

5.7 Landscape and heritage

5.7.1 Introduction

The landscapes and heritage of the Wellington region define a special place. Long stretches of rocky coastline, rugged mountain ranges, and floodplains with their river systems dominate the landscape we live in. There is evidence everywhere of our history and heritage – showing how the region has evolved under human occupation. Wellington’s landscapes and heritage make it unique and help give us our particular “sense of place”.



Landscapes do change through time, and when heritage gets added, it is often a mix of accident and design. Landscape and heritage have been described as the “children of change”. Like children, we can’t keep them just as they are, forever. But like good parents or guardians, we want to do our best to help them through the inevitable changes. In providing guidance, however, we need to remember why these “children” are special and how we might help them keep their individuality.

The *Regional Policy Statement for the Wellington Region 1995* has objectives and policies that focus on identifying and managing “regionally outstanding landscapes” and “regionally significant cultural heritage resources”. The way to identify the regionally outstanding landscapes was to be through the preparation of a Regional Landscape Plan. The significant cultural heritage resources are those items listed on the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (HPT) Register as Category 1 (there were 114 items listed for the Wellington region in 1995).

5.7.2 How successful has the Regional Policy Statement been?

5.7.2.1 Landscape

Greater Wellington prepared a Regional Landscape Plan, invited public submissions, held hearings and

made a decision to withdraw the Plan. Instead, non-statutory landscape guidelines were proposed as a way to manage landscape. This proposal was also withdrawn as councillors felt that guidelines were unnecessary and that the review of the Regional Policy Statement would provide an appropriate opportunity for revisiting the question of landscape management.

In the absence of “regionally outstanding landscapes” and guidelines, the Regional Policy Statement provisions have had no means of application. Currently, a policy vacuum exists and there is no strategic or consistent guidance for managing landscape change. Major development proposals with significant landscape impacts have had to be assessed on a case-by-case basis using, where available, various provisions in district plans. To date, the Regional Policy Statement has been unsuccessful in identifying, and then managing, important landscapes.

Feedback from Greater Wellington’s state of the environment report, *Measuring up 2005*, and the early work on reviewing the Regional Policy Statement reveals a widely held view that managing landscape change is important and that management is more than protecting the best places (whatever or wherever they are). The message being given is almost the opposite of “protecting the best and forgetting the rest”. It is that we need to think more

broadly – to recognise that local landscapes (and heritage) contribute strongly to local identity and that landscape management is about managing change in landscapes – not preventing change.

5.7.2.2 Heritage

The Regional Policy Statement confines its interest to Category 1 items on the Historic Places Trust Register. It also recognises that change in use for many of these buildings and items is economically inevitable if the structures are to survive. The aim has been to try to make sure that the special features or qualities of these buildings and places are recognised and appropriately protected or managed during these changes.

While there has been some success in the recognition of Category 1 items in district plans, recognition has not always guaranteed protection or effective management of their special values. Several items have been demolished and a number of others have been modified in ways that are not sympathetic to the original form of the historic buildings or structures.

For heritage, as with landscape, the message from *Measuring up 2005* (and from changes to the definition of historic heritage in the *Resource Management Act 1991* (RMA)) is that a broader interpretation needs to be taken to what constitutes heritage and how it might be managed.

In short, the clear message is that historic heritage includes more than just the 120 Category 1 items currently listed on the HPT Register and recognised in the Regional Policy Statement. Arguably, it applies to over 500 Category 2 HPT items, a very large number of Maori and European archaeological sites, and to a variety of buildings and places that reflect diverse themes and successive periods of human occupation of the region.

This broader range is not coherently recognised or well managed in the region. The current Regional Policy Statement has taken a limited view of what constitutes heritage and has only been moderately successful in promoting suitable management of the items it determined to be of regional significance.

