

Natural features and landscapes

Objectives

- Outstanding natural features and landscapes are recognised and protected.
- Landscapes and visual amenity values, as viewed from public places, are retained and enhanced.
- The natural character of the coastal environment, wetlands, and lakes and rivers and their margins is preserved.

Anticipated environmental results

- Protection and enhancement of:
 - Outstanding natural features and landscapes, including ridgelines.
 - Cultural and traditional relationships of Maaori with particular landforms.
- Avoidance or mitigation of effects of development (land use and subdivision) on:
 - significant ridgelines
 - the coastal environment
 - representative geological examples.
- Retention of notable trees.
- Preservation of natural character of the coastal environment, wetlands, and lakes and rivers and their margins, including distinctive aspects of localities.

Background

Section 6 of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) requires governing bodies to recognise and provide for natural features and landscapes, including the relationship of Maaori with these features and protect them from inappropriate subdivision, land use and development.

In 1992 a Landscape Study (reviewed 2003 and 2006) was undertaken in the district by Boffa Miskell. This report described the visual qualities and sensitivities of 31 separate landscape units. As a result the following 13 features were identified as being outstanding natural features and landscapes and are described in the planning maps as Landscape Policy Areas: Whangamarino Wetland, Hakarimata Range, Taupiri Range, Kokako hills, Te Hoe, Mt Karioi, Papanui Point, Motakotako Area, Bridal Veil Falls, Mt Pirongia, Horea-Rangitoto Point, Pataki Point, Waikato River, Lake Waikare, and Lake Whangape.

As part of the River Settlement Act 2010 the Waikato River has been given prominence and Waikato – Tainui and Waikato District Council have entered into a Joint Management Agreement (23 March 2010). The district plan now reflects the new era of co-management between Waikato District Council and iwi and gives effect to Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato; the vision and strategy for the Waikato River.

Also identified and given regard to in the district plan are; Prominent ridgelines (Ridgeline Policy Area); Coastal Areas (Coastal Zone); Whaanga Coast (Whaanga Coast Policy Area); Gully Areas and Notable Trees.

Pressures

The main pressure on our natural features and outstanding landscape is population growth resulting in an increase in economic development and in turn demands on our resources.

- **Population growth**

Over the next ten years the projected population growth for the Waikato district is estimated to be 18.6 per cent or 1.7 per cent per annum. Over the past 20 years the population growth has averaged 1.2 per cent, with the past five years being at 2 per cent. This latter increase has been in the non-urban areas consistent with higher demand for countryside living and rural residential sections, following the trend of people moving away from the cities such as Auckland and Hamilton. As detailed below, this trend is likely to remain relatively constant.

	2012	2022	Change
<i>Estimated population</i>	65,114	77,331	12,217
<i>Estimated dwellings</i>	23,240	27,975	4,735
<i>Estimated urban/rural mix</i>	47/53	49/51	

Note: These growth estimates are from our detailed population modeling prepared in conjunction with the National Institute of Demographic and Economic Analysis and includes base information from the 2006 census. The 2010 census was postponed because of the Canterbury earthquakes.

The census Usually Resident Population (URP) counts show that Waikato district is in the top ten territorial authority areas with an increase of population from 2006 to 2013 of 10.1% (Statistics New Zealand). The URP counts as detailed below show that the estimated population count for the district in 2013 is below the 2012 estimate and would not have taken into account the boundary change with the creation of Auckland Super City (incorporation of Franklin district).

	2001	2006	2013
Usually Resident Population	51,843	57,585	63,378

- **Economic development**

A major impact on our natural features and landscapes is due to economic growth and the consequent competition for resources.

The Waikato district is included in one of the larger regional economies in New Zealand with increasing demands on its natural and physical resources. Economic pressures on areas set aside for protection include the growth of residential areas as populations increase, demand for resources and services from outside the region, pressure to convert areas to other uses, increased pressure on the coast and development of transport infrastructure.

