

The First Five Years

A Report on the Performance of the Regional Policy Statement in its first Five Years

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Background

The RPS became operative in May 1995. It requires the Council to report this financial year on:

- (1) the appropriateness of significant issues and objectives in the statement
- (2) the effectiveness of the policies and methods in meeting the objectives.

The Council is required to commence a full public review of the RPS no later than 10 years after it became operative. *The First Five Years* is a staff evaluation of the provisions of the RPS at the half way stage.

The RPS specifically requires the report to contain:

- (a) recommendations for any changes
- (b) an assessment of the appropriateness of the significant issues and objectives
- (c) an assessment of the degree to which the policies are reflected in regional and district plans
- (d) an assessment of the degree to which the methods have been implemented
- (e) an assessment of the degree to which the anticipated environmental results are being achieved.

General

Each issue, objective, policy, method, and anticipated environmental result in the RPS was examined in its context and reported on in the subsequent pages.

A major role of the RPS is its influence on regional and district plans. The assessment of regional and district plans in this report indicates that the RPS is reflected in them to a satisfactory degree. They are not inconsistent with the RPS and regard has been had to the RPS when preparing them. All the regional and district plans are now either operative or close to becoming operative. The role of the present RPS in influencing their preparation is now over. Regional and district plans will be reviewed again in another 8 to 10 years, a factor which could influence the timing of the Councils full statutory review of the RPS. Perhaps it will be desirable for the review of the RPS to be complete before district plans are next reviewed.

A second major statutory influence of the RPS is on resource consents. Regard must be had to the provisions of the RPS when considering applications. There are a number of provisions in the RPS that are specifically directed at resource consents.

These provide important guidance to local authorities when resource consents are considered.

Another key role for the RPS is the course it sets when the Council is implementing the non-regulatory policies and methods of the RPS. We would write some of these provisions differently now. After five years of implementation, we know a lot more about how we can effectively promote sustainable management of natural resources than when the RPS was prepared. However, it is unnecessary to embark on such a rewrite now. The costs in staff time and public consultation would be large. Anything spent on changing the RPS is going to deter from spending on its implementation. Shortcomings of the RPS can be accommodated by the Council's other planning and strategy documents.

It will be sensible to leave the RPS untouched for up to another five years to see how well ongoing implementation and the Council's new initiatives in its Proposed 10-Year Strategy are able to achieve measurable changes. A review of the RPS at or before the 10-year mark will be a suitable time to reassess performance and make changes.

The Issues and Objectives

The starting point for all other provisions in the RPS are the issues. Generally, the significant issues of the Region in the RPS remain appropriate. There is a single issue in the Soil and Minerals Chapter that could be reworded but it is unnecessary to change it now. There are also issues in the Waste Management and Hazardous Substances Chapter that are probably less appropriate now than when the RPS was prepared. This is because of changes to the Local Government Act 1974 that affect the Council's role in relation to the Waste Management and Hazardous Substances Chapter. The issues remain relevant because they identify aspects where waste and hazardous substances management is not promoting the purpose of the Act. These issues are now addressed by territorial authorities under the Local Government Act 1974 rather than under the Resource Management Act 1991, but the policy direction provided in the RPS is still helpful to them.

Where issues in the RPS remain appropriate, the objectives are also appropriate.

The Policies and Methods

Policies and methods in the RPS outline the courses of action and methods of implementation that are to be used to achieve the objectives.

Changes are needed to the Landscape and Heritage Chapter. The landscape provisions in this chapter are based on the notion of "regionally outstanding landscapes", which the Council has not been able to identify. Without a change to this part of the RPS, provisions relating to landscape cannot be effective.

In all other chapters of the RPS, the policies and methods are generally meeting objectives or can do so in the next five years. Implementation of new initiatives in the Council's proposed 10-Year Strategy will help ensure that non-regulatory policies and methods of the RPS are effective. The new initiatives will increase the effectiveness

of implementation of the RPS, particularly in the Iwi, Freshwater, Soil, Air, Ecosystems, and Waste and Hazardous Substances Chapters. These initiatives include:

- iwi initiatives
- the Environmental Education Initiative
- an Ecosystems Strategy
- a Wetland strategy
- air monitoring implementation
- implementation of the Regional Land Transport Strategy.

The First Five Years is particularly concerned with situations where policies and methods may not be effective. Except for the landscape provisions in the Landscape and Heritage Chapter, mentioned above, no other changes are recommended. The following paragraphs of this summary highlight those parts of the RPS that will need particular attention when the RPS is reviewed.

Policies and methods in the Iwi Chapter are suitable but their effectiveness, in practice, will be enhanced through more action by the Council to implement them. Feedback from Iwi highlighting the need for more implementation of methods has generally been positive, in anticipation of improvements to their relationship with the Council over the next 3 years.

Review of the Soil and Minerals Chapter has identified that lack of information about the soil resource will be a problem in the future when we try to evaluate the effectiveness of our policies and methods. The need for monitoring and baseline information is a matter that should be addressed in the Councils' Regional Monitoring Strategy, which is currently being prepared, rather than by changing the RPS.

The provisions of the Soil and Minerals Chapter reflect the Council's approach to soil conservation at the time the RPS was prepared. Five years later, we are developing new tools for sustainable land management that are worthwhile promoting. These are being progressed through development of a Sustainable Land Management Action Plan. It is unnecessary to change the RPS now but in the future, review of the RPS will need to consider this initiative.

Probably more than any other chapter of the RPS, if we were writing the Ecosystem Chapter today, we would write it differently. We know a lot more about ecosystems and how we can be involved in their management now than we did when the RPS was prepared. Now we would focus less on knowing more and more on doing more. However, it is not necessary to change the chapter at this time. An Ecosystems Strategy for the Council is in preparation and it will accommodate any changes to our approach. The sharpness of focus that the Council needs will be provided by the Strategy. It will be sensible to leave the ecosystems chapter untouched for up to another five years to see how the more active approach of the Council is working, and whether there are measurable changes becoming apparent in the state of our special resources

The Energy Chapter and the Built Environment and Transport Chapter have sound policies and methods but rely heavily on implementation of the methods.

Implementation of some methods is demanding. The scope of some of them is large, often relies on the support of other agencies, and would require significant resources to implement. More effective implementation of some methods in these chapters would require considerable input and proactive leadership from the Council and a high degree of support and participation by other agencies. Rather than consider changes now, a public review of these chapters at the end the ten year period should more properly determine the Council's future role for Energy and for the Built Environment and Transportation.

Recommendation

That the Council changes the landscape provisions of the Landscape and Heritage Chapter of the RPS so that the significant landscape issues in the Region are able to be addressed effectively.