

RPS – NATC – Natural character

Scope and background

Scope

This chapter addresses the preservation of the natural character of the coastal *environment*, *wetlands**, *rivers**, *lakes** and their margins and the protection of them from inappropriate use and development.

Background

Preservation of the natural character of the coastal *environment*, *wetlands**, *rivers**, *lakes** and their margins is also a matter of national importance. Natural character is generally accepted as being an expression of:

- natural landform,
- natural waterbodies (*lakes* and *rivers*) and the sea,
- vegetation cover (type and pattern),
- natural processes associated with the weather and the ecology,
- wildness, exposure, and the natural sculpturing of landforms and vegetation, and
- the wider landscape context and the *site's** relationship to this.

Natural character is a sliding scale and varies from a low degree of natural character, such as urban *environments**, to a high degree of natural character (for example, Tongariro National Park).

The approach of the One Plan is to at least maintain, and enhance where appropriate, the current degree of natural character of the coastal *environment*, *wetlands**, *rivers**, *lakes** and their margins by:

- continuing to provide a regional policy on natural character to guide decision-making,
- protecting and managing indigenous biological diversity, important *wetlands**, *rivers** and *lakes** as described elsewhere in this Plan, and
- restoring and rehabilitating natural character where appropriate.

The natural character of *rivers**, *lakes** and their margins can be adversely affected by activities, in particular *structures** and flood mitigation measures such as stopbanks. It is important that preservation of the natural character of *rivers**, *lakes** and their margins, where this is reasonable, is considered when making decisions on relevant activities. The natural character of wetlands can best be provided for by proactively managing the top 100 *wetlands** in the Region (as provided for in the sections of this chapter dealing with indigenous biological diversity).

RPS-CE addresses the management of activities in the coastal marine area (CMA), including policy guidance on the management of the elements of landscapes and seascapes that contribute to the natural character of the CMA.

RPS-NATC deals with the natural character of the non-CMA portion of the coastal *environment* landward of mean high water springs and *wetlands**, *rivers**, *lakes** and their margins.

The coastal *environment* has seen some change in the last 10 years. There has been an increase in residential *subdivision** on both the western and eastern coastlines. Within a 1 km inland coastal strip, however, this development accounts for only 4% of the area. Although residential development is expected to continue, it is unlikely to affect the natural character of the coast at a regional scale for some time beyond the life of this Plan. Nevertheless, it is important and appropriate for local decision-

making on *land** use, particularly residential *subdivision**, to continue to take into account the natural character of a particular area.

Issues

Planning standards advice note: RPS-NATC-I1 and RPS-NFL-I1 are duplicates of One Plan – 2014 Issue 6-2. They will be replaced with separate NATC and NFL issues to give effect to the National Planning Standards using a Schedule 1 process as soon as practicable.

NATC-I1: Outstanding features, landscapes and natural character

1. The Region's outstanding natural features and landscapes can be adversely affected by *land** use activities and development. Adverse *effects** of development on outstanding natural features and landscapes include the potential for significant adverse cumulative *effects**. Developments with the potential for greatest impact include wind farms, residential *subdivision** and other major *structures**.
2. The natural character of the coastal *environment**, *wetlands**, *rivers**, *lakes** and their margins can be adversely affected by *land* use activities and development, particularly new *river** works, drainage and *subdivision*.

Objectives

Planning standards advice note: RPS-NATC-O1 and RPS-NFL-O1 are duplicates of One Plan – 2014 Objective 6-2. They will be replaced with separate NATC and NFL objectives to give effect to the National Planning Standards using a Schedule 1 process as soon as practicable.

NATC-O1: Outstanding natural features and landscapes, and natural character

1. The characteristics and values of:
 - a. the Region's outstanding natural features and landscapes, including those identified in RPS-SCHED7, and
 - b. the natural character of the coastal *environment**, *wetlands**, *rivers** and *lakes** and their margins
 are protected from inappropriate *subdivision**, use and development.
2. Adverse *effects**, including cumulative adverse *effects**, on the natural character of the coastal *environment**, *wetlands**, *rivers** and *lakes** and their margins, are:
 - a. avoided in areas with outstanding natural character, and
 - b. avoided where they would significantly diminish the attributes and qualities of areas that have high natural character, and
 - c. avoided, remedied or mitigated in other areas.
3. Promote the rehabilitation or restoration of the natural character of the coastal *environment**, *wetlands**, *rivers** and *lakes** and their margins.

