

# Landscape and heritage





# Objectives

1. Nationally and regionally outstanding geological features, landforms, soil sites and other natural features of the region are protected from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.
2. Adverse effects from human activities on the region's natural and physical resources are avoided, remedied or mitigated, so that the quality of any regionally outstanding landscapes which those resources contribute to is maintained.
3. The cultural heritage of the region which is of regional significance is:
  - Recognised as being of importance to the region;
  - Managed in an integrated manner with other resources; and
  - Conserved and sustained for present and future generations.
4. The attributes of natural and physical resources which provide for regional recreational opportunity, and for the appreciation and enjoyment of those resources by the regional community, are maintained or enhanced.



## Doing well

- There is an emerging consensus that landscape management is important if the region is to keep its distinctive identity.
- The number of registered heritage places has increased over the last decade, and for many registered residential and public buildings, the structural integrity is good.
- All local authorities now require resource consent before buildings and heritage items listed in their district plans can be demolished, removed or substantially altered.

## Must improve

- Significant landscapes have yet to be identified, and there is no strategic guidance for landscape management in the region. In this policy vacuum, decisions about landscape change are ad hoc and happen by accident rather than design.
- Communities have strong views about the importance of local landscape for themselves and for future generations, but management solutions must also recognise the rights of landowners.
- The quality of information on many archaeological sites and numerous heritage items is poor, their condition is mixed and the distribution of registered items and places is uneven across the region.
- Some heritage places of national or regional significance are at risk and may need active attention and management. More financial assistance and encouragement for all owners of heritage would be very helpful, but few public authorities offer such support.

## A sense of place

When people describe a place, they often talk about how it looks, the things that make it a bit different, and what they specially remember about it. They may like or dislike the place, but in either case their comments help us understand what they think and feel about it.

The landscapes and heritage of the Wellington region define a special place. Long stretches of rocky coastline, rugged mountain ranges and river systems dominate the landscape we live in. And everywhere is evidence of our history – of how our region evolved under human occupation.

Landscape and heritage are the children of change – a mix of accident and design. We can't preserve them forever just how they are right now, so we need to manage inevitable change in ways that reflect the values that make places special to us.

What do we know about the current state of our landscapes and heritage and the pressures on them? How do we manage these pressures in future?

In this chapter, we recognise that landscapes do change through time. In one sense, landscapes are the product of past choices; they reflect – and are part of – our history. The land has shaped the human experience over generations, and that relationship is reflected in the heritage that remains.

Landscapes change through time; Pauatahanui Inlet, 2005.



## What is landscape?

Technically, “landscape” might be described as a combination of land form, land cover and land use, but mostly, landscape reflects the emotional response of the individual. The value we put on places is the sum of our different priorities, backgrounds and associations, as well as our sense of beauty and history.

For Maori, the land defines their rohe, or tribal area, and takes on a powerful cultural significance. Features like mountains or islands, for instance, are earthly links with ancestors or legend.

From an ecological perspective, the climate and physical character of a particular place make it a home for plants and animals, specifically adapted to live there. For them, this landscape is a living environment, their special place. We need to consider these non-human associations when we pursue landscape management.

Landscape, then, is more than a visual snapshot, and managing landscape is more than simply recognising the most attractive parts. While the Wellington region has its share of iconic features, we need to remember that we all have places which are special to us, no matter how small or remote.

Landscape management needs to think beyond “protecting the best and forgetting the rest”. With landscape (and heritage management too) we should acknowledge the contribution that local identity – that unique mix of places, spaces, buildings and views – makes to our quality of life.

## The Regional Policy Statement and landscape

In 1995, the Regional Policy Statement identified several landscape-related issues which are still relevant.

- There continues to be concern about potential damage to the region’s significant natural features and soil sites.
- Similarly, there is concern about the impact of development on landscape quality. Examples of current pressures include large-scale earthworks associated with subdivision, development in the coastal environment (e.g. in some parts of the Wairarapa and along the Porirua and Kapiti coast), and infrastructure associated with wind energy generation on ridgelines and hilltops (e.g. the West Wind proposal on the Wellington peninsula).
- The loss of natural character, particularly where associated with remnant native vegetation, has continued at a localised scale.
- The rights of private landowners to use and manage their land sometimes conflicts with the expectations of the community for such land to provide public enjoyment through landscape protection – both for present and future generations.



Kapiti Island, a special place to Maori for its history but also important to many people for its visual and ecological values.



Hill tops provide viewpoints, but are also parts of views from elsewhere. We need to think about their management and use from both perspectives, and a third one too - that of the landowner.



