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TITLE: MAKING ROOM FOR THE GOOD IDEA

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MAKING ROOM FOR THE GOOD IDEA

ABSTRACT *– Good ideas for land development implemented through good design are often blocked through the resource management consent process for reasons that have little to do with the good outcomes that may be apparent from the individual projects. The process of promotion, encouragement and assessment that belies the Resource Management Act 1991, the district plans and the granting of consents, struggles to differentiate between the good idea and the mediocre. This paper addresses techniques and methods that may assist in ensuring that the door is always left open for good land development with high environmental outcomes in keeping with community aspirations.*

The Approach

This paper builds on recent papers prepared by the authors over the last five years. Most recently, two papers under the heading of 'Sustainability by Design' were presented at the NZPI Conference at Hamilton 2003. Those papers established the historical link between settlement patterns and the coastline throughout New Zealand's history of human occupation. By understanding the opportunities of good design outcomes and recognising the current biodiversity failings in many plan controls, it was hoped that the second generation of district plans would be able to offer innovation and opportunity as well as sustainability in the coastal environment.

This address is a statement about what we think coastal development can achieve within the broad context of the coastal environment. It is not a lesson in how to design but more a review of techniques and experiences that have brought about good results in the coastal setting. We wish to see pathways cleared and doors opened within district plan controls to provide support for good examples of coastal development that achieve positive environmental outcomes, enhance public access to the coastline and protect or improve existing landscape features; all achieved within a framework of community consultation and acceptance.

The approach is both philosophical and practical. It is philosophical because it examines, on every occasion, the fundamental relationship that arises from the various existing assumptions about development. These may be social, cultural, economic or physical. The practical and technical side of the approach is best addressed through the integrated catchment management analysis techniques now well established amongst the land and water related professions. Linking the philosophical to the practical gives a project an advantage of being able to prove from the outset that it belongs to the locality and will, if implemented, articulate the "sense of place" or better still, enhance and improve the natural processes that are integral to, and therefore inform that "sense of place".

Setting the Scene

Historically the growth of New Zealand has been linked to the coastline. Within all social, economic and physical aspects of our development over the last 200 years, the coastline has been a focus; an integral element; the conduit to wealth and survival. The towns and cities clinging to harbour edges or river mouths around the New Zealand coastline are the manifestation of those historical connections to the coast. In the last three decades the coastline has faced the pressure of dynamic interest and investment, particularly along the east coast in that warm stretch from the Bay of Islands to the Bay of Plenty.

This coastal area and hinterland, nicknamed 'The Big Banana', is the focus of economic population growth. The Big Banana incorporates the Auckland region and the coastal growth centres of Tauranga and Whangarei. It is influenced and supported by the inland growth nodes of Hamilton and Rotorua. This area contains about half the population of New Zealand but makes up less than 10% of the New Zealand land mass.

But this is hardly surprising. We are an island nation. We are descended from ethnic groups with strong maritime histories. Our tupuna/descendants – Polynesian, Celts, Scots, English, Dutch and so on – roamed coastlines and oceans for centuries. They lived and developed in coastal environments. They recognised the sea and the coastal edge as economic, social and cultural dynamic forces that provided food, life and

opportunity. Above all, the relationship between the sea and the land was experienced as a fundamental, physical entity within which man was an integral part – sometimes a bit player, but other times a major influence.

We have developed strong psychological connections to the coastal environment. We understand and relate to the spatial arrangement of the coastal edge – the sea and the land. This spatial understanding influences the way in which we work and live near or in the coastal environment. The coastline has an attractiveness like a magnetic pull that draws the population towards it. This attraction to the coast has become a fundamental foundation of our environmental psycho-pathology as a nation.

A World Problem

In the world context, coastlines are the most important and intensely used of all areas settled by humans. This fact is punctuated by the following points:

- *An estimated 50%-70% of the estimated 5.3 billion people alive today live in coastal zones* *(Edgren, 1993)*

- *Today, the world's population in coastal areas is equal to the entire global population in the 1950's* *(Beukenkamp, Gunther et al., 1993)*

- *In 30 years, more people will live in the world's coastal zones than are alive today.* *(NOAA, 1994a)*

- *Up to 75% of the world population could be living within 60 kilometres of the shoreline by 2020.* *(Edgren, 1993)*

These quotes from the recent publication *Coastal Planning and Management* by Robert Kay and Jacqueline Alder (Spon Press, London, 1999) provide a sobering insight to the need for management structures and strategies that can cope with the ongoing demand for development in the coastal environment. While in New Zealand

the coastal development pressure hardly ranks with these worldwide issues and conflicts, it needs to be recognised and confronted within the sustainable model of land use management as it affects the coastal environment.