NATC-O1: Ngā tohu kōhure me ngā mata whenua motuhake me te āhuatanga māori

1. Ko ngā āhuatanga me ngā ūara o
 - a. ngā tohu kōhure me ngā mata whenua motuhake o te Rohe ehara tonu ko ērā ka tautuhia i roto i Pukapuka Āpiti 7, me

- b. *te āhuatanga māori o te taiao takutai moana, ngā papa waiwai, ngā awa, me ngā roto me ngā tapa o ērā*

ka whakamarumarutia i te wehewehe whenua, te whakamahi me te whakaahu whenua kāore i te tika.

2. *Ko ngā pānga kino, ehara tonu ko ngā pānga kino katoa, ki te āhua māori o te taiao takutai moana, ngā papa waiwai, ngā awa, ngā roto hoki, me ngā tapa o ērā:*
 - a. *ka parea i roto i ngā wāhi tino rawe te āhua māori,*
 - b. *ka parea i ngā wāhi ka kaha te whakamemeha i ngā āhuatanga me ngā kounga o ngā wāhi nui te āhua māori, ā,*
 - c. *ka parea, ka whakatikaina, ka whakaitingia rānei i wāhi kē atu.*
3. *Ka whakatairanga i te whakaora ake, te whakahou ake rānei i te āhua māori o te taiao takutai moana, ngā papa waiwai, ngā awa, ngā roto me ngā tapa o ērā.*

Policies

NATC-P1: Natural character

1. The natural character of the coastal *environment*, *wetlands**, *rivers** and *lakes** and their margins must be preserved and these areas must be protected from inappropriate *subdivision**, use and development.
2. The natural character of these areas must be restored and rehabilitated where this is appropriate and practicable.
3. Natural character of these areas may include such attributes and characteristics as:
 - a. Natural elements, processes and patterns,
 - b. Biophysical, ecological, geological, geomorphological and morphological aspects,
 - c. Natural landforms such as headlands, peninsulas, cliffs, dunes, *wetlands**, reefs, *freshwater** springs and surf breaks,
 - d. The natural movement of *water** and sediment including hydrological and fluvial processes,
 - e. The natural darkness of the night sky,
 - f. Places or areas that are wild and scenic,
 - g. A range of natural character from pristine to modified, and
 - h. Experiential attributes, including the sounds and smell of the sea; and their content or setting.

NATC-P2: Managing natural character

In relation to the natural character of:

1. the component of the coastal *environment** which is not *coastal marine area^* (CMA), and
2. *wetlands**, *rivers** and *lakes** and their margins *subdivision**, use or development must generally (but without limitation) be considered appropriate if it:
3. is compatible with the existing level of modification to the *environment**,
4. has a functional necessity to be located in or near the component of the coastal *environment** which is not *coastal marine area^* (CMA), *wetland**, *river** or *lake** and no reasonably practicable alternative locations exist,
5. is of an appropriate form, scale and design to be compatible with the existing landforms, geological features and vegetation,

6. will not, by itself or in combination with *effects** of other activities, significantly disrupt natural processes or existing ecosystems, and
7. will provide for the restoration and rehabilitation of natural character where that is appropriate and practicable.

NATC-P3: Public access to and along *rivers** and *lakes** and their margins

1. Activities within or near *rivers** and *lakes** must be established and operated in a manner which readily provides for public access. Public access may be restricted only where necessary for safety, cultural or conservation purposes, or to ensure a level of security appropriate for activities authorised by a *resource consent*[^].
2. Public access for recreational purposes must recognise the need to protect *rare habitats**, *threatened habitats** and *at-risk habitats**.
3. Public access must recognise existing private *property** rights.

Methods

NATC-M1 District Planning – Natural Features and Landscapes	
Description	The Regional Council will formally seek changes to district plans if necessary to ensure provisions are in place to provide an appropriate level of protection to natural features and landscapes.
Who	Regional Council and Territorial Authorities.
Links to Policy	This method implements RPS-NATC-P1 and RPS-NATC-P2.
Targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District plan changes sought if necessary after this Plan becomes operative.

Principal reasons

NATC-PR1

The preservation of the natural character of the coastal *environment*, *wetlands**, *rivers** and *lakes** and their margins is a matter of national importance. The natural character of the CMA is dealt with in RPS-CE. The approach of the One Plan is to maintain the current degree of natural character of the coastal *environment*, *wetlands**, *rivers** and *lakes** and their margins and to restore and rehabilitate natural character where appropriate. The objectives, policies and methods adopted in this document aim to achieve this by:

1. providing policy guidance on matters to be taken into account when exercising functions and powers under the RMA and when making decisions on applications which may affect natural character,
2. the restoration and rehabilitation of natural character where appropriate, and
3. actively protecting and managing indigenous biodiversity, *wetlands**, and *rivers** and *lakes** as described in other parts of this document.