

5 OBJECTIVES/POLICIES: Coastal Environment

5. Coastal Environment

The Horowhenua coast is a relatively short (approximately 35km) stretch of the Lower North Island west coast dune system that extends from Paekakariki to Hawera (120km). The Horowhenua coastline extends from Waikawa Beach at the southern end of the District to just south of Himatangi Beach at the District's northern end.

The coastal landscape of Horowhenua is relatively homogenous, comprising sand beaches, a band of active foredune and more stable dunefields beyond, with damp inter-dunal hollows, sand plains and basins and dune lakes further inland. The coastline is punctuated by estuaries of several rivers and streams, the largest of which is the Manawatu River estuary covering approximately 200 hectares. This estuary is an important estuarine ecosystem particularly for migratory birds and is recognised as a RAMSAR World Heritage Site.

The coastal landscape contains a significant number of archaeological sites and sites of particular cultural value to Iwi resulting from the historical pattern of settlement of the area.

The local coastal areas are of great significance to Māori both spiritually and as a source of food, weaving and carving materials. Over time land use and development activities have reduced the coast's natural values and its ability to provide food and other resources. Coastal resources continue to provide sustenance and identity to coastal Māori. Māori regard the coastal environment as 'baskets of food' providing kaimoana. As a food source, the coast needs to be treated with respect. Sand dunes contain many important cultural sites including middens and urupa (burial grounds) reflecting historical activities. These sites are very significant spiritually to Māori. Inappropriate subdivision, use and development within the Coastal Environment have the potential to adversely affect the values which make the Coastal Environment of such great significance to Māori.

Protected customary rights provide recognition and protection of Māori customary activities, uses and practices that are exercised in the common marine and coastal area. A customary rights order is an order made by either the Māori Land Court or the High Court over an area of the public foreshore and seabed. A customary rights order will recognise a particular activity, use or practice that has been carried out on an area of the public foreshore and seabed since 1840. Each customary rights order will clearly define the type of activity, use or practice, and its scale, extent and frequency. Activities carried out in accordance with customary rights orders are known as recognised customary activities under the RMA. Section 6 of the RMA includes "the protection of recognised customary activities" as a matter of national importance that shall be recognised and provided for when exercising functions and powers under the RMA. Resource consent is not required for recognised customary activities. Of particular importance to Council is ensuring that appropriate access to the common marine and coastal area is available to those with customary rights so that these customary activities can be continued. It is noted that there are parts of the Horowhenua Coastline that are privately owned some of which is Māori customary land or Maori freehold land. The presence of recognised customary activities in coastal areas will directly influence how the Coastal Environment is managed and used.

The soils closest to the coastline are vulnerable to wind and water erosion particularly where they are exposed by the removal of surface vegetation. The natural coastal processes together with hazard events are a constant threat to this dynamic but fragile sand country environment. Due to the generally accreting nature of the Horowhenua coastline, properties along this stretch of coast are most likely to be at risk from inundation, however there are

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also potential threats of erosion, sea level rise and tsunamis. In addition, properties can experience minor to significant amounts of wind blown sand, which is a particular issue for properties immediately adjacent to the beach.

The RMA places special importance on the sustainable management of the coast. The preservation of the natural character of the Coastal Environment, and its protection from inappropriate subdivision, use and development, is a matter of national importance (Section 6(a)). Due to the differing levels of development and modification, the level of natural character within the Coastal Environment varies along the coastline.

The coastal settlements in the District, particularly Waitarere Beach, Foxton Beach, and Waikawa Beach, have all been subject to significant levels of subdivision and development over the last 10 years. As the level of development increases so do the demands and pressures placed on the Coastal Environment by residents and visitors.

