

National Policy Statement – Natural Hazards 2025 (NPS–NH)

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1. Introduction and Purpose

This Practice Note sets out guidance on the application and implementation of the National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards 2025 (NPS–NH) within the Queenstown Lakes District.

The document is intended to provide guidance on the NPS–NH to:

- » Applicants and planning practitioners
- » Council planners and technical specialists
- » Other Council business units

It explains the mandatory risk-based framework introduced by the NPS–NH, outlines information requirements for resource consent applications, and provides direction on consistent decision-making.

The NPS–NH became operative on 15 January 2026 and must be given effect to immediately, regardless of whether district plan provisions have been updated. At some point in the future, QLDC will progress a plan change to give effect to the NPS–NH, at which point this Practice Note will be updated.



2. Background and Context

The NPS–NH establishes a nationally consistent framework for assessing and managing natural hazard risk. It responds to shortcomings in previous planning approaches, including:

- » Inconsistent definitions of risk
- » Lack of nationally standardised assessment methods
- » Development occurring in areas of unacceptable risk

The NPS–NH introduces a standardised risk matrix methodology, ensuring that planning decisions are based on actual levels of risk, rather than varying local interpretations.

Importantly, the NPS–NH does not seek to prevent development, but to ensure that any development:

- » Manages natural hazard risks in a way that is proportionate to the level of risk
- » Avoids putting people or property at very high-risk from natural hazards



3. Scope of the NPS–NH

3.1 HAZARD TYPES COVERED

The NPS–NH applies to the following natural hazards:

- » Flooding
- » Landslips
- » Coastal erosion
- » Coastal inundation
- » Active faults
- » Liquefaction
- » Tsunami

3.2 RELATIONSHIP WITH QLDC DISTRICT PLAN

The NPS–NH does not change or invalidate the QLDC Proposed District Plan's rules. The District Plan's rules that enable natural hazards to be considered continue to apply.

The District Plan's objectives and policies regarding management of natural hazard risks remain relevant, but if they are inconsistent with the NPS–NH, the objective and policies of the NPS–NH will carry more weight in RMA decisions.

3.3 HAZARDS NOT INCLUDED IN THE NPS–NH

In addition to the hazards covered by the NPS–NH, the QLDC Proposed District Plan identifies a broader range of hazards:

- » Rockfall and avalanche
- » Wildfire
- » Subsidence and other localised hazards

For hazards not listed (e.g., wildfire):

- » The NPS–NH risk assessment methodology is not mandatory
- » Applicants must follow relevant District Plan provisions
- » The risk-based approach may still be applied where appropriate

4. Core Policy Direction

4.1 MANDATORY RISK-BASED ASSESSMENT

All (new) subdivision, use, and development must be supported by a natural hazard risk assessment that:

» Applies the NPS–NH risk matrix

» Evaluates:

- Likelihood of occurrence
- Consequence of impact

» Determines an overall risk category:

- Low – green coded
- Medium – yellow / amber coded
- High – red coded
- Very High – dark red coded

» Is proportionate in scale and detail to the anticipated level of risk

4.2 POLICY RESPONSES TO RISK LEVELS

Risk Category	Policy Response
Very High	Development must be avoided (consent may be declined)
High	Avoid or mitigate proportionately
Medium	Avoid or mitigate proportionately
Low	NPS does not provide a specific policy response. QLDC policy is that development is generally acceptable where risk is tolerable, subject to expected controls

4.3 KEY POLICY PRINCIPLES

» Avoidance of Very High Risk

Development that puts people or property at very high risk from natural hazards must be avoided.

» Proportionate Management

The level of assessment and mitigation must be proportionate to the level of risk.

» Cost-Effectiveness

Mitigation measures must be reasonable relative to the level of risk.

» Avoidance of Risk Transfer

Development must not create or increase significant risk on other sites.

» Climate Change Consideration

Risk assessments must consider climate change impacts over at least a 100-year timeframe.

» Best Available Information

Decisions will have to be made based on the best available information, even where uncertainty exists.

NPS–NH reads that best available information means:

Using complete and scientifically robust data where possible, but it does not preclude using information that is uncertain and incomplete.¹ NPS–NH provides a few examples to guide what ‘applying best information available’ looks like on page 18.

¹ See NPS–NH, 2025 Pages 17–18.

NPS–NH is directive in the sense that it says local authorities should develop their own criteria for evaluating the suitability of information for consenting and gives some examples. These include:

- » the age of information
- » advances in science or changes in the environment that have occurred since publication
- » the qualifications and experience of the person who authored the information
- » whether it was peer reviewed
- » whether it follows best practice methods
- » whether it remains consistent with good practice
- » whether uncertainties and limitations are well documented

5. Legal Effect and Implementation

5.1 IMMEDIATE EFFECT

From 15 January 2026:

- » The NPS–NH must be considered in all resource consent decisions
- » It cannot be assumed that the District Plan gives effect to the NPS–NH

5.2 STATUS WITHIN THE PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The NPS–NH:

- » Provides national direction under the RMA
- » Must be given effect to in all planning decisions
- » Must be considered by resource consent decision-makers
- » Should be applied to all subdivision and land use consent decisions involving significant risk from natural hazards

5.3 PLAN CHANGES

There is no mandatory timeframe requiring QLDC to initiate a plan change solely to align the District Plan with the NPS–NH.

