

10.0 Natural Character

10.1 Introduction

The Resource Management Act 1991 (the Act) (Section 6(a)) 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 (NZCPS) 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 NZCPS which introduces the protection of "... landscapes, seascapes and landforms ...". While the protection of outstanding landscapes is a matter of national importance in its own right under Section 6(b) of the Act, it is also addressed in the preservation of natural character, the combination of these matters assist in the promotion of 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 this chapter of the Plan, is the coastal environment and freshwater environments or wetlands, lakes and rivers and their margins.

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

- 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 and salmon.

All parts of the East Marlborough Coast from Rarangi to Willawa Point have some or all of these qualities and to that extent, all have some degree of natural character. One management issue to be addressed is the location of the inland boundary of the coastal environment. In some cases this will be clear in others it will be a matter for interpretation.

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.

The process used for addressing natural character involved the identification of qualities or components of natural character (above) and determining ways in which the Plan specifically manages these. A number of the policies and methods of implementation for preserving natural character are contained within other sections of this Plan.

Coastal or Freshwater Landforms

Examples of landform include tidal estuaries, dune formations, coastal cliffs and river terraces. The Plan addresses adverse impacts on landform by incorporating rules on land disturbance and alteration to the foreshore and seabed. Refer to Chapter 14: Land Disturbance, and Chapter 9: Coastal Marine.

Flora and Fauna and their Habitats

Important vegetation and fauna habitats are incorporated into 'areas of significant ecological value' and policies to protect these are provided in Chapter 4 Flora and Fauna and their Habitats. In addition for the Coastal Marine Area the Department of Conservation have identified areas of special conservation value which include areas of significant ecological value. Coastal Marine Area ecosystems, and ecosystems in the coastal environment, are described in Chapter 9: Coastal Marine.

Water and Water Quality

Water management issues and water quality are addressed in the Water and Coastal Marine sections of the Plan. Refer to Chapter 6 Fresh Water. 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.

Scenic or Landscape Values

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

Cultural Heritage Values

Cultural heritage values include historic places of early settlement and sites of significance to iwi. Policies to recognise and protect the values of tangata whenua and heritage values are contained within Chapters 2 and 3 and rules to protect specific heritage resources are contained in Volume Two of the Plan.

The protection of the individual elements of natural character will assist in 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. The irreversible adverse effects on natural character of some types of subdivision, use and development also need to be addressed. In such cases remedying or mitigating the change brought about by such activity can be complex.

Both of these issues create difficulties for ensuring the protection of natural character, and can only be assessed on a case by case basis. The policies which follow allow for this.

10.2 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	Discourage subdivision, use or development within those areas of the coastal environment and freshwater bodies which are predominantly in their natural state and have natural character which has not been compromised.
Policy 1.2	<p>Appropriate use and development in the coastal environment will be encouraged in areas where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The natural character has already been compromised; and • Where such use and development does not contribute to sprawling or sporadic development.
Policy 1.3	<p>To consider the effects on those qualities, elements and features which contribute to natural character, including:</p> <ol 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 settlements and sites of significance to iwi; (f) Habitat of trout and salmon; (g) Natural movements of sediments, water, air and biota; (h) Natural productivity; and (i) other dynamic processes.
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, 9, 13 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 Wairau/Awatere area.
Policy 1.6	In assessing the appropriateness of subdivision, use or development in coastal and freshwater environments, particular regard shall be given 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 promote the concept of streams, rivers, wetlands and estuaries as ecological corridors to the coast.
Policy 1.9	In ensuring that the cumulative effects of activities in the coastal environment are not adverse to a significant degree, consideration shall be given to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The additive effect of allowing more of the same or similar activity;• The additive result of allowing more of a particular effect, whether from the same activity or from other activities causing the same or similar effect; and• The composite bundle of effects from all activities that operate in, or that cause effects in the coastal environment.

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 under the Act which must be recognised and provided for in this Plan. The natural character of the East Coast and Wairau/Awatere freshwater bodies comprises those features and qualities which have been created 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.

10.3 Methods of Implementation

Rules	Rules have been constructed to ensure that the elements which contribute to natural character in Wairau/Awatere freshwater bodies and the East Marlborough Coast 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 contribute to the preservation of natural character.
Assessment Criteria	The provision of assessment criteria for discretionary activities to facilitate the consideration of effects on natural character.
Landscape Character	When issues involving landscape character arise suitably qualified professionals will be retained to give advice

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 East Marlborough Coast and Wairau/Awatere area.

Identification of the values of water bodies The natural and human use values supported by surface water bodies within the Plan area are identified in Appendix A of Volume 1 of the Plan. These values include ecological, habitat, recreational and natural character values. Regard can be had to these values when considering resource consent applications required as a result of rules in this Plan.

As more is learnt about the values supported by water bodies in South Marlborough, it is possible to add to Appendix A by way of plan change.

The methods to achieve preservation of natural character in those areas where this is required by the Act, are the general outcome of a number of the rules provided by the Plan. Subdivision, use, or development are usually precursors to major changes to natural character. Controls 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.

10.4 Anticipated Environmental Results

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

- The preservation of the natural character of the coastal and freshwater environments; and
- 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.

