

2013

Monitoring Steps

Getting Started



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Monitoring is about checking that we are achieving what we want to achieve and providing a feedback loop for environmental management. It is important, as without it we cannot tell what changes are occurring in the environment, how effective our actions and policies are, and what more we need to do.

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Key messages about monitoring

- The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) and Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) provide the basis for monitoring and signal that an integrated approach is required. Ensure that your RMA monitoring is interlinked - as well as being linked to broader monitoring of community outcomes being undertaken as part of the Long Term Planning process.
- Think before you start monitoring; start with what you know is required and build from there. What are you trying to achieve and what is the best way of achieving it? What information is already available?
- Develop an integrated strategy or methodology for monitoring. Think through all the steps that will be involved, who needs to be involved and how you'll resource it. Prioritise and start with what is most important.
- Ensure that monitoring provides meaningful information for decision-making.
- Ensure you have good quality, robust data and that you have carefully thought through a data management system.
- Aim to recognise cause and effect relationships where possible - what has changed, and how does this relate to the policy or plan, and the environment? Accept that you will often be making decisions on the basis of some uncertainty.
- Developing indicators can help focus monitoring effort.
- Once you have developed indicators, it is important to re-check that the information generated will be directly useful for measuring the outcomes of your policy or plan, and the quality of the environment.
- Don't forget that monitoring is a tool for management, not an end in itself. Ensure that the results of monitoring are fed back into review of relevant policies and activities.
- When reporting the results of monitoring, one size does not fit all. Think about the purpose of the report and the audience you want to reach before deciding on the report format and timing.

What is monitoring?

Monitoring is an active requirement under section [35 RMA](#), and other parts of the Act.

Monitoring is about checking that what we want to achieve is being achieved and having information available from which to make sound resource management decisions. Monitoring can tell us about key pressures on the environment, the condition or state of the environment, and about responses (ie, the environmental results) that we are achieving, or need to work towards. The design of a monitoring system should focus attention on questions such as: how much information is enough, when is it needed and for what purposes?

Monitoring is an ongoing and systematic process; it is not a person, position, product or end in itself. Monitoring assists decision-making by closing the loop in the planning cycle and informing decision-makers of the consequences of actions and changes in the environment. It provides practitioners with checks to ensure things are on track.

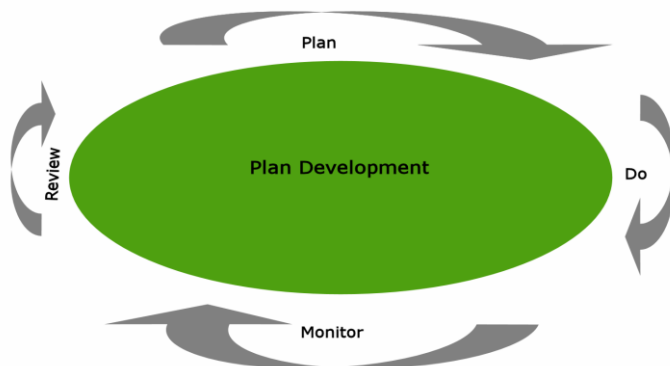
Monitoring involves:

- planned and repeated data collection
- analysis
- interpretation
- reporting on the results of monitoring
- recommendations for action (which usually involves reporting on monitoring)
- taking and reviewing actions.

In reality, some of these components may occur in a more iterative manner. The key thing is to think of monitoring as a process that assists decision-making.

Plan monitoring diagram

The chart shows the plan monitoring cycle. The first step is the creation of a plan. The second step is its introduction. The third step is monitoring the implementation of the plan. The fourth step is to review the data gathered from monitoring the plan implementation. Decisions made through the review step feed into the next iteration of the plan cycle.





