

Section 6 – Biodiversity

6.1 Background

Biodiversity is the number and variety of living organisms, including of animals and plants found within a region and the variability within and between species, and within and between ecosystems. A key part of this variety is indigenous vegetation and species that originate in this country, and are living or naturally occurring in the District. The Council has a number of obligations for indigenous biodiversity. Under the [Resource Management Act](#) (RMA) sustainable management involves safeguarding the life-supporting capacity of ecosystems. The protection of areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna is a matter of national importance. The RMA also requires the Council to have particular regard to the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values, the intrinsic value of ecosystems and to control the effects of the use of land for the maintenance of indigenous biodiversity. The [Waikato Regional Policy Statement](#) (RPS) also requires the Council to maintain the full range of ecosystem types, their extent and the indigenous biodiversity that those ecosystems can support.

The Coromandel Peninsula stands out from most other ecological regions in the Waikato for having a diverse and unique array of indigenous plant and animal species. The persistence of this richness in the Coromandel can be attributed to the large and interconnected remnant areas of indigenous forests and wetlands, combined with a relatively late invasion of animal pests to the area. Although large portions of the once extensively forested peninsula have been cleared or strongly modified by human activity in the past, more than half the District is still covered in indigenous forest and scrubland and a third of the District's land area is public conservation land. There are 107 known nationally At Risk or Threatened species (51 flora species and 56 fauna species) within the District, some of which are not found elsewhere. Species are considered At Risk or Threatened either due to predatory/competitor pressure or lack of habitat or both. While there is good representation of lowland forest on the steep ranges, other ecosystems, such as duneland, wetlands and coastal forest, have been reduced in area and/or ecological viability. As habitat area is progressively reduced in extent and quality, the rate of species loss often increases. This loss is exacerbated by the effects of animal and plant pests. Providing land use incentives through subdivision rules is an effective way for the Plan to help maintain and enhance the biodiversity values of these underrepresented natural areas.

The Waikato Regional Council Technical Report 2010/36 (Waikato Report 2010/36) identifies potential 'Significant Natural Areas' (SNAs) across the District. SNAs contain indigenous habitats of flora and fauna with potential biodiversity values worthy of protection. The SNAs were identified using the 11 criteria for determining significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna in the RPS, and then further assessed to determine the level of significance (local, regional, national or international). These SNAs are remnant areas which often provide the last refuge for many At Risk and Threatened species. The Council used the SNA report and threatened environment data as the basis for identifying locations to be targeted for priority biodiversity management in the District. However, because the Waikato Report 2010/36 is based on a desk-top assessment and has not been ground-truthed its maps have not been adopted into the plan as identified SNAs.

Priority locations for biodiversity management in the Rural Zone have been mapped in Section 41 Subdivision. Incentives for subdivision are offered where a priority area is set aside for restoration or enhancement and protection. Subdivision incentives are also provided for in the Rural Lifestyle Zone where biodiversity values are restored or enhanced.

Areas of indigenous vegetation and habitats of indigenous fauna are managed by the rules in Section 30 Biodiversity. These rules address the main activities that affect areas of indigenous vegetation and habitats of indigenous fauna in the District. Proposed subdivision, use or development that requires resource consent for vegetation clearance will be required to undertake an ecological assessment using the criteria in the Waikato Regional Policy Statement for determining the significance of indigenous biodiversity as part of the consenting process. As SNAs are confirmed, the Council will monitor the most appropriate technique(s) to record their locations and, for biodiversity management, this may result in future plan changes. To maintain or enhance indigenous biodiversity, a planned approach to ecosystem restoration and protection is needed. Outside of the Plan, the Council's Biodiversity Strategy includes non-regulatory methods to maintain and enhance biodiversity. Land Information Memoranda will also notify people where a property is identified by the Waikato report 2010/36 as having a potential significant natural area.

The funding of the District's biodiversity is going to be a major challenge for the District going forward. There is little point in 'locking new areas up for protection' if there are not long term funding streams for basic maintenance especially: boundary fencing; weed and pest control for the areas that have already been reserved. The Council will work collaboratively with landowners, the appropriate government agencies, adjacent district council and the regional council on this critical issue

Kauri dieback disease caused by *Phytophthora agathidicida* is a lethal threat of the survival of kauri. The disease is present in the Thames-Coromandel District. It is spread through the movement of soil contaminated with *Phytophthora agathidicida* and is managed through standards and assessment matters in the earthworks rules of the Conservation Zone, Rural Zone and Rural Lifestyle Zone to limit the spread of the pathogen.

6.2 Issues

1. Subdivision, use and development can contribute to the continued loss and reduction of the District's indigenous biodiversity resulting in:
 - a) Loss of resilience, and increased vulnerability of ecosystems and species;
 - b) A decline in extent, health and quality of ecosystems and species, including by kauri dieback disease;
 - c) Cumulative loss or degradation of ecosystem services or species;
 - d) Loss of amenity and cultural values;
 - e) Loss of economic opportunities;
 - f) Loss of choices for future generations.
2. The health and ecological functioning of indigenous ecosystems and habitats is reliant upon management measures and the identification of opportunities for restoration, enhancement and protection including the creation of ecological buffers, connections and corridors.

