

New Zealand's Fuel Response Plan 2026

Phase 1: Watchful

What's happening

The fuel market continues to operate effectively and fuel remains available nationwide. However, higher global crude oil prices and international market volatility are flowing through to domestic fuel prices.

This phase is focused on shoring up fuel supply, monitoring fuel markets closely, supporting market functioning, and ensuring New Zealanders have clear and timely information.

What the Government will do

- Monitor fuel stocks, cargo movements, and international supply conditions.
- Publish regular fuel stock updates and market information.
- Coordinate closely with fuel suppliers and key industry participants to support continued market functioning.
- Maintain engagement with international partners.
- Prepare government and critical agencies to reduce fuel demand if required.
- Progress targeted regulatory relief measures where appropriate.
- Progress commercial fuel reserve arrangements and readiness planning.
- Seek information and feedback from industry, stakeholders and the public on potential response measures, including regulatory relief measures.
- Provide fuel-saving guidance to the public to help stretch their tanks and reduce fuel bills.

What you can do

- Continue purchasing and using fuel as normal
- Stay informed through MBIE updates and public information
- Consider practical fuel-saving measures where appropriate
- Follow EECA guidance on reducing fuel use to save money

Phase 2: Precautionary

What's happening

The market continues to operate effectively and fuel remains available nationwide but there are signs of potential short-term supply disruption or difficulty securing future supply.

This phase focuses on shoring up fuel supply, closer coordination between government, industry, and other stakeholders, and supporting voluntary demand reduction while markets continue to function.

What the Government will do

- Continue to monitor fuel stocks, cargo movements, and international supply conditions.
- Continue regular public fuel stock updates and market information.
- Increase coordination with fuel suppliers, importers, and major fuel users.
- Work with international partners and industry to maintain fuel flows into New Zealand.
- Consider temporary relaxation of Minimum Stockholding Obligations.
- Implement a public sector fuel reduction plan.
- Progress targeted regulatory relief measures where appropriate.
- Expand public awareness campaigns and fuel-saving guidance, with messaging shifting focus to conserving fuel in the national interest.

What you can do

- Stay informed through MBIE updates and public information.
- Consider combining trips, reducing unnecessary travel, or using alternative transport where possible.
- Follow EECA guidance on practical fuel-saving measures.

Phase 3: Managed

What's happening

There are widespread challenges securing diesel or petrol supply, and the disruption may be deeper or longer lasting than under Phase 2.

Markets continue to operate, but government and industry are taking additional steps to support fuel availability and reduce pressure on supply while replacement fuel is secured.

What the Government may do

- Continued implementation of a public sector fuel reduction plan.
- Implement targeted regulatory relief measures where appropriate.
- Consider deploying supply reserve measures and other supply-side levers, such as converting New Zealand oil tickets or further changes to our fuel specifications.
- Consider temporary relaxation of Minimum Stockholding Obligations.
- Work with industry and major fuel users on their plans to voluntarily reduce fuel use.
- Prepare additional demand reduction measures if required, such as increasing capacity on public transport.
- Regularly assess the situation with a view to moving back to Phase 2 as soon as possible.

What you can do

- Fill up vehicles only as needed.
- Adhere to any new regulatory requirements.
- Follow EECA guidance on additional measures to help save fuel day-to-day.

Phase 4: Protected

What's happening

There is a severe and ongoing fuel supply disruption and additional intervention is required to protect critical goods and services.

This phase is designed to safeguard essential services, public safety, food supply, and core economic activity while fuel supply is restored.

Phase 4 would apply only if fuel supply to New Zealand is significantly constrained and there is a risk critical goods and services could not continue without further intervention. This remains highly unlikely.