The benefits of monitoring

Although the law ([s.35](#)) requires monitoring, it is more than a statutory requirement. Monitoring is common sense because it tells us if we are on track. The primary benefit of environmental monitoring is to check that your policy statement, plan, or condition on a resource consent has resulted in the environmental outcome you expected. It provides information to understand the current state of the environment and assess whether things are getting better or worse. Monitoring provides a number of real benefits for both the council and the community. Monitoring:

- can give early warning of issues or problems before they become serious, costly or irreversible
- prompts organisations to adjust when monitoring shows that current approaches are not working and helps prepare us to respond effectively to any changes
- provides a better understanding of the key pressures on the environment, the condition or state of the environment, leading to better responses and results
- provides information to enable more robust and defensible policies and decisions
- enables action to be taken to increase policy and plan effectiveness, so reducing costs
- contributes to a range of other monitoring systems (including social and economic) and can enable integration of information management systems and organisational decision-making
- protects investment in plans and policy statements by leading to better formulation of policies and methods for implementing policies (including rules) and clearer targets
- provides accountability
- enables more effective participation in resource management and community development and education at the local level
- enables more targeted consent conditions, more appropriately designed rules and standards, and more efficient processing of consents, resulting from a better understanding of likely changes to the environment and a smoother process for consent holders.



What monitoring is required?

<p align="center">Resource Management Act</p> <p align="center">For the purposes of sustainable management of natural and physical resources</p>	<p align="center">Local Government Act 2002</p> <p align="center">For the purposes of sustainable development</p>
Reviewing	
<p>Statements, regional and district plans must be reviewed at least every 10 years (s.79 RMA). The Minister for the Environment can direct a council to review a policy statement or plan, in full or in part. The Minister of Conservation can direct a council to review a regional coastal plan, in full or in part.</p>	<p>Long Term Plans cover 10 financial years (s.93(7)(a) LGA).</p> <p>Long Term Plans must be reviewed every 3 years (s.93(3) LGA).</p>
Monitoring	
<p>Under s.35 a local authority must monitor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state of the whole or part of the environment (appropriate to functions under the Resource Management Act). • The efficiency and effectiveness of policies, rules or other methods in its policy statement or plan. • The exercise of any functions, powers or duties delegated or transferred by it. • The exercise of any resource consents. • In the case of a regional council, the exercise of any protected customary activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Long Term Plan must describe the activities of the local authority, and describe community outcomes (s.93(6)).
Reporting	
<p>Reporting is required (s.35(2A)) every five years in relation to policy and plan efficiency and effectiveness.</p> <p>Under s.28A, regional councils may be requested by the Minister of Conservation to provide monitoring information on their coastal permits or regional coastal plans or the exercise of any protected customary right or other agreement in the common marine and coastal area within 20 days. Reporting timeframes for any other monitoring requirements set out above may be imposed in regulations under the Act.</p>	<p>Each Long Term Plan (ie, every 3 years) must contain a report from the Auditor General on the extent to which the local authority has complied with the requirements of the Act, and on the quality of information and assumptions (s.94(1)).</p>

Section 28A of the Resource Management Act enables the Minister of Conservation to require regional councils to provide monitoring information on their coastal permits regional coastal plans or the exercise of any protected customary right. Councils must provide this information within 20 working days, unless a longer timeframe has been set by the Minister of Conservation.

Section 35 of the Resource Management Act specifies the duty to gather information, monitor and keep records (in relation to the functions in the table above) and to take appropriate action when monitoring indicates this is necessary.

Section 62(1)(j) requires that a regional policy statement must state... the procedures used to monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of the policies or methods contained in the statement.

Section 67(2)(e) and 75(2)(e), provides that a regional plan and a district plan respectively may state... the procedures for monitoring the efficiency and effectiveness of the policies and methods in the plan.

Section 79 of the Resource Management Act requires councils to commence a review of any provision of a regional policy statements, and all regional and or district plans that has not been reviewed or altered in the preceding 10 years, to be reviewed not later than 10 years after becoming operative. Councils can choose how to review their plans and do not need to review them in their entirety after the plan becomes operative. However, the relevant Minister can direct a council to review a policy statement or plan, in full or in part (section 25B).

