



# New Zealand Natural Resources and Industry Overview

## FIXNZ DATA & TRUTH

English Edition

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# Executive Overview

New Zealand has a small population but an unusually large natural-resource base. Its economy combines a dominant service sector with globally significant agriculture, forestry, fisheries and food production. The country also has a growing technology-export sector, but much domestic employment remains concentrated in lower-productivity retail, hospitality and other labour-intensive services.

This report provides a compact overview of natural resources, domestic industry, export structure, taxation, social welfare, public-resource use, crime and migration. It is designed as a reference document rather than a substitute for official statistics. Several datasets use different definitions and reporting periods, so comparisons should be treated as indicative rather than exact.

**Key observation: New Zealand's wealth is not determined by the volume of land or resources alone, but by how effectively those assets are converted into productive, exportable and broadly shared economic value.**

## 1. Natural Resources

New Zealand covers about 268,000 square kilometres, or approximately 26.8 million hectares. Around 1.4 million hectares are generally classified as Māori freehold land, equal to roughly five to six percent of the national land area. A very small residual category of Māori customary land consists of only a few dozen blocks.

- Public conservation land and national parks account for a large share of the country, much of it administered by the Department of Conservation.
- New Zealand has roughly 15,000 kilometres of coastline and an exclusive economic zone of about 4.3 million square kilometres.
- Forests cover about 10.1 million hectares, including approximately 8 million hectares of native forest and about 2.1 million hectares of plantation forest.
- Most plantation forest is privately owned, while large areas of native forest are held or managed for conservation purposes.
- Crown minerals include resources such as ironsands, gold, coal, oil and natural gas; commercial extraction is subject to permits and royalties.
- At June 2024, livestock numbers were approximately 23.6 million sheep, 5.8 million dairy cattle, 3.7 million beef cattle and 709,000 deer.
- Commercial fisheries operate under a quota-management system and support domestic processing and exports.

## 2. Domestic Industry

Services make up most of New Zealand's economic activity. Wholesale and retail trade, professional and technical services, finance, insurance, property, health and other services together dominate gross domestic product. Manufacturing and construction remain important, particularly food processing and building activity, while primary production represents a smaller direct share of GDP than its importance to export earnings might suggest.

| Industry group             | Indicative annual value | Economic role                                           |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Wholesale and retail trade | About NZ\$37b           | Large domestic employer and major channel for household |

|                                     |                 |                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                     |                 | consumption                                                            |
| Manufacturing                       | About NZ\$35b   | Food processing is a major component and supports export supply chains |
| Professional and technical services | About NZ\$35.5b | Higher-value services, engineering, consulting and technology          |
| Construction                        | About NZ\$29.2b | Housing, infrastructure and commercial development                     |
| Finance and insurance               | About NZ\$23.6b | Banking, investment, insurance and payment services                    |

Large retail and food-distribution groups include Woolworths New Zealand and the Foodstuffs cooperatives. The Warehouse Group is a major general retailer. In primary processing and export, Fonterra, Zespri, Silver Fern Farms and other large producers remain central. Banking is dominated by ANZ, ASB, Westpac and BNZ, while telecommunications and technology firms include Spark, One New Zealand, Xero and Fisher & Paykel Healthcare.

### 3. Export Industries

New Zealand's merchandise exports remain strongly concentrated in food, forestry and other biological products. In 2024, goods exports were approximately NZ\$74 billion. Dairy products were the largest category, followed by meat, fruit, wood and pulp, wine and seafood.

| Export category | Indicative 2024 value/share   | Comments                                          |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Dairy products  | About NZ\$21.8b; roughly 29%  | Milk powder, butter, cheese and related products  |
| Meat            | About NZ\$9.2b; roughly 12%   | Beef, lamb and processed meat                     |
| Fruit           | About NZ\$5.1b; roughly 7%    | Kiwifruit, apples and other horticulture          |
| Wood and pulp   | About NZ\$5.75b               | Logs, sawn timber, pulp and other forest products |
| Seafood         | Roughly NZ\$1.0-1.8b annually | Quota-managed wild catch and aquaculture          |

Technology exports have become increasingly significant. TIN200 reporting indicated strong growth in software, medical technology, clean technology and advanced manufacturing. Government and industry commentary increasingly describe technology as one of New Zealand's major export pillars alongside dairy and tourism. Fintech, screen production and space technology remain smaller but fast-growing parts of the export economy.