What the Government may do

- Protect access to fuel for **critical** services like police, courts and ambulance, and nationally significant activities such as school transport.
- Require **food and freight** and **commercial and community** users to implement fuel-saving plans and demand reduction measures.
- Apply transaction limits for the **public** at retail fuel sites.
- Deploy spot-check system to ensure compliance and apply penalties in instances of non-compliance.
- Deploy any remaining supply reserve measures.
- Consider additional stronger regulatory measures to conserve fuel.
- Regularly assess progress with a view to moving back to Phase 2/3 as soon as possible.

What you can do

- Know that essential services like food supply and emergency response are fully protected.
- Develop a fuel plan and follow the fuel reduction requirement.
- Adhere to the limit imposed at retail sites.
- Adhere to any new regulatory requirements.
- Reduce non-essential fuel use.

Fuel Response Plan 2026

The process to move between phases of the plan

What will prompt a move between the phases?

The Fuel Security Ministerial Oversight Group will be responsible for deciding whether a shift between phases is appropriate, with the group required to consider a move when there is a change in any of the six assessment criteria.

These criteria will be used to assess a movement up or down a response phase. If there is a change in any of these criteria, the Ministers will meet to make their assessment and a decision on whether a move is appropriate. The assessment criteria are:

1. Export restrictions – if any of New Zealand's source refineries introduce or relax export restrictions.
2. A fuel company informs the Government they are unlikely or unable to fill future orders.
3. A breach, or a notification of an imminent breach, of the Minimum Stock Obligations.
4. Any significant policy changes in Australia or by the International Energy Agency.
5. A significant disruption to regional distribution.
6. A change to New Zealand's fuel stock levels of plus or minus three days since the most recent published update.

A move from Phase 1 to 2 might be triggered if we see issues with future fuel supply, but those issues are expected to be short-lived.

Moving from Phase 2 to Phase 3 might occur when there is the loss of consignments accompanied by an increased risk of future disruptions. A move to Phase 4 might be triggered by more consignments being lost and even higher risk of future supply shocks.

We commissioned Envisory, an independent fuel sector consultancy, to assess plausible fuel shipment disruption scenarios. We combined that assessment with internal modelling to test the likely scale and duration of fuel disruptions.

Modelled scenarios indicate that it is highly unlikely we would ever get to Phase 3 or 4 of the Fuel Response Plan, but as a prudent Government we are ensuring that New Zealand is prepared for whatever the global environment brings. It is better to have a plan you don't use, than to need one and be caught short.

How will you know if decisions to move between phases will be made?

A group of senior Ministers will decide whether New Zealand needs to move between phases. Ministers may decide that New Zealand needs to be at different phases in the plan for different fuels: for example, we could move to Phase 2 for diesel but stay at Phase 1 for petrol.

Ministers will consider a broad range of information. There is no single change that will automatically move us up or down a phase. Ministers will assess the full picture each time and publicly explain any decision to change phases.

Ministers will exercise care and judgement in making decisions – we will move up a phase only when there is a clear and genuine need, and we will move back down as soon as conditions allow.

At the moment, it doesn't look likely that we'll need to move to phases 3 or 4, but it's best to be prepared - having a plan in place gives Ministers the ability to make evidence-based decisions rather than reacting under pressure. New Zealanders also need confidence that we are ready to act in a measured and proportionate way if circumstances change.

What could a decision to move phases be based on?

Ministers will receive advice on the following, which will inform decision-making:

- Whether fuel is getting to New Zealand as expected – e.g. whether countries that supply our fuel have restricted exports, or whether shipments are being delayed
- What fuel companies and airlines are telling us – e.g. whether they are having difficulty sourcing supply or whether they are seeing pressures at specific airports, ports, or terminals
- Whether our refineries are sourcing and receiving adequate crude oil to produce normal levels of export fuel.
- How our fuel stocks are tracking – whether levels are stable, falling, or increasing
- What's happening internationally – whether our key partners, like Australia, are taking action and how these actions affect New Zealand
- Whether specific communities are being affected – e.g. whether fuel stations in a specific region are consistently struggling to get supply.