Some places have resilience and a ruggedness that helps ensure maintenance of their character. Turakirae Head is a significant geological site, with nationally important raised beaches brought about by uplift during earthquakes. A mix of dynamic natural forces - crashing seas, seals, dramatic skies and active geology - create a very special sense of place. Photo: Dave Hansford.

The Regional Policy Statement anticipated that a Regional Landscape Plan would provide the specific guidance necessary to resolve some of these issues. Such a plan was developed and then withdrawn after public submissions and hearings persuaded the Council that these matters could be addressed by district and city councils with guidance from non-statutory landscape guidelines. Later, the Council decided that guidelines were not necessary and the upcoming review of the Regional Policy Statement was seen to be a more appropriate opportunity for revisiting the question of landscape management for the region.

## Where we are now

The decisions to withdraw the Regional Landscape Plan and stop work on the guidelines mean that significant landscapes in the region have yet to be identified. Because of this, there is no strategic guidance for landscape management. At best, development proposals have been subject to landscape management provisions in district plans, but these are patchy in coverage, and their wording provides rather generalised guidance that does not necessarily achieve the desired outcomes.

This strategic policy vacuum means that landscape decisions are being made *ad hoc*, and that landscape change is still happening by accident rather than design.

## What's being done

There is a growing awareness of the importance of place and of the need to take a more consistent and coordinated approach to landscape management. A number of such initiatives are now under way in the region, for example:

- Porirua City Council's District Plan is under review, and landscape, heritage and ecology are being considered in an integrated way.
- In Wellington City, recent changes to the District Plan point to the potential benefits of a landscape inventory - the identification, description and listing of different types of landscape, as well as their unique characteristics.
- The Wairarapa district councils and Greater Wellington have put together the Wairarapa Coastal Strategy, of which landscape description and assessment are a significant part.

As part of the background to this report, territorial authorities and landscape professionals were asked to comment on how landscape was managed. They said they wanted a more coherent and consistent policy context, that regional leadership was needed, and that Greater Wellington was best placed to provide such leadership.

## Where to from here?

How do we manage the mosaic of landscape types in a more consistent way? And how will it reflect the importance we might attach to each of them? Do some places deserve

more care than others? If they do, how do we decide which ones?

Is it realistic to seek input from many different interests - landowners, iwi, individuals, local communities and the wider regional community – and try for some sort of consensus?

A first step might be to describe the region's different landscapes – an objective, fact-based way of characterising and classifying the landscape. However, this would not be sufficient in itself.

Increasingly, people are concerned about how the region's landscapes can sustain their character in the face of human pressures. Whether this groundswell translates into broader agreement about landscape management and/or effective action will be partly determined by our responses to the questions above. In the upcoming review of the Regional Policy Statement, people will get a chance to speak about their feelings for landscapes.

## What is heritage?

The Regional Policy Statement defined cultural heritage as *“buildings, structures, sites, areas, wahi tapu and wahi tapu areas associated with human activity which are inherited from the past or are of value to future generations, and which are considered to be of special value.”*

In 2003, the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) definition of “historic heritage” was amended to mean: *“those natural and physical resources that contribute to an understanding and appreciation of New Zealand's history and cultures, deriving from any of the following qualities: archaeological, architectural, cultural, historic, scientific, technological, and includes historic sites, structures, places, and areas, archaeological sites, sites of significance to Maori, including wahi tapu, and surroundings associated with natural and physical resources.”*

The Regional Policy Statement interpreted “regionally significant” cultural heritage as those places classified as Category I on the Historic Places Trust Register. This was a rather limited interpretation, and meant that Regional Policy Statement provisions applied to only about 100 places.

## Where we are now

The Government reviewed heritage management in the late 1990s, and the amended definition of “historic heritage” in the RMA mentioned above was one result of that review. Other changes made protection of historic heritage a matter of national importance under section 6(f) of the Act, and an addition to section 12(g) gave protection to historic heritage in the coastal marine area.

Such changes notwithstanding, the Historic Places Trust and city and district councils retain the chief responsibility for heritage management. Nowadays they are backed up by a growing number of organisations and societies – often working at a local level.



Wellington's landscapes are a mix of natural and human influences – houses and bush on the hills, and the city centre with its modern towers and the bustle of shoppers, the harbour as the backdrop. For Wellington and the region, we may need to better appreciate what specific characteristics and qualities make landscapes work if we are to effectively manage the opportunities and the risks that change presents.



Taylor Stace cottage, Pauatahanui - classified as Category 1 on the Historic Places Trust Register and therefore a 'regionally significant' heritage item in the Regional Policy Statement. Photo: R. McClean, NZHPT, 2004.

