

Topic 3: Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity

Introduction

As part of the District Plan Review, Timaru District Council has commissioned a Discussion Document on ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity to stimulate discussion and form a basis for public consultation. This can be found at www.timaru.govt.nz/dpr.

It identifies a range of issues with how the current District Plan manages ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity, establishes potential options to address these issues and discusses the associated strengths and weaknesses. We seek your feedback on the issues and options.

The issues relating to ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity are broad and varied and are of interest to a range of parties. National regulation through the Resource Management Act requires the management of indigenous biodiversity as a matter of national importance. Generally the protection of indigenous biodiversity provides benefits to the environment and the community, but can come at a cost for landowners. In many cases significant areas of indigenous biodiversity remain because of the choices made by landowners in managing their properties.

The Council does not wish to be unnecessarily regulatory but needs to provide for protection of indigenous biodiversity to meet statutory requirements and to ensure there is a level of protection against any land management activities which could have a detrimental effect or where changing land use patterns impact on biodiversity. The Council wishes to reach an appropriate balance between recognising and acknowledging private property rights and working with landowners as custodians and managers of the land, while also recognising and implementing the Council's statutory responsibilities for protection of biodiversity. The Council also wishes to ensure that there is certainty around indigenous biodiversity and the ways in which this will be managed and the areas which will be affected by the District Plan provisions.

To achieve these outcomes, the Council wants to pursue a mix of regulatory and non-regulatory approaches – some in the District Plan and many outside the District Plan. The Council wants to provide landowners with as many options as possible to best manage the protection of indigenous biodiversity. Beyond the

District Plan, the Council is considering a broad Biodiversity Strategy incorporating a range of methods including:

- Free ecological surveys for identifying Significant Natural Areas.
- Rates remission for properties containing an identified Significant Natural Area.
- Financial support through the Significant Natural Area Fund for beneficial activities such as fencing and pest control.
- Waiver of charges for resource consents involving Significant Natural Areas where protection is achieved.
- Assistance with applying for grants for funding to protect and manage indigenous biodiversity.
- Education, information, advice and encouragement.
- Co-ordination and liaison with other agencies / parties.
- Engagement with iwi and participation with iwi.
- Supporting applications for covenanting and purchase to QEII Trust, Nature Heritage Fund, etc.
- Support for local conservation care groups and programmes.
- Appropriate management of Council land and assets, including reserve management plans.

This summary outlines the issues our district faces in relation to our ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity.

We welcome your feedback on this topic.

Tracy Tierney
Timaru Ward Councillor





Issues and Options

Issue 1

Significant Natural Areas and significant indigenous biodiversity

The issues relating to Significant Natural Areas and other areas of significant indigenous biodiversity relate to (1) how to identify these areas (including use of the criteria set out in the Regional Policy Statement) and (2) how to manage activities occurring within identified areas in a way that balances protection with continued use of land. A survey of significant areas has been undertaken giving some defined areas, but there are many un-surveyed issues e.g. habitats of bats and lizards, which will also need to be addressed in the District Plan. This issue also links to overlapping issues with other management of biodiversity e.g. Department of Conservation land or land under a QEII covenant.

The options for addressing this issue are to (i) update the criteria to align it with the Regional Policy Statement; (ii) include amended and / or new rules for activities that affect significant indigenous biodiversity, such as rules relating to earthworks, activities affecting indigenous vegetation (clearance, removal, disturbance, trimming, harvesting, overplanting, etc), and erection of structures; (iii) consider provisions for biodiversity management plans¹; and (iv) amend existing riparian setback rules to explicitly provide for biodiversity protection, including rules relating to vegetation clearance and grazing in riparian areas, whilst avoiding duplication with rules in Regional Plans.

Issue 2

Enhancement and restoration

Beyond protection of indigenous biodiversity are issues relating to ways in which biodiversity values can be restored (if lost or degraded) or improved through enhancement or recreation. This relates to methods for enhancement or restoration incentives in relation to subdivision, and ensuring that enhancement or restoration activities are managed so that they are compatible with adjacent existing and consented land use activities. Also related to this is a need to consider if there is a desire to provide explicitly for biodiversity offsets as part of development or changes in land zoning.

The options for addressing this issue are to (i) provide enhancement or restoration incentives (i.e. development bonuses) in relation to subdivision or other activities, including provision for creation of wetlands; and / or (ii) include provisions enabling consideration of biodiversity offsets² where appropriate.

Issue 3

Tree planting and wilding spread

Forestry occurring in high natural areas can impact on indigenous biodiversity values. Related to this is the need to manage plant species prone to wilding spread to avoid impacts on ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity.

The options for addressing this issue are to (i) amend rules relating to tree planting (including shelterbelts, woodlots and forestry) to ensure protection of biodiversity values; and (ii) include rules to avoid wilding tree spread.

It is also noted that pests and weeds have a significant impact on biodiversity values but are not able to be addressed directly through the District Plan, as it is not possible to regulate through District Plan rules to require pest and weed control to be undertaken. There are a range of other methods of addressing this issue, including the Regional Pest Management Strategy.

¹A Biodiversity Management Plan approach would enable a package of proposals for development to be consented across one (or more) properties in a way that appropriately identifies and provides for protection and enhancement of indigenous biodiversity values, whilst enabling ongoing use of the land for rural activities. This may be more efficient for land owners than applying for multiple resource consents over time.

²Canterbury Regional Policy Statement 2013 "Biodiversity offsets are the final step in a hierarchical process in which adverse effects on indigenous biodiversity are best avoided, then remedied, and finally mitigated. Only in the latter case should off-site biodiversity offsets be considered to deal with residual unavoidable adverse effects."