A number of other resource management plans and policy statements address the sustainable management of the Horowhenua coast. These include:

The New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010 (NZCPS) This is a National Policy Statement and provides guidance on how the RMA's responsibilities should be met. It covers the whole of the Coastal Environment which includes the land influenced by the coast and coastal processes and the coastal marine area (CMA). The CMA includes the foreshore, seabed, and coastal water, and the air space above the water, between the outer limit of the territorial sea, and the line of mean high water springs (MHWS).

National Policy Statement Freshwater Management 2011 sets out objectives and policies that direct local government to manage water in an integrated and sustainable way, while providing for economic growth within set water quantity and quality limits. As the NZCPS also addresses issues with water quality in the coastal environment an integrated and consistent approach towards this is required.

The One Plan provides an overview of the resource management issues of the region including the coast and sets out policies and objectives that must be adhered to in District Plans.

Reserve Management Plans The Council has, under the Reserves Act 1977, prepared reserve management plans for Council owned reserves within the Coastal Environment. These plans are designed to provide for the use, enjoyment, maintenance, protection, preservation and appropriate development of the reserve land.

It is noted that in managing the coastal environment Council is also required to have regard to planning documents recognised by an Iwi authority where these planning documents have been lodged with Council and also other relevant strategies (e.g. Conservation Management Strategies).

The Extent of the Coastal Environment

The One Plan includes a policy requirement that local authorities identify the landward extent of the Coastal Environment.

Neither the One Plan nor the NZCPS specify how the inland extent of the Coastal Environment should be determined, although guidance is provided by the NZCPS on the characteristics of the Coastal Environment.

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Council, as part of undertaking a natural character assessment of the Coastal Environment, determined the extent of the Horowhenua Coastal Environment by identifying the extent of where the coastal processes, influences and qualities are significant, or the Coastal Significance Sector as shown in the coastal landscape cross section diagram below.

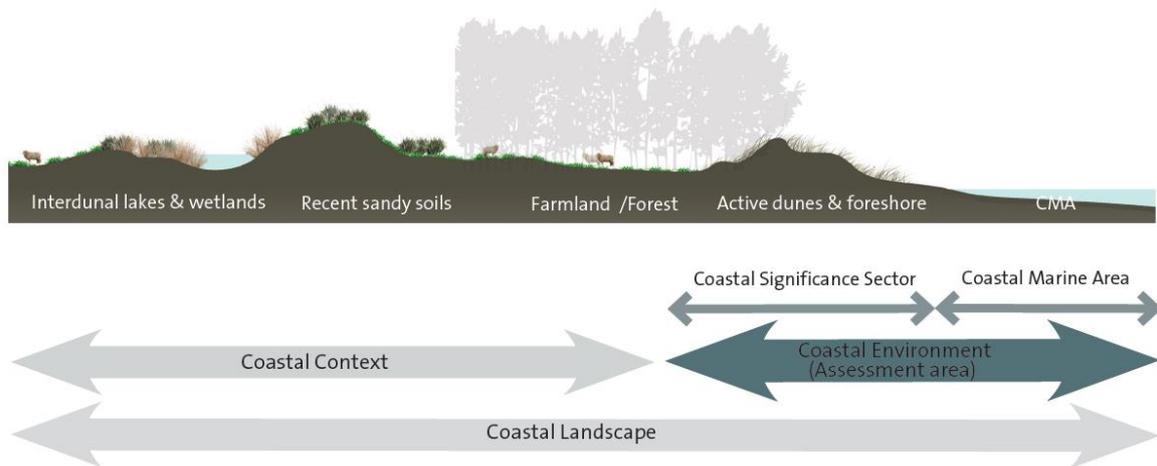


Figure 5-1: Coastal Landscape Cross Section

Issue 5.1 NATURAL CHARACTER OF THE COASTAL ENVIRONMENT

Preservation of the natural character of the Coastal Environment and protection of the Coastal Environment from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.

ISSUE DISCUSSION

The requirement to preserve the natural character of the Coastal Environment is recognised as a matter of national importance through Section 6(a) of the RMA. Further policy direction is provided on this matter through the NZCPS, which includes a requirement to map, or otherwise identify at least, areas of high natural character.

