

2.0 Natural Character

2.1 Introduction

Section 6(a) of the Act declares as a matter of national importance: “the preservation of the natural character of the coastal environment (which includes the coastal marine area), wetlands, lakes, rivers and their margins, and the protection of them from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.”

Chapter One of the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement expresses ways in which the natural character of the coastal environment can be preserved. It links natural character preservation with a number of other protection matters. An example is Policy 1.1.3(a) of the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement which introduces the protection of “... landscapes, seascapes and landforms ...”. While the protection of outstanding landscapes is a matter of national importance under section 6(b) of the Act, its protection will also work towards the preservation of natural character. The combination of both seeks to promote the sustainable management of natural and physical resources.

Natural character can generally be described as being those characteristics (qualities and features) of a particular environment. The particular environment in the case of the Plan, is the coastal environment, freshwater environments or wetlands, lakes, rivers and their margins.

The natural character of the coastal environment and freshwater bodies is comprised of a number of key elements which include:

- Coastal or freshwater landforms;
- Indigenous flora and fauna, and their habitats;
- Water and water quality, including marine and freshwater ecosystems;
- Scenic or landscape values;
- Cultural heritage values; and
- Habitat of trout.

All parts of the Marlborough Sounds coastal and freshwater environments have some or all of these qualities and to that extent, all have some degree of natural character.

The preservation of natural character and protection from inappropriate subdivision, use and development will generally be achieved by a process which addresses those identified components of natural character. By identifying and explaining the process of natural character preservation and providing an integration mechanism in this chapter, natural character can be effectively addressed.

The process which addresses natural character is based on the identified components of natural character (above) and the way in which the Plan specifically manages these. In other words, a number of the policies and methods of implementation for preserving natural character are contained within other sections of the Plan. Based on the qualities or components of natural character identified above, the process is as follows.

2.1.1 Coastal or Freshwater Landforms

Examples of landform include tidal estuaries, dune formations, coastal cliffs, and bays and inlets. The Plan addresses adverse impacts on landform by incorporating controls on land disturbance and alteration to the foreshore and seabed. Refer to Chapter 13: Soil Conservation and section 9.4: Alteration to the Foreshore and Seabed.

2.1.2 Indigenous Flora and Fauna and their Habitats

Important vegetation and animals and habitats are incorporated into 'areas of significant ecological value' and policies to protect these are provided in Chapter 4: Indigenous Flora and Fauna and Their Habitats.

2.1.3 Water and Water Quality

Water management issues and water quality are addressed in Chapter 3: Freshwater and section 9.3.1: Coastal Marine Water Quality. The achievement of the policies in these sections and the implementation of the relevant rules in Volume Two will also contribute to the preservation of natural character.

2.1.4 Scenic or Landscape Values

Scenic or landscape values are essentially people's appreciation of the visual qualities of a particular area. Protection of visual qualities is provided in Chapter 5 Landscape and throughout a number of other chapters of the Plan (eg Open Space, and Rural and Urban Environments).

2.1.5 Cultural Heritage Values

Cultural heritage values include historic places of early settlement and sites of significance to iwi. Policies to manage Tangata Whenua and heritage values are contained within Chapter 6 and rules to protect specific heritage resources are contained in Volume Two.

The protection of the individual elements of natural character will go towards preserving the natural character of the coastal and freshwater environments and protecting them from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.

In addition to protecting those elements which contribute to natural character, it is important to address the cumulative effects of subdivision, use and development. Also, the irreversible adverse effects on natural character of some types of subdivision, use, and development need to be addressed. In such cases remedying or mitigating the change brought about by such activity can be complex.

This creates difficulties for ensuring the protection of natural character, which can only be assessed on a case by case basis. The policies which follow allow for this.

2.1.6 The Framework for Natural Character

Knowledge of the biophysical and ecological aspects of the above elements has been used to describe the overall natural character and to classify and map the Marlborough Sounds area into management units, known as **Natural Character Areas**. These classifications are based on a range of biophysical and ecological parameters, relating to collective characteristics, landforms, geological features, dynamic features and processes including climate, water, predominant

indigenous vegetation, distinctive biota, communities and habitats, and potential for restoration. This information describes the distinctiveness of the natural character within each natural character area.

Appendix Two of this volume of the Plan contains detailed description of:

- Overall natural character of the Marlborough Sounds across terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments; and
- Natural character of the following constituent natural character areas:
 - (i) Land:
D'Urville, Bryant, Cook Strait; Bulwer; Arapawa; Portage; Stokes; Nydia; Pelorus; Kaituna; Robertson; and
 - (ii) Coastal/marine:
Eastern Cook Strait and Outer Queen Charlotte; D'Urville Island - Northern Cook Strait; Port Underwood; Tasman Bay - Admiralty Bay; Middle Pelorus Sound; Inner Pelorus Sound; Tory Channel; and Queen Charlotte Sound.

Guidelines to interpretation and definitions of relevant terms are also contained in Appendix Two.

This natural character information is a relevant tool for management in helping to identify and protect those values that contribute to people's experience of the Sounds area. Preserving natural character in the Marlborough Sounds as a whole depends both on the overall pattern of use, development and protection, as well as maintaining the natural character of particular areas. The Plan therefore recognises that preservation of the natural character of the constituent natural character areas is important in achieving preservation of the natural character of the Marlborough Sounds as a whole.