5.7.3 What's changed and what are the landscape and heritage issues now and for the future?

For **landscape**, no new or additional statutory mandate exists to provide for landscape management in the Regional Policy Statement. However, the degree of professional and public concern about, and support for, strategic and consistent landscape guidance tells us that the topic is a significant resource management issue for the region, and therefore a relevant matter for the Regional Policy Statement to address.

For **heritage**, a broader interpretation and upgrading of status is reflected through recent amendments to the RMA. A new definition of “historic heritage” has been provided and the protection of “historic heritage” has been elevated to section 6 – a matter of national importance. Authorities and agencies exercising powers and functions under the RMA “shall recognise and provide for” section 6 matters in, for example, their policy documents (such as Regional Policy Statements and regional or district plans).

Measuring up 2005 and the early work on reviewing the Regional Policy Statement has identified the following concerns for landscape and heritage:

- There continues to be concern about the impacts of development and land use changes on important natural features around the region, as well as on “landscape” generally.
- Current pressures on landscape and natural features include large-scale earthworks (modern earth-moving equipment can transform landform, not just move soil), development in the coastal environment (e.g. in parts of the Wairarapa and along the Porirua and Kapiti coastlines), and infrastructure associated with wind energy generation (on ridgelines and hill tops).
- Vegetation removal has visual and ecological impacts on natural character, both on the coast and inland.

- Private landowners' rights to use and manage their land can conflict with community expectations for land (in public and private ownership) to provide visual enjoyment for current inhabitants and, longer term, for future generations.
- The HPT list of registered places has increased but is concentrated in certain areas (Wellington and Porirua). There is not a good geographic spread through the region, nor is there consistent representation through periods of human occupation or items that reflect the various themes of that occupation (e.g. whaling, early Maori and pakeha settlement, archaeological sites).
- HPT listing and scheduling in district plans does not mean that items are "safe". Most plans have rules for heritage items, but their effectiveness varies and important historic heritage continues to be lost.

5.7.4 Comments and questions for you to consider

A key problem around protection and consequent management of landscape and historic heritage is uncertainty about their true value to the regional community.

For landscape, there is a lack of guidance on how we can manage the inevitable changes that affect the appearance of the region. Is guidance necessary? Is it necessary for the whole region or just at a local scale? Do we want to meld, rather than just weld, change on to what is already here? Would it be helpful, as a first step, if Greater Wellington and the city and district councils were to describe and classify the sorts of landscapes we have? A second step might involve getting widely-based community agreement on how best to manage change in these various types of landscape.

Heritage helps define who we are and where we have come from. Managing heritage reflects how much we, as a community, value and identify with our history.

Like landscape, heritage items face the pressures of change and development. Our challenge is to decide what should be kept and how it can be more effectively cared for. In the absence of a clear statutory mandate for historic heritage management, is it helpful to have some overall policy direction? Does there need to be one leader, a champion, for historic heritage? Would shared responsibility between interested groups and agencies lead to prevarication and inaction or constructive progress?

Question 1:

Do you think we have identified the right sorts of landscape and heritage issues? Are there other problems you would like to highlight?

Question 2:

Do you feel that the phrase “landscape management” means managing change? Should we be managing change at all scales; from coastlines and mountains to the areas and places local communities feel are special for their individual identity?

Question 3:

Would it be helpful to know what the ingredients or characteristics of our landscapes are? Would landscape description and classification be useful to help get a clearer picture of the range and rarity of our landscapes so we can manage change in them appropriately?

Question 4:

Historic heritage may be a matter “to recognise and provide for”, but what does this mean for local government? Should Greater Wellington and city and district councils simply let the Historic Places Trust and central government agencies “recognise” heritage in their registers and “provide” funding and advice? Is there a role for local government too?

Question 5:

Do you think that the Regional Policy Statement is the appropriate document to provide policy guidance on landscape and heritage management for the region? Is guidance needed at all? Should each city and district council decide for its own area, how it will manage heritage and landscape issues? Do you feel there are landscapes that are regionally significant and that there should be a way to manage them? Should we just let change happen in its own way and live with the consequences?