

levels of that devolved mandate playing their assigned part. The three levels of plan and policy roles and responsibilities are addressed in Parts II–V of the RMA.

#### THE NATIONAL LEVEL

The ministry responsible for the RMA is the Ministry for the Environment (MFE), which was to provide general guidance on the act and its operations. It was also to prepare national policy statements (NPS) and national environmental standards (NES) when and where the Minister directed that these would be appropriate. National policy statements (S45) have a potentially broad remit, from environmental issues that affect more than one region or the country as a whole, to obligations derived from global agreements, to practices to implement economic instruments. National environmental standards (S43) were much more specific and technically focused, and could address standards for contaminants, water quality, levels and flows, air quality, noise and discharges to soil, with all standards expected to have both national relevance and application. Initially it was expected that there would be a steady stream of NPS and NES, which would serve four purposes. First, it would guide regional and city/district councils as to the most important issues to be addressed in the new plans. Second, it would support and enhance consistent decision making on resource consent applications by providing a common policy or environmental standard on which decision makers could rely. Third, it would ensure that a set of common environmental standards on water quality, for instance, were applied across the country, developing an even standard of environmental response and freeing regional councils in particular to address the issues that were unique to their regions. Fourth, it would form the first step of instituting the act's co-operative mandate. The coast was to be treated separately, with the Department of Conservation (DOC) being charged with producing the national level policy statement called the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS). The NZCPS focuses on the management of the coastal environment, including consideration of issues of special concern to Māori.

Although there were high expectations that the NPS, NES and NZCPS would be rapidly forthcoming, this was to prove a vain hope. The NZCPS was produced relatively promptly by the Department of Conservation, but no other national guidance was forthcoming. The first NPS on electricity transmission was not made operative until 2008 and the first NES on air quality became operative in October 2004. At present a number of other NPS and NES are under preparation, with the NPS on renewable energy about to become operative. It is only in the coastal area that there has been any real exercising of the central government mandate, with the first NZCPS becoming operative in 1996, and the second-generation