Tourism is second only to the dairy industry in terms of foreign exchange earnings and the image of New Zealand as 'clean and green' is still very much alive abroad if somewhat on the wane internally. The importance of protecting our natural features and outstanding landscapes to improve and maintain the tourism draw New Zealand has to offer is a crucial factor to consider when undertaking economic development.

The Waikato District Council has a number of mechanisms for making economic development decisions, including the District Growth Strategy, Future Proof and the Long Term Plan.

State

Waikato River

Refer to Part 6.0 of the state of the Environment Report: Cultural Wellbeing.

Coastal environment

The Waikato section of the Waikato District Plan has a dedicated coastal zone with specific coastal zone rules to preserve the amenity values of coastal areas within the district. The rules within the coastal zone are similar to that of the rural zone in that they are designed to retain the amenity values of the area. Preference is given to subdivision/development in areas that have already been compromised rather than in areas with more natural character. Sprawling and sporadic development on the coast is also discouraged. This is consistent with the objectives of the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement. Between 2009 and 2013, 15 resource consents were granted for development in the coastal zone and 35 subdivisions were granted. One subdivision consent was declined in 2011.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Land use Consent	1	1	5	2	6
Subdivision Consent	7	12	3	11	2

Figure 1: Resource and Subdivision Consents granted annually between 2009 and 2013 in the Coastal Zone

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Landscape Policy Area	15	19	15	12	8
Ridgeline Policy Area	4	1	1	3	5
Whanga Coastal Policy Area	1	-	-	2	3

Figure 2: Resource Consents Granted annually between 2009 and 2013 in the Landscape Policy Area, Ridgeline Policy Area and the Whanga Coastal Policy Area.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Landscape Policy Area	43	42	30	31	12
Ridgeline Policy Area	5	8	7	7	3
Whanga Coast Policy Area	2	-	1	-	3

Figure 3: Building Consents granted annually between 2009 and 2013 in the Landscape Policy Area, Ridgeline Policy Area and Whanga Coast Policy Area.

Landscape policy Areas

Outstanding natural features and landscapes are identified in Schedule 3A and also visually on the district plan maps, shown as Landscape Policy Areas. The land forms of the district are varied and include the Waikato basin, lowland peat areas, lakes and hill country. The district has an exposed cliff coastline for much of its west coast. The coastal cliffs and the cones of Karioi and Pirongia dominate the southern landscape, while the Hakarimata, Taupiri and Hapuakohe ranges run through the district from the south-west to the north-east.

The plan identifies and manages outstanding natural features and landscapes, and also addresses effects of subdivision and development on general landscape values throughout the district. Between 2009 and 2013 69 resource consents were granted (Figure 2) for development within the Landscape Policy Areas. There were 158 building consents were granted (Figure 3) in the Landscape Policy Area between 2009 and 2013. In 2013 there was a notable decline in building consent numbers.

Ridgeline policy areas

Ridgelines that have been identified as ridgeline policy areas on the planning maps have been recognised as having particular landscape and amenity value due to their prominence and visibility from public places.

To ensure that amenity values are not compromised by inappropriate building and development activities rules of the plan support the objectives by ensuring there are restrictions to how development is undertaken. This includes rules relating to volume and area of earthworks; building and aerial height and subdivision.

Between 2009 and 2013 a total of 14 resource consents were granted (see Figure 1) for development within the ridgeline policy area. No consents were declined. There were 30 building consents granted (Figure 3) in the ridgeline policy area between 2009 and 2013.

Whaanga Coast policy area

There is also an identified coastal policy area, the Whaanga Coast policy area. The Whaanga Coast is situated south of Raglan, between Calvert Road and Papanui Point and is identified as having important scenic, recreational and cultural significance to the district.

Rules have been put in place to control development and protect the amenity values of this coastline. These rules include restrictions for area and volume of earthworks, restrictions on indigenous vegetation clearance and building construction. There were six resource consents granted within the

Whaanga Coast policy area between 2009 and 2013 and six building consents granted. No building or resource consents were declined during this period.

