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Report to the Environment and Rural Services and Wairarapa Committees
From Richard Peterson, Policy Advisor, Resource Policy
Karen Brewster, Section Leader, Policy & Planning

Managing the Effects of Subdivision on the Natural Character of the Coastal Environment

1. Purpose

- To inform both the Environment and Rural Services and Wairarapa Committees about the extent of the ongoing subdivision within the Region's coastal environment; and
- To seek the Committees' support for Regional Council Officers to take a strong position against applications which will adversely affect the natural character of the coastal environment.

2. Background

The Coastal Environment chapter of the Council's State of Environment Report, currently in **draft**, states that:

“Subdivision, use and development have significantly altered the natural character of the coastal environment in the Wellington Region. Despite provision in statutory plans that seek to protect natural character, there is ongoing pressure for new development and uses that have the potential for adverse impacts, with a high potential for cumulative effects. If current trends to approve development continue, there will be further loss of natural character of the coastal environment.”

The drafting of the State of Environment Report has coincided with several applications for coastal subdivision being made to territorial local authorities within the Region. Two subdivision consents, which were proposed in the early to mid **1990s**, are in the process of being re-submitted to the **Kapiti** Coast District Council. For both of these applications, the natural character of the coastal environment was a significant issue when first lodged. Significantly, the Planning Tribunal overturned one of these consents because of concerns about the impact that it would have on natural character.

In the Wairarapa eight coastal applications involving 66 new lots have been lodged with territorial local authorities for resource consent approval in the calendar year to date. Pre-application consultation indicates that further proposals will soon be lodged. Attachment One shows the location and number of coastal lots proposed in the Wairarapa for 1998 and 1999. Each of these subdivisions (approved and proposed) has the potential to have significant impacts on the natural character of the coastal environment.

The Kapiti and Wairarapa coastlines are at opposite ends of the scale with regard to the intensity of rural residential development. The Kapiti Coast is at a stage whereby it is at risk **from** sprawling development along its entire length. In contrast, the Wairarapa coast is facing more intensive sporadic development where road access already exists.

Obviously the danger for the Wairarapa is that sporadic subdivision will continue to such an extent that it mirrors the development pattern that has occurred along the Kapiti Coast. The Kapiti Coast has a history of small beach settlements occurring at the end of beach access roads. Urban expansion and rural/residential development has spread along the **coastal** fringe in a linear pattern that has linked several of the original beach settlements. The subdivision applications that have been granted through the 1990s has the potential to continue this pattern and link **Waikanae** with the settlements at Peka Peka and Te Horo.

This report seeks support from the Environment and Rural Services and Wairarapa Committees, for submissions to be made on coastal subdivisions which emphasise:

1. the importance of the natural character of the coastal environment;
2. the need to protect the Region's coastline from sprawling and sporadic subdivision;
3. the cumulative nature of the environmental effects which result from such development; and
4. the need for careful consideration of these issues to adequately promote and achieve sustainable management.

Arguably a decision on the Council's approach to such subdivision should wait until the State of the Environment Report is released. However, given the number and scale of applications that are being processed by territorial local authorities in the Region, or which are about to be submitted to these authorities, it is appropriate that the Regional Council makes its position on this issue clear now.

3. **Statutory Considerations**

The Resource Management Act 1991 ("RMA"), New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement ("NZCPS"), and the Regional Policy Statement ("RPS") have objectives, policies, and methods to ensure that the natural character of the coastal environment is not compromised. In particular, section 6(a) of the RMA identifies as a matter of national importance:

"the preservation of the natural character of the coastal environment (including the coastal marine area), wetland, lakes and rivers and their

margins, and the protection of them from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development”

The NZCPS recognises, as a national priority, the preservation of the natural character of the coastal environment by:

- “(a) encouraging appropriate subdivision, use or development in areas where the natural character has already been compromised and avoiding sprawling or sporadic subdivision, use or development in the coastal environment;*
- (b) taking into account the potential adverse effects of subdivision, use, or development on the values relating to the natural character of the coastal environment, both within and outside the immediate location; and*
- (c) avoiding cumulative adverse effects of subdivision, use and development in the coastal environment.”*

The importance of protecting the coastal environment has also been recognised in the Regional Policy Statement. The Coastal Environment chapter of the Policy Statement includes a series of resource management issues, objectives and policies which relate to the natural character of the coastal environment. Issue 1 of the Coastal Environment chapter identifies the effects which may arise as a result of activities in the coastal environment. This issue makes particular reference to the role that sprawling urban development along the Kapiti Coast and sporadic development in the Wairarapa have had in this regard.

The objectives and policies of this chapter develop these concerns further. For example, Policy 1 identifies specific sites which have significant historical, ecological, geological or landscape values. Policy 2 identifies matters for consideration when planning for or making a decision on subdivision, use and development in the coastal environment generally.

These national priorities and policies demonstrate that the coastal environment is recognised at the national and regional level as being an environment of significant importance. At the district level in the Wellington Region, this principle has been adopted in district plans to varying degrees.

Despite these clear policy signals, the statistics presented above, along with the findings of the draft State of Environment Report, indicate that pressure has continued to be exerted on the natural character of the coastal environment in the Region. To date the territorial local authorities have seemed reluctant to decline consent for coastal subdivision applications. In part this reflects the cumulative nature of the issue, as a result of which the impact of an individual proposal can be difficult to gauge. Having noted this, and as the draft State Environment Report notes, further loss of the natural character will occur if the trend to approve consents continues.

The Regional Council has opposed the two most recent consent applications in the Wairarapa, primarily on natural character concerns. One of these, namely the Flat Point subdivision, was recently approved by the Carterton District Council, while the South Wairarapa District Council is yet to make a decision on a proposal to subdivide

at Te Awaiti. It may be appropriate to appeal the Flat Point decision to the Environment Court. Similarly, it may be appropriate to oppose future subdivision on both coastlines at territorial local authority hearings and in the Environment Court, unless applications and decisions clearly show that the subdivision is not “inappropriate” from the point of view of the preservation of natural character. Councillors should be aware that such actions would not always be popular, particularly with applicants and local decision-makers.

4. Communications

The Regional Council has expressed its concerns that the natural character of the coastal environment is being compromised by inappropriate subdivision, use and development through the formal submission process. **This** process includes giving evidence at territorial local authority hearings. Informal discussions have also been undertaken with district council staff to emphasise that natural character should be a central issue in the consideration of coastal subdivision.

5. Recommendation

1. *That the report be received and its contents noted.*
2. *That the Committee **affirms** the actions of staff to continue to oppose coastal subdivisions where they adversely **effect** the natural character of the coastal environment.*

Report prepared by:



RICHARD PETERSON
Policy Advisor, Resource Policy

Approved for submission:



COLIN WRIGHT
Divisional Manager, Wairarapa



KAREN BREWSTER
Section Leader, Policy & Planning



JANE BRADBURY
Divisional Manager, Environment

Attachments: 1