The Council has undertaken a specific assessment of the Horowhenua Coastal Environment for the purpose of fulfilling this statutory obligation. The assessment divides the Coastal Environment into ten sections and determines the existing level of natural character for each of those sections.

In this context, seven components of natural character were identified and assessed.

- Waterscape
- Landform
- Vegetation/Habitat
- Biodiversity
- Natural Systems and Processes
- Structures and settlements
- Perceptual and Experiential

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In terms of being able to preserve natural character, it is helpful for Council to understand the current level of natural character present.

The dynamic nature of the Coastal Environment combined with its sensitivity to modification can mean that development can significantly alter the level of natural character.

The NZCPS makes a distinction between “areas of the coastal environment with outstanding natural character” and those areas with a level of natural character below outstanding. The natural character assessment identified no “areas of outstanding natural character” within the Horowhenua Coastal Environment, which is reflective of the modifications such as farming or forestry that have occurred. The areas assessed ranged from low to very high, with the NZCPS requiring areas with high to very high natural character to be mapped. The ranking of these areas should be seen as an ‘overall average’ as there may be parts of the area that have higher or lower natural character. It is important to recognise and understand that ‘natural character’ is not the same as ‘natural features and landscapes’ or amenity values which are addressed in Chapter 3 of the District Plan.

It is also recognised that there are several areas within the Coastal Environment where notable subdivisions have occurred or been granted consent. While these areas have a level of natural character, through granting consent the Council has signalled that an additional level of development would be acceptable. A challenge for Council is to achieve a balance between the expectations of private property owners wanting to develop and use their properties and Council’s statutory obligations of protecting and preserving natural character in the coastal environment.

Objectives & Policies

Objective 5.1.1 Natural Character of the Coastal Environment

To preserve natural character of the Coastal Environment and avoid, remedy or mitigate the adverse environmental effects from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.

Policy 5.1.2

Identify in the District Plan the landward extent of the Coastal Environment based on the presence of coastal characteristics including the extent of where the coastal processes, influences and qualities are significant (i.e. the Coastal Significance Sector).

Policy 5.1.3

Identify in the District Plan areas with high and very high natural character based on the degree of natural character for following components:

- Waterscape
- Landform
- Vegetation/habitats
- Biodiversity
- Systems and processes
- Structures/settlement
- Perceptual and Experiential

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Policy 5.1.4

Identify in the District Plan Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes within the Coastal Environment and protect these from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.

Policy 5.1.5

Avoid significant adverse effects and avoid, remedy, mitigate other adverse effects of subdivision, use and development on the natural character of the Coastal Environment

Policy 5.1.6

In areas of high and very high natural character within the Coastal Environment, avoid subdivision and development where the level of natural character is reduced, except where there is a significant public benefit and the development has a functional need to be located within the Coastal Environment. Such development should avoid, as far as practicable, adverse effects on the natural character, and where avoidance is not achievable, adverse effects are to be remedied or mitigated.

Policy 5.1.7

Confine urban development in the Coastal Environment to existing settlements and identified growth areas to avoid urban sprawl along the coastal margin.

Policy 5.1.8

Ensure development within the Coastal Environment recognises and respects the sensitive and dynamic landscape, particularly the coastal foredunes in which natural coastal processes dominate.

Policy 5.1.9

Promote and encourage opportunities to restore or rehabilitate the natural character of the Coastal Environment, particularly at the time of subdivision and development.

Policy 5.1.10

Ensure that development within the Waikawa Beach – Strathnaver Coastal Natural Character Area Overlay avoid as far as practicable, adverse effects on the natural character and where avoidance is not achievable, adverse effects are to be remedied or mitigated.

Policy 5.1.11

Ensure that development within the Muhunua West Forest Park Overlay avoids as far as practicable, adverse effects on the natural character and where avoidance is not achievable, adverse effects are to be remedied or mitigated.