Section 80 of the Resource Management Act provides for two or more councils to prepare combined policy statements or plans. Collaborative reporting by councils would be pertinent in these instances.

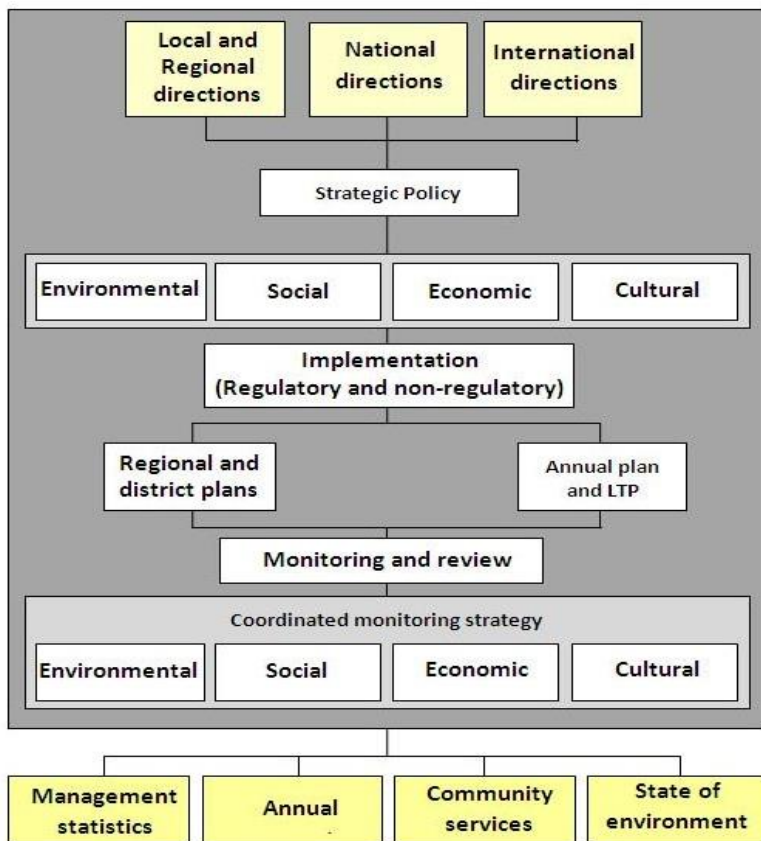
Section 360(1)(hk) enables regulations to be made that prescribe indicators, standards, and methods for monitoring. Regulations under section 360(hl) may prescribe time limits for councils to provide information to the Minister, and (hm) may prescribe threshold amounts.

The Local Government Act 2002 requires local authorities to produce a Long Term Plan that outlines community outcomes and provides a basis for accountability from the local authority to the community. A Long Term Plan must cover a period of 10 consecutive financial years ([s.93\(6\)](#)). In the Long Term Plan, councils are required to describe community outcomes, and the Auditor General must report on how that requirement has been met once every three years. To demonstrate that Long Term Plan requirements have been effectively achieved, it would be useful for councils to monitor and report in a similar way to the monitoring requirements of the Resource Management Act. This suggests the need for coordinated, integrated and focused planning and monitoring.

The need for integrated monitoring

Integrated monitoring makes the best use of existing information and information gathering systems. An important first step in integrating monitoring is to identify connections, possibly through preparation of a monitoring strategy. Because there are connections between the various roles and responsibilities of councils, information from one area of council activity will often also be relevant for monitoring other areas of council activity and policy - and to the activities of other agencies (refer to integrated monitoring and reporting diagram below).

Integrated monitoring and reporting diagram



Text description of figure:

The diagram shows the span of integrated monitoring and reporting by local authorities. Local and regional policy directions, along with national and international directions, influence strategic policy, which takes into account environmental, social, economic and cultural factors. The strategic policy is implemented through regulatory and non-regulatory methods, including those in regional and district plans, annual plans, and Long Term Plans.



