

The future of eco-nomics: Proposed  
topic for the 2026 long-term insights  
briefing – consultation





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## Executive summary

Have your say on our proposed topic for Stats NZ's 2026 long-term insights briefing.

### Proposed topic

The proposed topic for the long-term insights briefing is 'The future of eco-nomics: Integrating environmental and economic measurement in Aotearoa New Zealand'. The briefing will present the case for better integration of economic and environmental metrics, and the emerging challenges and opportunities in this space.

We selected this topic in our capacity as the home of the Government Chief Data Steward and as New Zealand's national statistics office.

### Proposed scope

The briefing could:

- **set the scene** by outlining what environmental measurement is, why it's important, what we currently measure, and how it currently links to our economy
- examine **future trends** including:
  - projected environmental changes that will have major impacts on the economy
  - emerging challenges and opportunities for environmental measurement
- present the **case for integrating** economic metrics with environmental metrics and what this could look like in practice
- outline the **global context** including relevant international frameworks, country comparisons, and best practice case studies
- explore **future directions**, honing-in on what Stats NZ as New Zealand's national statistics office needs to do to address the challenges and opportunities outlined.

## Consultation questions

### We'd like to know what you think

We'd like your feedback on the proposed topic and scope of our long-term insights briefing. In particular, we value your input on the following:

- Do you find our proposed topic valuable and worth exploring?
- Is the scope useful, relevant, and clearly defined?
- Are there additional opportunities or implications we should consider?
- Are there any other topics you would like us to consider for future briefings?
- Do you have anything else you would like to share with us on this subject?

**Submissions open on 26 August 2024 and close at 5pm on 4 October 2024.**

### How to submit your feedback

You can make your submission online at <https://www.stats.govt.nz/ltib/>.

Or you can send your submission to [ltib@stats.govt.nz](mailto:ltib@stats.govt.nz).

Your submission will inform the focus and scope of our long-term insights briefing. You will then have the opportunity to provide further feedback on the content of the draft briefing in 2025.

## How we manage your personal information

If you send us a submission, we will keep it in our records according to the principles outlined in the Privacy Act 2020. Any personal information you supply in your submission will be used only to inform our long-term insights briefing.

We do not intend to identify or name individuals in publications about this consultation, but might name groups or organisations in our submissions report. If you don't want us to publish your name or anything that could show who you are, let us know in your submission.

Please don't include any personal details about yourself or others in your answers to each question.

If we receive a request under the Official Information Act 1982 that includes your submission, we might have to share it. We'll talk to you about this if you have provided your contact information.

If you want to know more about the Official Information Act 1982 and the Privacy Act 2020, visit the websites of the [Ombudsman](#) and the [Privacy Commissioner](#).

## Our role

### Stats NZ is New Zealand's official data and statistics agency

We deliver high-quality, impartial, and objective official statistics about our country and the lives of its people.

Our work supports communities, individuals, iwi, and businesses to make informed decisions, while also identifying key trends and developments.

### Stats NZ is also the home of the Government Chief Data Steward

The Government Chief Data Steward is the system leader for data across government. The Government Chief Data Steward is responsible for:

- empowering agencies to use data more effectively while maintaining the trust and confidence of New Zealanders
- supporting the use of data as a resource across government to help deliver better services to New Zealanders.

A critical aspect of our stewardship role involves adopting a forward-looking perspective that considers the implications of current trends, risks, and opportunities.

# About long-term insights briefings

## Stats NZ is required to publish a long-term insights briefing every three years

The Public Service Act 2020 requires government departments to create a long-term insights briefing at least once every three years (see [Schedule 6, Clauses 8 and 9 of the Public Service Act 2020](#)). This is a legal duty for department chief executives, independent of Ministers. These briefings are different from the advice given to Ministers and from the accountability and planning reports prepared for Parliament.

The purpose of long-term insights briefings is to give the public:

- information about medium and long-term trends, risks, and opportunities that may affect New Zealand and its society
- impartial analysis and policy options for addressing these matters.

Departments choose the topics for these briefings. Chief executives must consult with the public on both the proposed topic and the draft version of their briefing.

## We published our first long-term insights briefing in 2023

[Aotearoa NZ: Empowered by data – Long-term insights about the role of data in wellbeing and economic advantage](#), published in April 2023, was our first long-term insights briefing. It focused on the transformative role of data, and explored the value of integrated data and the settings that could help foster progress and fuel innovation for society.

We received mainly positive feedback on our first briefing from the public, the Governance and Administration Select Committee, and the government of the day. It has also influenced our strategic intention and informed policy work on the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation. We thank everyone who shared their views and provided valuable input into our first long-term insights briefing.

## Proposed topic and scope of our 2026 briefing

### What we are proposing

The proposed topic for our 2026 long-term insights briefing is 'The future of eco-nomics: Integrating environmental and economic measurement in Aotearoa New Zealand'. It will present the case for better integration of economic and environmental metrics, and the emerging challenges and opportunities in this space.

### Why we are proposing this topic

Our environment (Te Taiao) is deeply connected to the way we live, the way we work, and the wealth and wellbeing of Aotearoa New Zealand. We have a good understanding, across many

disciplines and world views, of the connection between the environment and people's wellbeing. We understand less about how economic activity and the environment affect and interact with each other, and what the impact of that relationship is on New Zealand.