Explanation and Principal Reasons

The Coastal Environment, which immediately abuts the coastal margin, has been accorded special protection due firstly to its susceptibility to modification that has potential to reduce the level of natural character, and secondly the statutory requirements to preserve natural character.

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A natural character assessment of the coast was prepared during the development of this District Plan. The assessment establishes the existing level of natural character for different sections of the Coastal Environment. This assessment would be used to help understand the impact that a proposal may have on the natural character of a particular site or section of the coast.

A significant step in reducing the level of modification and the extent of development in the Coastal Environment has been the identification of growth areas for the existing settlements and the controls used for managing rural coastal subdivision. New settlements along the coast have the potential to open up currently remote areas of the coastline to pressures that would adversely affect the natural character and therefore are to be avoided.

It is recognised that there may be certain activities or forms of development that have a functional need to be located within the Coastal Environment. In these situations it will be important that the effects of such development on natural character are avoided as far as practicable in the first instance. If the adverse effects cannot be practically avoided, then they must be remedied or mitigated.

Rather than apply a directive approach to restoration and rehabilitation of natural character by identifying specific areas, Council has followed an approach that would promote opportunities that arise at the time of subdivision or development.

It is recognised that previous subdivision has created some notable areas within the Coastal Environment. Through the granting of subdivision consent for these developments, Council has signalled that some form of development is likely to be acceptable and potentially a reduced level of natural character. Where the subdivision consent conditions do not adequately control the effects of built development on the natural character of the Coastal Environment (i.e. through a site specific Council approved management plan) it will be necessary for these matters to be given due consideration through a land use consent process. In these situations it will be necessary to recognise the reduced levels of natural character that may exist as a result of subdivisions having been historically approved.

It is recognised that large areas of plantation forest dominate parts of the coastal environment. Although by virtue of usually consisting of exotic species these plantation forests do not directly contribute to the natural character of the coastal environment, the plantation forests have been a significant factor in stabilising active dunefields and creating areas of productive rural land east of the forest areas. The plantation forests have also had the indirect but positive impact, on the natural character of the foredunes through limiting the types of development and activities that occur immediately landward of the foredunes.

Methods for Issue 5.1 & Objective 5.1.1

District Plan

- The Planning Maps identify the extent of the Coastal Environment. This encompasses the sensitive areas where coastal processes, influences and qualities are significant. Rules will be used to apply strict control of activities and development in this area. Buildings, structures and the subdivision (excluding boundary adjustments) of land in the Coastal Environment require full discretionary resource consent.
- In assessing the merits of a proposal requiring resource consent in the Coastal Environment, the issues, objectives, policies and methods contained in this Chapter of the District Plan will apply.

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- The Planning Maps identify Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes, which, due to their contribution to the character and quality of the Coastal Environment and the District as a whole, require protection through rules in the District Plan.

Other Statutory Plans

- Horizons Regional Council administers the One Plan which includes provisions relating to the coastal foredunes and Coastal Marine Area.
- The One Plan together with the District Plan provisions provide for the management of the Coastal Environment.

Annual Plan

- The acquisition of reserves (e.g. esplanade reserves, local purpose reserves etc) and associated reserve management plans, will continue to be used to protect and enhance the Coastal Environment.

Other Statutory Mechanisms

- The Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act, the Reserves Act and the Conservation Act are some of the other relevant mechanisms for managing and achieving protection of specific features, areas and landscapes.

Education and Information

- Council will work with the Horizons Regional Council and the Department of Conservation, Iwi, environmental and community groups, and landowners, where appropriate, to encourage sustainable land use practices in the Coastal Environment, and the district as a whole.
- Council will use design guides where available to assist persons involved in subdivision and land use development in the Coastal Environment. These guidelines will provide advice on how to minimise the environmental effects of development.