Notable trees

Trees have an important place in terms of economic, environmental and social roles in any district of New Zealand. It is vital that district councils acknowledge the heritage, scientific, cultural, ecosystem services and intrinsic values that trees provide. However, some trees may be considered as having greater value than others. It is these trees that stand out as being notable, significant or distinguished that are selected by territorial local authorities for inclusion in the district plan. Inclusion in a district plan provides a mechanism to administer greater legal protection.

Between 2009 and 2013 there were 35 building consents granted relating to notable trees.

Conservation covenants

The Waikato district has a total of 477 registered conservation covenants protecting approximately 872ha of indigenous vegetation. These form an integral part of our natural features and landscapes.

Please refer to Part 1.0 of the state of the Environment Report: Indigenous biodiversity, for a full analysis of conservation covenants within the district.

Response

Council responds to the pressures identified by initiating strategies and collaborating with other stakeholders within the District and the wider regions. By doing so, this enables Council to make informed decisions on behalf of the communities on the best way to manage the districts resources.

- **Significant Natural Areas**

Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) are recognised under section 6(c) of the RMA as a matter of national importance (“areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna”). Waikato Regional Council is currently commissioning a desktop analysis and report to determine Significant Natural Areas within the Waikato district. The report on desktop analysis is scheduled to be completed in June 2015. Waikato District Council will then need to determine which of these SNAs identified in report require ground truthing. Land owner approval will be necessary to ground truth the SNAs mapped by Waikato Regional Council. The staging or timing of any plan change, or changes, to incorporate SNAs has not yet been determined and is dependent on the outcome of pre-plan change consultation with affected landowners and organisations.

- **Structure plans**

A structure plan provides a long time framework for the future growth and development of a particular area. Structure plans can play a significant role in ensuring our natural features and landscapes are protected from inappropriate building and development activities by targeting growth in appropriate areas.

The Te Kauwhata Structure Plan has been included in the district plan and has specific rules regarding development within the Whangamarino Wetland.

- **Future Proof**

Future Proof is an integrated growth strategy to enable us to know what our future will look like by planning for it today. Hamilton City, Waipa District, Waikato Regional Council and Waikato District Council finalised the Future Prof strategy on the 30 June 2009. It outlines how the Hamilton, Waikato and Waipa region will develop moving forward.

One of the vision statements is focused on resources and the environment. It has identified the “*protection of natural environments, landscapes and heritage and a healthy Waikato River as the heart of the regions identity*”.

Future Proof is currently under review.

- **District Growth Strategy**

The District Growth Strategy came about as the district lacked a specific strategy for growth for a long time. The effects based approach of the RMA is embodied in a district plan that is pro-growth but allows

this to happen in an ad hoc manner. This meant that developers, investors and service providers had little basis on which to make important decisions that affect the local community. Growth has been driven solely by the market.

The most active sector of the market has been for lifestyle development but, unlike its traditional form of hobby farms and relative self-sufficiency, the modern form has been for large executive housing set in expansive grounds, predominantly, but not solely around the fringes of Hamilton City.

The strategy seeks to direct the majority of growth into settlements, with a focus on larger towns and the expansion of existing villages that are supported by services and facilities. This will ensure that the pressure on our natural features and landscapes is reduced. Plan Change 2 reflects this in the rural and coastal zones.

- **Conclusion and recommendations**

Natural features and outstanding landscapes are vital to not only the ecosystems they contain but also to the cultural and social aspects they deliver. Protection and enhancement of these features is paramount. They form part of our cultural identity, heritage and are important to our economic development.

Council needs to continue to collect relevant information using the environmental indicators to assess change in the environment. This would enable a more comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of the rules in meeting the objectives and policies of the plan and thereby respond to any pressures on the environment in the best possible way. In turn this will assist any district plan review, ensuring that the policies, objectives and rules are providing the desired result.

The Council will continue to work in partnership with the community and other agencies to better understand community outcomes to ensure we protect our outstanding landscapes and natural features. By working with external agencies and utilising shared services (eg via Future Proof and other associated strategies) Council will be in the position to make informed decisions.