### 4. Population, Education and Public Services

New Zealand's population is ethnically diverse. Public-school enrolment is broadly divided among European/Pākehā, Māori, Asian and Pacific students, with smaller groups and international students making up the balance. International students represent only a small share of total school enrolment.

Use of public health services varies by age, income, location and ethnicity. Māori and Pacific populations experience higher rates of some health conditions and, in several categories, higher hospitalisation rates than their population shares. Visitors and other non-residents account for only a small proportion of total public-health utilisation.

### 5. Tax Revenue and Welfare Expenditure

New Zealand's personal income tax system does not apply different rates by ethnicity. Official tax statistics are not normally published as a complete ethnic breakdown. Differences in total tax contribution between population groups largely reflect employment rates, age structures and average earnings.

Social-protection spending is a major part of the national budget. In the 2023/24 financial year, New Zealand Superannuation cost about NZ\$21.57 billion, while other welfare benefits, including unemployment, disability, sole-parent support and housing assistance, totalled about NZ\$18.72 billion. Working for Families tax credits were about NZ\$3.043 billion.

**Interpretation caution: higher benefit receipt in a population group does not, by itself, identify the cause. Age, household structure, disability, labour-market participation, housing costs and regional deprivation all affect welfare use.**

## 6. Crime and Public Safety

Māori are substantially over-represented in New Zealand's criminal-justice system. During the period covered by the source material, Māori accounted for a much larger share of prosecutions, convictions and the prison population than their share of the total population. Pacific peoples were also over-represented in some categories, while European and Asian populations were generally under-represented relative to their population shares.

Government and community research generally links this pattern to multiple factors, including socioeconomic disadvantage, intergenerational harm, educational exclusion, substance abuse, family violence, policing patterns and unequal access to early intervention. Non-residents account for a very small proportion of overall recorded offending.

## 7. Residence Visas and Migration

Between 2020 and 2025, excluding the exceptional 2021 Resident Visa pathway, New Zealand approved tens of thousands of residence applications each year. Skilled and business categories made up the largest share, followed by family categories, with refugee and humanitarian pathways representing only a small proportion.

- Major source countries included India, China, the United Kingdom and the Philippines.
- Approval rates were generally high, but varied by category and year.
- Common reasons for refusal included failure to meet skill, health, character, language or documentation requirements.
- Immigration statistics are usually reported by nationality or visa category rather than by ethnicity.

Migration policy therefore affects labour supply, housing demand, public-service capacity and the long-term composition of the population. Policy evaluation should distinguish temporary work visas, residence approvals, family migration, students and humanitarian entrants rather than treating all migration as one category.

## 8. Interpretation and Policy Questions

The data in this overview raise several strategic questions for New Zealand:

- How can natural resources generate more high-value processing and export income inside New Zealand?
- How can investment move from land and low-productivity services toward technology, equipment and advanced manufacturing?
- How should infrastructure and public-service capacity be matched to population growth?
- How can the country reduce persistent social and justice-system disparities without weakening equal legal standards?
- How should migration be assessed by productivity, tax contribution, family cost and long-term national capacity?
- Which datasets should government publish more transparently so public debate is based on evidence rather than assumption?

**FIXNZ position: natural wealth, population growth and public spending should be judged by whether they raise productivity, living standards, social trust and the long-term capacity of New Zealand.**

## References

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## Editorial Note

This English edition is a translated and editorially reconstructed version of a Chinese-language research reference. Terminology has been standardised for an English-speaking New Zealand audience. The report retains the substance and direction of the source material while improving clarity and removing machine-generated branding, personal identifiers and non-public production metadata.