6. Information Requirements for Applicants

Applicants for resource consents are required to provide an assessment of the effects of their proposed activity on the environment. In cases where a proposed activity increases the risk of harm from natural hazards, applicants will be required to provide information that is proportionate in scale and detail to assess the anticipated level of risk. The NPS–NH provides a specific risk assessment methodology.

6.1 RISK ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS

Applications must include a natural hazard risk assessment that:

- » Applies the NPS–NH risk matrix (where relevant) to the affected site or sites
- » Identifies (undertaken by an accredited professional):
 - Hazard type(s)
 - Likelihood
 - Consequence
 - Overall risk level

6.2 SUPPORTING MATTERS

Assessments must also address:

- » Any proposed mitigation measures
- » Residual risk following mitigation
- » Climate change effects (100 years)
- » Any new or increased significant natural hazard risk for other sites

7. Council Decision-Making Guidance

7.1 ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Decision-makers should seek documentation and evidence from an Applicant that demonstrates:

1. Identification of relevant hazards
2. Application of the risk matrix in the NPS–NH (likelihood × consequence)
3. Determination of the risk category based on the matrix
4. Applies the appropriate policy response
5. Identification of any new or increased significant risk for other sites
6. Inclusion of climate change impacts

7.2 DECISION OUTCOMES

» Very High Risk → Natural hazard risk must be avoided and consent may be declined

» High / Medium Risk →

- Avoid or mitigate
- Consent may be granted if proportionate mitigation can be demonstrated
- Cost-effectiveness is relevant to proportionality

» Any increase to High / Medium Risk offsite → as per High / Medium Risk

» Subdivision or land use → very high, high and medium natural hazard risk are all defined as “significant”, triggering the Council’s powers under ss 106 and 106A to refuse to grant consent, or to grant consent subject to conditions

7.3 KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Decision-makers must ensure:

- » Use of best available information
- » Appropriate response to uncertainty
- » Inclusion of climate change impacts
- » Scale and detail of natural hazard information is proportionate to natural hazard risk

8. QLDC Implementation Context

8.1 CURRENT DISTRICT PLAN POSITION

The Proposed District Plan Natural Hazards chapter:

- » Contains objectives and policies only
- » Does not include operative rules
- » However where rules elsewhere in the District Plan class an activity as discretionary or non-complying, or enable natural hazard risk to be considered in the context of controlled or restricted discretionary activities, the NPS–NH is relevant and must be considered
- » Any subdivision or land use activity for which the District Plan requires resource consent, and involves significant hazard risk, must be considered under ss 106/106A of the RMA and the NPS–NH is relevant to such decisions

8.2 PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

This results in:

- » Increased reliance on case-by-case assessments
- » Direct application of the NPS–NH policy framework at consent stage

8.3 ALIGNMENT WITH NPS–NH POLICIES

QLDC planning documents should reflect:

- » Risk-based assessment (Policy 1)
- » Proportionate management (Policy 2)
- » Avoidance of very high risk (Policy 3)
- » No risk transfer (Policy 4)
- » Best available information (Policy 5)
- » Climate change consideration (Policy 6)

9. Practical checklist:

The following framework should be applied in practice:

1. Identify potential natural hazard risks
2. Identify whether there is any adverse effect on (i.e. increase to) natural hazard risk associated with the proposed subdivision, use or development
3. If there is, undertake risk assessment
4. Define risk category
5. Apply policy response
6. Confirm no change to off-site risk effects
7. Incorporate climate change in risk assessment for #2 above (100 years)
8. Assess proportionality and cost-effectiveness, and demonstrate that both requirements have been met
9. Ensure RMA ss 106/106A are satisfied for all subdivision or land use consents involving “significant” (very high, high or medium) natural hazard risk
10. Determine outcome (approve, condition, or decline)

10. Key Messages

- » It is important to identify whether there is any increase to natural hazard risk associated with the proposed subdivision, use or development, because in some cases there will not be
- » Identification of risk level, using the NPS–NH methodology, is mandatory
- » The scale and detail of information required from applicants should be proportionate to the effect on natural hazard risk
- » Very high-risk development must be avoided, and this means that a consent application would likely be declined
- » Applicants can be required to provide natural hazard mitigation that is proportionate to the level of risk (taking into account cost-effectiveness)
- » Climate change must be incorporated in all assessments
- » The NPS–NH applies immediately to RMA decision-making, even though it is yet to be given effect through a plan change to the district plan
- » Natural hazard risk that is assessed as very high, high or medium using the NPS–NH methodology is defined as “significant natural hazard risk”, triggering the Council’s functions in relation to all subdivision consents under s 106 and all land use consents under s 106A