

David Parker admits wetland rules 'have gone too far' but changes will be difficult and expensive



By **Hamish Rutherford**

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David Parker admits new rules on freshwater management have gone too far in defining wetlands, but the difficult path to fixing it shows why the Resource Management Act needs changing.

On Tuesday morning [the Herald reported](#) ministers have faced warnings from some of New Zealand's leading housing and construction companies that the new rules on wetlands effectively mean farm tracks and even the overflow of septic tanks can be captured by the new definition.

As he released the first of three pieces of legislation which will replace the RMA, Parker said the freshwater rules brought into place just prior to the 2020 election would need to be fixed.

"We do accept that that definition's gone a bit far," Parker told reporters in the Beehive on Tuesday on the definition of wetlands.

"We didn't quite land the definition right in the NES," Parker said, referring to the national environmental standard on freshwater management. Changes were planned for landfills, queries and "some" subdivisions Parker said.

He indicated that changes would be made this year although was unclear about how the fix would be brought into effect.

"We're working up the solutions. In some areas it will change from being a prohibited activity to being a strictly controlled activity that will require offsets," Parker said.

"We're bound by rules in the RMA as to how we do that," Parker said. The Minister for the Environment has warned that the process to fix the policy statement is not dissimilar to what is required to creating it in the first place, which highlighted the need for change.

"We need a more fit for purpose planning framework."

Although he did not have the details, Parker has said there is a need for a standing committee which could fix changes such as the wetland definition.

A standing committee may be able to "provide a bit more national direction without a hugely convoluted and expensive process".

Under the current rules "when it's not going well, it's quite hard to fix and it's also quite hard to make in the first place," Parker said.

Builders warned the rules could mean hundreds of houses may have to be stripped from masterplans for housing developments.

Universal Homes chief executive Andrew Crosby said the rules meant sales between developers and landowners had seized due to the uncertainty around how much could be built.

Fletcher Building's residential business said it had identified seven developments across its Auckland portfolio of land where the amount of houses would be reduced by 10-15 per cent.

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