The Plan requires that plan change and resource consent applications be assessed with regard to the natural character of the Sounds as a whole as well as each natural character area, or areas where appropriate. This method is further explained in the following methods of implementation and provided for in the zone rules.

2.2 Objectives and Policies

Objective 1	The preservation of the natural character of the coastal environment, wetlands, lakes and rivers and their margins and the protection of them from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.
Policy 1.1	Avoid the adverse effects of subdivision, use or development within those areas of the coastal environment and fresh-water bodies which are predominantly in their natural state and have natural character which has not been compromised.
Policy 1.2	Appropriate use and development will be encouraged in areas where the natural character of the coastal environment has already been compromised, and where the adverse effects of such activities can be avoided, remedied or mitigated.

Policy 1.3	To consider the effects on those qualities, elements and features which contribute to natural character, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Coastal and freshwater landforms; b) Indigenous flora and fauna, and their habitats; c) Water and water quality; d) Scenic or landscape values; e) Cultural heritage values, including historic places, sites of early settlement and sites of significance to iwi; and f) Habitat of trout.
Policy 1.4	In assessing the actual or potential effects of subdivision, use or development on natural character of the coastal and freshwater environments, particular regard shall be had to the policies in Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 12,13 and Sections 9.2.1, 9.3.2 and 9.4.1 in recognition of the components of natural character.
Policy 1.5	Promote an integrated approach to the preservation of the natural character of the coastal and freshwater environments of the Marlborough Sounds.
Policy 1.6	In assessing the appropriateness of subdivision, use or development in coastal and freshwater environments regard shall be had to the ability to restore or rehabilitate natural character in the area subject to the proposal.
Policy 1.7	To adopt a precautionary approach in making decisions where the effects on the natural character of the coastal environment, wetlands, lakes and rivers (and their margins) are unknown.
Policy 1.8	To recognise that preservation of the intactness of the individual land and marine natural character management areas and the overall natural character of the freshwater, marine and terrestrial environments identified in Appendix Two is necessary to preserve the natural character of the Marlborough Sounds as a whole.

The above objective and policies seek to support other sections of the Plan in terms of their contribution to natural character and provide an integration mechanism for the management of natural character.

The preservation of the natural character of the coastal environment, wetlands, lakes and rivers (and their margins) and the protection of them from inappropriate subdivision, use and development is a matter of national importance which must be recognised and provided for in the Plan. The natural character of the Marlborough Sounds comprises those features and qualities which have been brought into being by nature. While it is seen as nationally important to preserve the qualities of natural character, it is not intended that this principle should preclude appropriate subdivision, use and development.

This level of direction is consistent with the policies contained within the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement, including Policy 1.1.5. It provides a guide for decisions on plan changes, assessment of effects, consent decisions, and direction in determining appropriate measures to avoid, remedy and mitigate adverse effects of activities on natural character.

2.3 Methods of Implementation

Rules	Rules have been constructed to ensure that the elements which contribute to natural character in the Marlborough Sounds are protected from inappropriate subdivision, use and development. Refer to General Rules and Zone Rules, Volume Two. The establishment of a Conservation Zone and related rules, also contributes to the preservation of natural character in the Sounds.
Assessment Criteria	The provision of assessment criteria on discretionary activities to facilitate the consideration of natural character impact.
Information	The Council, in liaison with the Department of Conservation, will prepare and maintain a bibliography of published material on the natural and physical resources of the Marlborough Sounds.
Methods of Implementation	Natural character areas - The natural character of the Marlborough Sounds overall, and the constituent land and marine natural character management areas are described in Appendix Two. These descriptions must be considered in the preparation of resource consent and plan changes and in making consent and plan change decisions. These area descriptions also provide direction in determining appropriate measures to avoid, remedy and mitigate adverse effects.

The methods to achieve preservation of natural character in those areas where this is required by the Act, is the general outcome of a number of the rules provided by the Plan. The zoning mechanism identifies the most appropriate locations for more intensive development. For example, the Sounds Residential Zone indicates appropriate locations for residential development in the Sounds. Subdivision is a precursor to major changes to natural character. Controls on subdivision ensure that these changes are not adverse.

Rules will ensure, as far as is practicable, that subdivision, use and development harmonise with the natural character of the coastal environment and wetlands, lakes and rivers.

The natural character area framework is based on biophysical and ecological components listed in Appendix Two. This framework is in addition and complementary to the outstanding landscape areas identified in the Plan maps. (The outstanding landscape areas are based on the VAMPLAN method of identification and therefore represent an assessment of the visual values within the Marlborough Sounds.)

Plan users should also note that the natural character descriptions are a summary of the current knowledge of the plan area and constituent management

areas. The natural character descriptions are not exhaustive and will not preclude consideration of other natural character values and effects within resource consent and plan change processes or developing appropriate mitigation or environmental offsets. However, recognition of additional natural character attributes will not detract from those features identified in Appendix Two.

The linkages that exist across natural character areas and traversing land and marine areas are addressed through the appropriate wording of consent assessment criteria.

2.4 Anticipated Environmental Results

Implementation of the policies and methods relating to natural character will result in:

- The preservation of areas of uncompromised natural character in the coastal and freshwater environments;
- The protection of the elements and features which significantly contribute to the natural character of the coastal environment and wetlands, lakes and rivers and their margins; and
- The preservation of the core components that make up the natural character of the Marlborough Sounds overall and the constituent natural character areas identified in Appendix Two.