## What's being done

After discussions in 2004, Greater Wellington and the Historic Places Trust sent questionnaires to agencies and interest groups about the state of heritage in the region, the pressures on it, and how different authorities were dealing with those pressures. The Trust then assessed the condition of selected registered buildings. The box below highlights their main findings.

### Main findings of the heritage surveys

- The number of Historic Places Trust registered places increased from 555 in 1995 to 648 in 2005 – but the increase was slow compared with earlier years – and the increase is largely concentrated in Wellington and Porirua.
- While only two items have been removed from the Historic Places Trust Register between 1995 and 2005, these figures understate the true extent of damage.
- The integrity of buildings on the Register varies between residential and public buildings (where repair and use are generally compatible with the heritage values) and commercial buildings (where the heritage fabric is often restricted to the facade following major internal modifications), especially in the main towns and cities.
- Information about Category I items on the Register is generally good, but data for Category II is only poor to fair.
- Category I generally excludes historic areas, registered archaeological sites and sites of significance to Maori.
- Although the number of archaeological sites increased from 881 in 1995 to 1030 in 2005, information about their condition is mixed and not geographically representative. The New Zealand Archaeological Association is currently upgrading its information, supported by Greater Wellington and territorial authorities in the region.
- All city and district councils now demand resource consent to demolish, relocate or carry out substantial alterations and additions to heritage items listed in the district plans. However, the effectiveness of plan rules varies greatly between districts.
- The Historic Places Trust considers a reasonably large number of places of regional or national significance to be at risk and needing intervention.
- Support for heritage owners is critical but available funding is limited. Central government provides some money through the Historic Places Trust's heritage incentive scheme (but only for Category I items), and only four councils (Wellington City Council, Kapiti Coast District Council, Masterton District Council, Hutt City Council) offer any financial support for property owners.

The Historic Places Trust and Greater Wellington also drew up a set of “heritage indicators” to bring all the collected information together and to be able to assess heritage and its management. One indicator of heritage recognition is the number of Category I and II items on the Trust’s register. Table 7.1 shows these figures for the Wellington region while Table 7.2 provides more detailed information broken down for each of the city and district councils.

Wellington region	1995	2005
Number of registered category I historic places	114	126
Number of registered category II historic places	422	496
Number of registered historic areas	18	24
Number of registered wahi tapu and wahi tapu areas	1	2

Table 7.1:  
Category I and II items on the Historic Places Trust Register, 1995 and 2005.

Table 7.2:  
Category I and II items, 1995 and 2005, by local authority area.

Local Authority	1995						2005					
	Historic Places			Historic Areas	Wahi Tapu	Wahi Tapu Areas	Historic Places			Historic Areas	Wahi Tapu	Wahi Tapu Areas
	Cat I	Cat II	Total				Cat I	Cat II	Total			
Carterton DC	0	18	18	0	0	0	1	18	19	0	0	0
Masterton DC	11	41	52	0	0	0	11	44	55	1	0	1
South Wairarapa DC	4	66	70	1	0	0	4	71	75	2	0	0
Hutt CC	7	35	42	1	0	0	9	37	46	3	0	0
Upper Hutt CC	5	7	12	1	0	0	5	7	12	2	0	0
Kapiti Coast DC	5	18	23	2	0	1	5	22	27	2	0	1
Porirua CC	4	7	11	1	0	0	5	50	55	1	0	0
Wellington CC	78	230	308	12	0	0	86	247	333	13	0	0
Regional total	114	422	536	18	0	1	126	496	622	24	0	2

## Where to from here?

Wellington has a rich and varied historic heritage, which represents a valuable record of our past and economic potential for the future (e.g. tourism). For these reasons – and others – it should be managed well.



Lower Hutt Post Office, a more recent heritage item but an important landmark building, nonetheless, contributing to the city centre's character.  
Photo: R. McClean, NZHPT, 2004.

Heritage, like landscape, helps define our sense of place, and continuing damage and destruction may have sparked a greater appreciation of its value. What's left, and how we manage it, are key issues for the Regional Policy Statement review. It may be that we adopt a more comprehensive interpretation of the range of historic heritage in our region, in line with the definition in the RMA and the feedback from our questionnaire.

The heritage monitoring indicators developed for this State of the Environment work are a positive way to compare our achievements of the coming decade with those of the last. Perhaps we have seen a turning of the tide, and historic heritage may now be better appreciated for the contribution that it makes to our quality of life.

## More information

Holmes, John, 2005. *Landscape and heritage background report*. Greater Wellington.

McClean, Robert, 2004. *Wellington Region State of the Environment Cultural Heritage Technical Report*. New Zealand Historic Places Trust.