



Discharge to land implementation materials



Discharging treated wastewater to land is a well-established practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, the technical complexity of land-based discharges, combined with New Zealand's diverse soils, climates and community values, means that a one-size-fits-all approach is not possible. Until now, the lack of clear, nationally consistent guidance has led to uncertainty, inconsistent consent conditions and challenges for councils and operators

Overview of the standard framework

The new discharge to land standard establishes a risk-based framework for assessing land suitability and setting treatment, monitoring and reporting requirements.

Key elements of the standard are set out below.

Features of the standard	Guidance notes
The establishment of a nationally consistent risk-based assessment framework	<p>This framework involves three main steps.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baseline assessment: A desktop review of the site's physical attributes. Note, this is not a feature of the standard but a necessary step to identify potentially suitable sites prior to standard implementation.• Risk screening: A qualitative assessment of public health and environmental risks of the proposed discharge. This step assigns a risk category to the site.• Site-specific assessment: A detailed evaluation of the site's capability to receive and manage discharges. This step assigns a site classification category to the site.• Assigning a land class: The resulting risk and site classification categories will determine an overall land class for a site, which will determine the remaining requirements under the standard.
Loading and concentration limits	<p>Based on land class, and the type of application (i.e., either slow-rate infiltration or rapid infiltration), the standards determine the loading limits and concentration limits for the following contaminants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Total Nitrogen• Total Phosphorus• <i>E. coli</i>.
Monitoring and reporting	<p>The standard will assist in developing a nationally consistent approach to monitoring and reporting for discharge to land schemes. The following is required, as a minimum, under the standard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• monitoring of treated wastewater• groundwater monitoring• regular reporting to regional councils and the Authority.
Management plans and maintenance and operations plans	<p>All discharge to land schemes will require a management plan, covering key elements of the scheme such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• site restrictions and inspection requirements• maintenance and contingency procedures• environmental monitoring and reporting protocols.

Developing guidance materials for discharge to land

To ensure this standard is practical and effective, the Authority is developing guidance, in collaboration with the New Zealand Land Treatment Collective (NZLTC), to help councils, network operators and consenting authorities navigate the new requirements with confidence and clarity.

The NZLTC brings together technical experts, researchers, practitioners and regulators with deep experience in land-based wastewater management. Their input will ensure the guidance reflects best practice, is grounded in robust science and is responsive to the practical realities faced by planners, designers and operators of treatment systems that discharge to land.

The guidance will be made available to the sector as soon as it is finalised.