Rules are an effective method of ensuring that the scale and character of development is designed in a manner which has regard to the objectives and policies of the District Plan. It is also recognised that there are a range of other statutory and non-statutory methods which can be used to encourage the sustainable management of the coast.

Issue 5.2 PUBLIC ACCESS TO AND ALONG THE COAST

Provision of appropriate public access to and along the coast to maintain and enhance recreational opportunities without adversely affecting the recognised values of the Coastal Environment.

ISSUE DISCUSSION

The coast is an important recreation resource for the District's residents and visitors. The beaches in the District offer a variety of public access opportunities ranging from vehicle access at Waitarere Beach to more limited pedestrian access at Waikawa Beach. Typically the greater number of access points to the coast exist at the more populated coastal settlements of Waitarere and Foxton Beach.

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The principle of maintaining and enhancing public access to and along the coastal marine area is embodied in the RMA as a matter of national importance, and is also recognised through the NZCPS. Certain activities may prevent the use and enjoyment of the coast by the public. It is important therefore that Council actively manage activities in the area immediately abutting the coastal margin, and promotes activities which maintain existing public access points to the coast, and provide new access points where it is appropriate and they are sensitively designed.

New access to the coast has the potential to result in disturbance to the foredune and coastal marine area. There are a variety of techniques that can be used such as board and chain walkways that can minimise some of the effects of providing access.

While providing for public access to, and along the coast, it is important to recognise that there may be reasons, such as to protect historic heritage or protect sensitive natural areas, where providing such public access may not be appropriate or may need to be restricted.

Although Council owns and manages foreshore and esplanade reserves along the coastline, there remain large portions of the coastline that are in private ownership. Private development adjacent to the coastal marine area has the potential to be undertaken in a manner which could preclude public access to the coast.

While vehicle access to and along beaches such as Waitarere Beach is extremely popular with beach users, it does present the challenge of finding the right balance between allowing vehicles on the beach for recreational purposes and keeping a safe beach environment for beach users. Vehicle access to and along the beaches improves accessibility and supports recreational uses. However, this vehicle access can expose a greater portion of the coastal environment to the misuse of vehicles and associated adverse effects on the coastal environment. Motor bikes and other off-road vehicles can pose a threat to maintaining vegetation within the foredunes when used in sensitive locations or in an inappropriate manner.

Objective 5.2.1 Public Access To and Along the Coast

To maintain the existing level of public access to and along the coast and ensure that any new access is provided in a way that does not adversely affect the recognised values of the Coastal Environment.

Policy 5.2.2

Provide for the maintenance and creation of esplanade reserves, esplanade strips and public access strips to and along the coast.

Policy 5.2.3

Ensure that private development does not preclude the use of the coast by the general public.

Policy 5.2.4

Develop, improve and maintain existing forms of access to the coast that do not adversely affect the recognised values of the Coastal Environment.

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Policy 5.2.5

Ensure that adverse effects arising from the provision of existing, new or upgraded public access are avoided, remedied or mitigated particularly on areas with high natural character and areas subject to coastal hazards.

Policy 5.2.6

Where new access to the coast is provided, ensure it is located and constructed so that disturbance to foredunes and adjacent coastal marine area is minimised.

Policy 5.2.7

Ensure that the use of vehicles in the Coastal Environment does not give rise to adverse environmental effects including but not limited to damaging dunes, harming ecological systems and posing a danger to other beach users.

Explanation and Principal Reasons

Whilst providing public access to the coast is recognised as a matter of national importance it needs to be balanced against considering the other values afforded the same status such as preservation of natural character and protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes. In addition, the Coastal Environment is subject to coastal hazards, and it is important the provision of public access does not increase the risk to people and property, or worsen or accelerate the natural hazard risks.

There is already a high level of public access provided to the coast within Horowhenua. The priority is on developing, improving and maintaining the existing forms of access rather than providing new public access points. There will be situations and locations where new access is deemed desirable. The provision of new access points will present the opportunity to consider how access can be provided while minimising disturbance to the coastal foredunes.