3. The loss of habitat that supports or provides a key life-cycle function for indigenous species listed as 'Threatened' or 'At Risk' in the New Zealand Threat Classification System Lists or taxa listed as threatened by the International Union of Natural and Natural Resources.

6.3 Objectives and Policies

Objective 1

The full range of the District's indigenous ecosystems and biodiversity is maintained in a healthy and functional state, and restored or enhanced where appropriate.

Policy 1a

Subdivision, use and development shall protect areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna in preference to remediation or mitigation by:

- a) Avoiding the loss or degradation of areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna in preference to remediation or mitigation;
- b) Avoiding the loss of habitat that supports or provides a key life function for Threatened or At Risk indigenous species.
- c) Preventing the spread of kauri dieback disease; and
- d) Requiring that any unavoidable adverse effects on areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna are remedied or mitigated.

More than minor residual adverse effects on significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna, outside the Coastal Environment, that cannot be avoided, remedied or mitigated in accordance with a) - d) above shall be offset, or if biodiversity offsetting cannot be reasonably achieved, shall be addressed through environmental compensation.

Policy 1b

To achieve Policy 1a, where indigenous vegetation clearance requires resource consent, the significance of the vegetation to be cleared shall be assessed in the context of the larger area of vegetation on the site as part of a resource consent application using the criteria in APP5 of the [Waikato Regional Council Policy Statement 2016](#).

Policy 1c

Subdivision, use and development that has adverse effects on non-significant indigenous vegetation and non-significant habitats of indigenous fauna should:

- a) Retain the viability, integrity and sustainability of the area by for example, the use of buffers to protect and support the indigenous biodiversity values present; and
- b) Consider and address any threat of increased risk from plant and animal pests; and
- c) Prevent the spread of kauri dieback disease; and
- d) Maintain, enhance or restore ecological corridors and connections linking indigenous ecosystems, habitat fragments and wetlands and dune systems; and
- e) Consider on-going management of priority locations mapped in Section 41 Subdivision, including legal protection, restoration, enhancement, pest control and stock exclusion; and
- f) Provide for the temporary loss of indigenous vegetation associated with plantation forestry cycles.

Significant residual adverse effects on non-significant vegetation and non-significant habitats of indigenous fauna, outside the Coastal Environment, that cannot be avoided, remedied or mitigated should be offset, or if biodiversity offsetting cannot be achieved, shall be addressed through environmental compensation.

Policy 1d

Subdivision resulting in restoration or enhancement of indigenous biodiversity including under-represented ecosystems shall be considered in the Rural Area where indigenous biodiversity is increased, and legally protected in perpetuity, by one or more of the following:

- a) Restoring or enhancing priority locations mapped in Section 41 Subdivision, identified for protection;
- b) Contributing to the establishment of mountain to sea corridors of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems;
- c) Reconnecting fragmented ecosystems (on land and via waterways);
- d) Establishing buffers to an underrepresented or threatened indigenous ecosystem;
- e) Creating an ecological stepping stone or corridor to link indigenous vegetation;
- f) Maintaining or enhancing habitat of nationally Threatened or At Risk indigenous species;
- g) Restoring or enhancing indigenous habitats adjoining wetlands, rivers, springs, coastal cliffs, dunes, estuaries and fragmented forests;
- h) Establishing self-sustaining pest free areas;
- i) Restoring or enhancing rare ecosystems.

Policy 1e

The maintenance, operation and minor upgrading of lawfully established infrastructure and network utilities and the reasonable use and enjoyment of land with minor adverse effects on biodiversity shall be provided for. This may include:

- a) The collection of material for traditional Maori cultural practices; and
- b) Actions necessary to avoid loss of life, injury or serious damage to property.

6.4 Non Regulatory Methods

Method 1

1. The Council will support provision of biodiversity advice and information to landowners.

Method 2

1. The Council will review its Biodiversity Strategy.

Method 3

1. The Council will include reference to the Waikato Regional Council SNA Technical Report 2010/36 in Land Information Memoranda for properties that have been identified as containing potential Significant Natural Areas.

Method 4

1. Where an ecological assessment of vegetation significance is required for any proposal to remove indigenous vegetation under Section 30 Biodiversity the Council will appoint an ecologist and pay for the full cost of the assessment. The circumstances in which the Council will not pay for an ecological assessment to determine significance are:
 - a) where an application relates to a subdivision under Section 41 of the District Plan; or
 - b) where an area is protected by a conservation covenant registered or encumbered with the Council, or Queen Elizabeth II National Trust, or Ngā Whenua Rahui.

Method 5

1. Assessments to identify areas of significant indigenous vegetation will be undertaken using the criteria in the Waikato Regional Policy Statement. Where an assessment is required the Council will consult with the landowner/applicant to agree on the suitability of an ecologist to prepare the assessment. A suitably qualified person is one who:
 - a) holds a recognised professional qualification(s) and has relevant experience in terrestrial ecology and biodiversity to be able to undertake an assessment using the criteria for determining significance of indigenous biodiversity contained in the Waikato Regional Policy Statement; or
 - b) has relevant experience in relation to the matters set out in a) about and is approved by the Council prior to undertaking the assessment.

Method 6

1. The Council may initiate future plan change/s to include areas confirmed as significant indigenous vegetation or areas of significant habitat of indigenous fauna through resource consent or other processes.