

Natural Character

Issues

- The Council's responsibility to recognise and provide for the preservation of the natural character of the coastal environment, wetlands, and lakes and rivers and their margins; and the protection of them from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.
- The need to consider relevant riparian areas to protect natural character values.

Operative District Plan Approach

The Operative Plan approach is to include a general objective together with policies focusing on natural character of the landscape, the coastal environment and the functioning of coastal waters, lagoons, rivers and wetlands separately.

Rules currently only apply to Rural 1, 2 and 5 zones and do not cover any other parts of the district. Within those zones covered, the rules focus on tree planting and harvest, vegetation clearance, buildings and structures, earthworks, cultivation and grazing activities. The riparian areas to which these provisions vary depending on the activity being managed and, in some cases, the slope of the land in the riparian area.

Draft Plan Approach

The proposed approach is to provide clarity around what areas are considered to be riparian margins for the purpose of natural character protection and to apply these consistently in recognition of the different types of waterbodies. On this basis the rules will apply to the coast and land that is within:

- 10m of the bank of that part of a river that is up to 3m wide (and is not listed in (c) below); and/or
- 20m of the bank of that part of a river that is greater than 3m wide (and is not listed in (c) below); and/or;
- 100m of the banks of the Rangitata; Opihi; and Orari Rivers; and/or;
- 50m of any wetland.

The rules then provide for management of the activities that have the potential to damage natural character values.

Changes

The policies identify what makes up natural character values and where restoration/enhancement is desirable, as well as where preservation of natural character values is to be achieved. There are also policies in relation to works necessary for flood risk mitigation, a desire to achieve incentives to support restoration/enhancement and protection for high naturalness waterbodies.

Summary of key rules within riparian margins

Permitted activities

- Clearance of pest plant species outside high naturalness waterbodies.
- Indigenous vegetation planting for restoration/enhancement purposes outside high naturalness waterbodies.
- Limited earthworks.
- Post and wire fences.

Restricted discretionary activities

- Vegetation planting and earthworks by local authorities for the purpose of hazard mitigation works.

Non-complying activities

- Buildings and structures outside high naturalness waterbodies.

Reasons

The preservation of the natural character of the coast, rivers, lakes and wetlands and their margins, and the protection of them from inappropriate subdivision, use and development is identified as a matter of national importance within section 6 of the Resource Management Act. The National Planning Standards require that all District Plans must include a Natural Character chapter if relevant to the district and the Regional Policy Statement also requires preservation of natural character.

What it Means in Practice

The natural character values of riparian areas will be better recognised and protected from development pressures, improving the overall environment for waterbodies and wetlands. There will be greater encouragement of restoration and enhancement of waterbodies. Resource consents will be required for a greater number of activities (including those that may currently be permitted) than the present rules.