The use of vehicles in the Coastal Environment has the potential to result in significant adverse environmental effects. It is important that the use of vehicles is managed in a way that does not adversely affect the recognised values of the Coastal Environment or the safety of other beach users.

Methods for Issue 5.2 & Objective 5.2.1

District Plan

- Subdivision and development within the Coastal Environment will require a resource consent. This consent application will allow for the assessment of the merits of applications with respect to providing new or upgraded access to and along the coast.

Annual Plan

- In addition to setting aside funds for the purchase of reserves, the Council may provide public amenities such as toilets, street furniture and other amenities to encourage the use and enjoyment of the coast.

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Education and Information

- Council will work with the Horizons Regional Council and the Department of Conservation, Iwi environmental and community groups, and landowners, where appropriate, to encourage sustainable land use practices in the Coastal Environment, and the District as a whole.
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Issue 5.3 COASTAL HAZARDS

Identification of the extent of the Coastal Environment potentially affected by coastal hazards, and manage subdivision, use and development in the areas at risk.

ISSUE DISCUSSION

Some activities have the potential to worsen the risk or consequences of coastal hazards or can compromise the function or maintenance of landforms or structures designed to mitigate the effects of coastal hazards. Examples include earthworks that undermine the effectiveness of the foredunes to act as a natural form of defence or the construction of hard structures such as sea walls that can adversely change the level of hazard impact on the adjoining properties.

Subdivision and development can be directly affected by a hazard event. Risks associated with tsunami, sea level rise and climate change are relevant to every coastal environment including the Horowhenua. Areas that are potentially affected or at high risk need to be identified and the effects of natural hazards avoided or mitigated.

The coastal environment is subject to a range of natural hazards that have potential to adversely affect people and properties within the coastal environment. To provide for the wellbeing and safety of people and communities, it is imperative to identify and minimise the risks from such hazards by avoiding development from these areas, or mitigating the risks through design and siting.

Coastal hazard risks are projected to increase as an effect of climate change which is expected to cause future changes in sea level and coastal processes. In areas of the coast where accretion currently occurs, sea level rise could eventually cancel out or even reverse this trend. Given the uncertainties with the rate of sea level rise it is necessary to take a precautionary approach to coastal hazards.

The NZCPS provides direction on managing the coastal edge in a way that recognises the potential effects of climate change. The NZCPS promotes the restoration of natural defences, such as dunes and coastal vegetation, against hazards. Maintenance and protection of the naturally functioning dune buffer is an important component for protection of the coast.

With a generally accreting coastline, hard protection structures are not common within the Horowhenua Coastal Environment. The most notable hard protection structure is the sea wall at Foxton Beach. Hard protection structures while proving to be effective in controlling the effects of erosion, can have negative impacts on the environment and community. Hard protection structures often hold the shoreline seaward of its natural location resulting in the loss of a dry beach above the mean high water mark, resulting in reduced natural character and amenity. The presence of hard protection structures can also increase the effects of erosion on the land immediately adjacent to the end of the structure. Where such structures

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exist they are likely to face further challenges and costs associated with maintaining the structures as a result of pressure from the effects of climate change.

Objective 5.3.1 Coastal Hazards

Avoid or mitigate subdivision, land use and development in the Coastal Environment where it is subject to natural hazards. Where land use and development occurs in the Coastal Environment, ensure that it does not worsen the risk of occurrence or the severity of coastal hazards or compromise natural hazard protection or mitigation works.

Policy 5.3.2

Identify in the District Plan the extent of the Coastal Hazard Area.

Policy 5.3.3

In areas subject to Coastal Hazards, ensure new subdivision, use and development are located and designed to avoid or mitigate the effects of natural hazards, unless there is a particular functional need for a use or development to locate in an area subject to significant risk.

