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Committee Environment
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Findings from the Heritage and Landscape work for the State of the Environment Report

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of the main points emerging from technical reports on heritage and landscape, written as part of the development of the State of the Environment Report.

2. Background

Over the last year, officers have been working on technical reports for the State of the Environment Report (SER) which will be published by the end of 2005.

Technical reports are being written for each of the chapters in the Regional Policy Statement (RPS). In some cases, where the resource being considered has many different aspects and an enormous amount of relevant data, such as water, a number of technical reports are needed, and their findings will be brought together and analysed in a background report.

The Landscape and Heritage chapter of the RPS has been the subject of two reports, one for the landscape objectives, policies and methods, and the other an equivalent analysis of the heritage provisions. For the heritage section, a significant body of research and data collection has been prepared jointly by the Historic Places Trust and Greater Wellington. Much of the credit for this work should go to Robert McClean at the Historic Places Trust, and staff would like to acknowledge his efforts and assistance with this project.

Both landscape and heritage have been marginal and, at times, contentious areas of resource management for Greater Wellington. Councillors may recall, for example, the Regional Landscape Plan which was proposed, and then withdrawn, in the late 1990s.

The research and analysis carried out for the SER on landscape and heritage has been a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. For the Region's heritage resources, there is more definite, harder information about their state, the pressures on them, and the responses that the territorial authorities and other agencies have made to sustain and manage heritage. For landscape, the emphasis in the work undertaken has been on getting ideas and opinions about the effectiveness of landscape management provisions in the RPS and district plans.

The technical reports on both landscape and heritage (and all the other technical and background reports) are expected to be available on the website within the next few months. In addition, officers will be regularly reporting some of the main points that have emerged from the background reports to the Committee.

3. Comment

Landscape

The RPS provided objectives and policies for "regionally outstanding landscapes", to be identified through the Regional Landscape Plan. With the preparation of the Plan, six such landscapes were identified, but the Plan's withdrawal has left a policy vacuum for landscape management within the Region. When the Plan was withdrawn, the Council undertook to prepare Regional Landscape Guidelines, but this exercise was also curtailed, and the Council resolved to "investigate other ways of being involved in landscape issues". There has been no "investigation" since that decision in March 2000 until the current SER work.

While no "regionally outstanding landscapes" have been defined, the RPS objectives and policies also referred to "nationally and regionally outstanding geological features, landforms, soil sites and other natural features of the Region". Sites within the Region that qualified are subject to the RPS provisions.

Notwithstanding the absence of regional guidance, several territorial authorities do have some form of landscape identification and management in their district plans, albeit patchy and inconsistent across the Region.

The main method for getting an assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of landscape provisions (in the RPS and district plans) was to ask those people involved in landscape management what their experience had been over the last ten years. Two workshops were convened, one for landscape consultants and practitioners acting for both development interests and local authorities. The other involved local authority staff from district plan and resource consent teams. Before each workshop, background material, questions and a "think piece" were circulated. Both workshops were well attended and discussion was wide ranging with few punches pulled.

In both workshops, and in subsequent follow-up work, there was remarkable consistency between the points being made. A copy of the main points from each workshop, and the broad conclusions from the Landscape Technical Report are attached as Appendix One.

In summary, there was a strong message that landscape management was needed for all parts of the Region, not just “regionally outstanding landscapes.” For differing reasons, most of the territorial authorities are considering how they might better incorporate landscape considerations into their district plans. Participants sought a more consistent policy context for making decisions about landscape management and an approach that was coherent across local authority boundaries. Local authorities wanted more guidance and Greater Wellington was seen to be well placed to provide leadership and to facilitate a collaborative process of landscape character description and assessment.

Given the history of the Regional Landscape Plan, this set of messages was something of a surprise. In fact, the interest in making progress was sufficiently strong for officers to explore a little further into what might be technically involved, and how a collaborative process might be established.

On a no-commitment basis, a presentation from Lars Brabyn was arranged. Lars has developed a GIS-based landscape classification system for New Zealand. The classification offers a simple technical way of describing the characteristics of different areas without placing any value judgement on them such that one might be described as “better” than another.

More than 30 people attended the presentation, including many of the participants from the two workshops as well as representatives from the Ministry for the Environment, the Department of Conservation and the Queen Elizabeth II Trust.

At this stage, Greater Wellington officers are exploring, very cautiously and in close liaison with the territorial authorities, if, and how, further progress might be made. It is not clear at this time how the SER findings will find expression in the review of the RPS, but it is timely to highlight this unexpected interest in a desire for co-ordination and direction from Greater Wellington.

Heritage

The RPS was primarily interested in “regionally significant cultural heritage resources”, which, in simple terms, meant heritage items listed by the Historic Places Trust as Category I items. There is a more general interest in heritage management through the Built Environment and Transportation chapter, where heritage is seen as a component of environmental quality and character. In the Coastal Environment chapter, a small number of heritage items are specifically identified. Several more enjoy recognition and a degree of protection through the Regional Coastal Plan.

The Environment Committee has received numerous reports on heritage management over the last 10 years, principally in relation to implementation of the methods in the RPS and identified actions for Greater Wellington. There was also a set of reports associated with the review (in the late 1990s) of responsibilities for heritage management, which was followed by minor changes to the Resource Management Act (elevating the protection of historic heritage from inappropriate subdivision, use and development to section 6 of the Act).

The conclusions from the Historic Places Trust report, and the technical paper, are attached as Appendix Two.

In summary, the main points are:

- There is a growing awareness of New Zealand heritage (Maori and non-Maori) and the need to recognise and sustain it as a component of sustainable development and quality of life.
- More places are being formally identified and included within local authority and Historic Places Trust heritage schedules and lists.
- Much of the higher profile heritage is retaining its integrity and is in good condition (with the exception of commercial buildings), but there are several places at risk within the Region.

In developing the information for the SER, a set of heritage indicators has been developed and it would be appropriate to continue to use these for future comparative purposes. There are also several recommendations in the Historic Places Trust report about how “heritage” should be interpreted as we move towards the review of the RPS.

4. Communication

A communications plan is being developed for the State of the Environment Report, which will be published in December of this year.

5. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. *receive the report, and*
2. *note the contents.*

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Attachment 1: Summary of the Landscape Workshops and Conclusions from the Landscape Technical Report

Attachment 2: Conclusions from the Historic Places Trust Report and Heritage Technical Report