Components of a monitoring strategy

A monitoring strategy is a framework within which you can plan your monitoring and reporting. An integrated strategy should provide for the different types of monitoring you do and identify connections with monitoring carried out by other organisations. It should describe how monitoring will be linked into reviews of policy and operations and what sort of reporting there will be on the results of monitoring. Developing a strategy before you begin monitoring can help you to focus your efforts so you make the best use of the resources you have available.

Key questions that a monitoring strategy should address include:

- What are the purposes of your monitoring? Why is it important and what will it be used for?
- What types of monitoring will you be doing and how do they relate to each other?
- What methodologies will you use?
- How will the results of monitoring be used to influence policy and other decision-making? What mechanisms will you use to ensure effective feedback between monitoring and decision-making?
- How will you decide what issues to monitor and when? What criteria will you use to decide priorities?
- What framework and criteria will you use to select indicators/ measures for the issues?
- How will you collect and manage data to ensure it is of good quality and will be consistent over time? How will you ensure you can retrieve it in a usable form for analysis and reporting at the times you need it?
- Who will you be reporting the results to? What will the information in reports be used for? What forms of reporting will you use to ensure it is effective?
- What are your timeframes for implementing and reviewing the strategy?
- Who will have overall responsibility for implementing the strategy? Who else will be involved and what will their roles be?

In answering these questions, it is important to keep in mind what resources you have available (or what additional resources you can realistically obtain). If you have few resources, focus your strategy on getting good information about some key priority issues rather than planning comprehensive monitoring programmes. Think about what resources you will need to keep monitoring programmes going over time, as well as those required for the first round of monitoring.

When developing a monitoring strategy, allow for it to evolve over time. Put the framework for monitoring in place and make room to incorporate or change some of the details as you begin to implement the strategy.

In practice, an overarching monitoring strategy and more detailed monitoring plans for particular issues are sometimes combined into a single document.



Making monitoring work in your organisation

Some tips for building commitment and improving integration of monitoring across your organisation are:

- Capture the imagination of councillors, managers and colleagues - don't blind them with science but show them how monitoring can help them in practical ways.
- Start by focusing on some key priorities where the need for better information is recognised by the decision-makers, and build up from this as resources become available.
- Find partners within the organisation to work with you (for example field officers who can collect information, planners who will use it, information systems and communications staff).
- Make opportunities to get feedback on monitoring priorities and the monitoring process from staff who work with the issues.
- Provide early feedback on monitoring results and allow opportunity to discuss these.

Managing the monitoring process

- Actively manage the monitoring and reporting project.
- Risks decrease with good project management - both at set up time and throughout the process.
- Map out a clear project plan of what will happen when and who is responsible, and ensure this addresses what you will do to manage risks.
- Identify the resources you have available and make sure you design the project to match these.
- Data collection can take longer than expected - allow plenty of time and set up good systems and processes for data collection, storage, management and reporting.
- Consider an independent review of the methodology, as good quality data and information is important.
- A big part of project management is expectation management. Develop a communications strategy or plan.
- Identify priorities - 'start small if you are small' - to make the best use of resources.
- If producing a written report, manage report production once the scope of the report has been determined. Consider the format of the report in terms of publication on the web.
- Establish a table of contents.
- Develop a detailed brief and writing instructions for chapter authors.
- Edit the report/s and ensure it is relevant to the audience. Consider the use of a neutral editor.



THE RMA QUALITY PLANNING RESOURCE

- Monitoring is a long-term process and there are likely to be staff changes over time. The process should therefore be documented and filed in an accessible location.
- Put good systems in place up front and your organisation will reap the benefits.
- Think ahead, plan well and assign a good project manager.
- Have a coordinated approach eg, one identified coordinator.
- Involve a range of people to make use of different skills.