Policy 5.3.4

Ensure that the use and development of land does not accelerate or worsen any material damage from coastal hazards to that land, other land or structure, or the risk of occurrence or the severity of coastal hazards.

Policy 5.3.5

Ensure that new development within the Coastal Environment, particularly adjacent to the beach, recognises the potential for windblown sand to move from the beach inland (often from public land to private land) as part of the normal coastal processes that occur in this location.

Policy 5.3.6

Encourage the protection, restoration and enhancement of natural defences such as beaches, dunes, coastal vegetation, estuaries, wetlands and intertidal areas, where these protect coastal land uses from coastal hazards.

Policy 5.3.7

Ensure that environmental and social costs are recognised and considered at the time of assessing any application for hard protection structures to protect private property from coastal hazards.

Explanation and Principal Reasons

Buildings and structures in the Coastal Environment are potentially prone to coastal erosion, inundation, tsunami and sea level rise. However it is recognised that some buildings and structures benefit the community and have functional need to be located near or immediately adjacent to the beach. Development in the Coastal Environment can also adversely affect other values such as landscape and natural character. These values need to be balanced

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when considering the merits of a particular development proposal. Therefore specific requirements apply to manage buildings and structures in the Coastal Environment to assess the range of issues.

Although developing close to the coast can provide sea views it can also mean that buildings and property are prone to a certain amount of windblown sand being transported from the beach inland. This issue is seen as part of the natural coastal processes that occur in this location and should be reasonably expected by those living there.

Methods for Issue 5.3 & Objective 5.3.1

District Plan

- Identification of a Coastal Hazard Area on the Planning Maps areas subject to coastal hazard risk.
- Rules to control subdivision and development within identified areas subject to coastal hazard risk to avoid or reduce the potential adverse effects of natural hazards.
- Subdivision and development within the Coastal Hazard Area will require resource consent. This requirement will allow for the assessment of the merits of applications with respect to coastal hazards and recognition of the effects of natural coastal processes and consideration of other values.
- Where there are significant risks from coastal hazards (inundation, erosion, sea level rise and tsunami) that have not yet been identified in the District Plan, subdivision will be controlled in these areas through Section 106 of the RMA.
- Require consent applications within the Coastal Environment for hard protection structures to recognise and consider the environmental and social costs.
- Require subdivision and land use consent applications within the Coastal Environment to address the impact on natural defences (such as beaches, dunes, coastal vegetation, estuaries, wetlands and intertidal areas) that protect coastal land uses from coastal hazards.

Building Controls

- Apply Sections 71 and 72 of the Building Act 2004 to control inappropriate development of land subject to a natural hazard.

Horizons Regional Council and the One Plan

- Rules in the One Plan relate to activities in the bed of lakes and rivers, for land use activities in the coastal marine area, coastal foredune and erosion protection works that cross or adjoin mean high water springs.

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ANTICIPATED ENVIRONMENTAL RESULTS

The environmental results for the Coastal Environment which are anticipated to result from the combined implementation of the above policies and methods are as follows:

- 5(a) The natural character of the Coastal Environment is preserved;
- 5(b) The Coastal Environment is protected from inappropriate subdivision, use and development and any adverse environmental effects caused by development are avoided, remedied or mitigated.
- 5(c) The protection and enhancement of historical and cultural values, including Tangata Whenua spiritual values (taonga raranga) associated with their ancestral lands including the coast.
- 5(d) Public access to the coast is provided in appropriate locations and in a manner which minimises the disturbance to the foredunes while private access tracks to the coast are avoided.
- 5(e) Outstanding natural features and landscapes within the Coastal Environment are protected from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.
- 5(f) Activities or structures in the Coastal Environment do not accelerate or worsen any material damage from coastal hazards or reduce the effectiveness of measures which serve to mitigate the effects of coastal hazard events.
- 5(g) Subdivision, development and use within the Coastal Environment where it is subject to natural hazards avoids or mitigates the effects of coastal hazards.

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