Recent trends – both domestic and global – are prompting us to reconsider how we measure national progress and prosperity. Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and severe, affecting agriculture, food security, and infrastructure. The transition to a low-carbon economy is reshaping industries and job markets. There is also growing recognition of the economic value of ecosystem services, like the role of forests in carbon sequestration or wetlands in flood protection.

[Environment Aotearoa 2022](#), the latest state of the environment report developed by the Ministry for the Environment and Stats NZ, provides concrete examples of how environmental changes are impacting people's wellbeing and different sectors of the economy. It reveals how changes in urban land use have reduced access to nature and green spaces, affecting people's wellbeing. The report emphasises the importance of clean water for health, cultural identity, food gathering, and recreation, while noting human activities have degraded many water sources. It also highlights how shifting rainfall patterns and warming temperatures threaten our agricultural sector, native ecosystems, Māori customs, and impact mental wellbeing.

Looking ahead 10 years or more, we may face even more significant challenges:

- [Climate change and possible impacts for New Zealand](#) reports sea level rise and coastal erosion could threaten coastal communities and infrastructure.
- Changing rainfall patterns might alter our agricultural landscape.
- Competition for resources and the shift away from fossil fuels could dramatically impact our trade relationships and energy systems.

We might need to measure new phenomena, like the value of genetic diversity in our native species as we face new environmental pressures.

But these challenges also bring opportunities:

- The shift to a low-carbon economy opens doors for green technology.
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts encourage existing sectors to think and work differently, and for new innovations to emerge.

To address these challenges and seize these opportunities, we must improve the integration of environmental and economic data.

Integrating environmental and economic measurements provides us with a more complete picture of our true wealth, wellbeing, and progress. Most developed countries are looking to adopt the latest international standards within the next decade, which incorporate natural capital and other environmental considerations alongside GDP. One such indicator is the net domestic product (NDP), which, besides accounting for economic depreciation, also subtracts the depletion of natural resources used in producing goods and services.

Additionally, many countries, including New Zealand, produce environmental-economic accounts to better understand the pressures, dependencies, trade-offs, and impacts between the environment and the economy. This is done within the United Nations' System of Environmental-Economic

Accounting framework, which specifies how environmental data can be integrated coherently with economic data from the System of National Accounts.

See:

- [System of Environmental Economic Accounting](#) (United Nations)
- [Environmental-economic accounts: Data to 2022](#) (Stats NZ).

This integration is particularly crucial for New Zealand, where our economy is closely tied to our natural environment through the primary sector (for example, agriculture, forestry, fisheries) and tourism. We must also consider uniquely New Zealand perspectives, including Māori data governance and mātauranga Māori. Incorporating different knowledge systems can help us build a richer picture of environmental and economic measurement and support the development of solutions that reflect our environment, culture, and priorities.

In developing this briefing, we will build on earlier work carried out by Stats NZ on the future of our economic statistics.

[Measuring an inclusive and sustainable economy: Report on feedback](#) revealed a strong interest from stakeholders in using measures of progress that go 'beyond GDP' and incorporate indicators that reflect environmental and social aspects of progress.

We aim to take that work a step further by more closely considering why we should think 'beyond GDP' and integrate economic and environmental measurement, as well as exploring what we are already doing in this area, and what more we could do to build on the progress we have already made.

## What our briefing could cover

Our aim for this briefing is to explore the topic in useful depth, while complementing future work. This future work includes implementing updated international standards for environmental-economic statistics and national adaptation plans, as well as potential refinements to the Environmental Reporting Act 2015. The briefing will also acknowledge the limited resources available for departmental stewardship.

Our proposed outline is set out below.

1. **Setting the scene:** This section will outline what environmental measurement is, why it is important, and how it connects to our economy and economic metrics. It could also cover New Zealand's current environmental and economic measurement practices.
2. **Future trends:** This section will explore some key environmental and economic trends over the next decade and beyond, and specific considerations for New Zealand. It will discuss potential impacts on New Zealand's economy and outline emerging measurement challenges. This could include topics like measuring the impacts of climate change and emerging pollutants, quantifying biodiversity loss and degradation, and measuring the circular economy.



3. **The case for integration:** This section will present the case for aligning environmental and economic metrics, and what this could look like in practice. This could include measuring natural capital and other environmental considerations alongside GDP calculations, assessing the economic impact of extreme weather events and slow-onset climate change, quantifying the economic value of New Zealand's ecosystem services, and considering Māori perspectives on environmental-economic measurement.
4. **Global context:** This section will examine what other countries are doing to integrate environmental and economic measurements. It will outline some key international frameworks and standards, and highlight successful approaches from around the world. The goal would be to identify best practices and lessons that could be applicable to New Zealand.
5. **Future directions:** The paper will conclude by discussing key challenges and opportunities for Stats NZ as the national statistical office. This could include better integration of both new and existing data sources, addressing data gaps, establishing partnerships to build mātauranga Māori into environmental measurement, standardising and adopting new methodologies for valuing ecosystem services, and leveraging emerging technologies. Finally, we will propose potential policy directions and next steps for implementing integrated environmental-economic measurement in New Zealand.

## Thank you for your contribution

Thank you for taking the time to consider our proposal. We value your feedback and will use this to shape the final topic and scope of our long-term insights briefing. A summary of the feedback we receive will be published later this year.