What is Constraining Best Practice?

At all levels, a best practice model needs to take the primary step of facing up to the market demand for settlement in the coastal environment. The market demand in New Zealand is driven by changing demographic factors that reflect generally unchartered economic social and cultural factors. The demographic pressure arising from the aging "baby boomers" takes a relatively wealthy cohort of the population into an older age bracket over the next decade. This societal energy provides, in our experience, much of the driving force for the present coastal interest and development. It is part of a broader life experience shift that is pushing the establishment of new settlement patterns at the peri-urban edges of our cities. At present we know little about the strength of this energy. Our assumption arises from experience and hearsay; there is no directed research we know of. Interestingly, these people are often promoters of good ideas or are very receptive to good ideas when it comes to decisions on design and environmental benefits as a prerequisite to the development process.

As a starting point we find and accept that the regime of statutory instruments controlling the coastline – the district plan, the regional policy statement, the regional coastal plan and the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement – are driven by conventional wisdom and are guardians of the status quo. The underlying expectation that such documents represent community expectations is risky and not readily verifiable. Very few statutory documents have had the benefit of the form of structured community participation from which localised coastal conservation and development aspirations have translated into district plan controls.

The Framework for Best Practice

At a simple level the sequence seems straightforward. The best practice model nurtures good design; which then demands good analysis; and finally relies on good decision-making. The clear goal of this conference is to support across the board, a "lifting of the game" on the part of all participants; to encourage the improvement of analysis, design, implementation and consent assessment for coastal development.

This cannot be achieved without a major shift in the approach at both the policy and regulatory levels of local government administration. A paradigm shift in behaviour is required. The paradigm shift needs the support of an almost passionate commitment towards the environmental goals being postulated for the coastal environment.

The starting point in any paradigm shift is to recognise as mediocre, the outcomes that pervade coastal planning controls in district plans. Currently, there is an overall absence of recognition for the patterns and the context of the different coastal spaces, let alone the provision of models to demonstrate methods and solutions. The structural analysis of community aspirations is rarely achieved to a level that can be seen as both educational and problem-solving. Not surprisingly the development forms that emerge do not exhibit the excellence or rigour of a design process that the coastal environment deserves, and that communities are beginning to demand.

The Integrated Catchment Management Model

For us, the starting point is an examination of the broad context that is best achieved through the integrated catchment management (ICM) model. This rigorous analysis model establishes the land capability potential of any particular space. It can operate from the broadest regional context through to site specific requirements. The integrated catchment model provides a philosophical and technical consistency. It also provides the continuum from the large broad scale to the discrete finite scale.

Through the ICM model, the analysis focuses on a three part arrangement –

- The elements of the landscape
- The patterns of the landscape
- The processes of the landscape

This trilogy expresses the landscape character from which the construct of re-establishing landscape function can emerge.

The co-ordinated and holistic approach of the ICM model is best described by the definition prepared by the Integrated Catchment Management Project Team:

> *ICM aims to integrate the management of land, water and related biological resources in order to achieve their sustainable and balanced use. It will bring together those involved in primary production, environmental conservation, land and water planning, research, environmental rehabilitation and other aspects of natural resource management. ICM is based on a systematic effort to understand through interpretation and analysis, the linkages between eco-systems, resources and people. It is a strategic approach to the management of environmental problems and involves the bringing together of a diversity of perspectives, disciplines and practices.*

The ICM project is a Ministry for the Environment sustainable management fund project. It is administered by the LandCare Trust.

The ICM model examines the physical space in a range of parallel but still inter-related activity areas. Traditionally, the physical constraints and attributes were the obvious matters for analysis. They covered topography, hydrology, vegetation and land use patterns.

But the ICM model offers more. The issues of heritage and landscape fit neatly within the model and can be supported, examined and enhanced through the design

actions that follow. In any particular location, the heritage of the landscape or just the land itself can be examined to reveal the loss of landscape that may have occurred or the advantages that may have been retained. The actions of colonisation of the land by Maori and Pakeha settlers has largely stripped away our landscape and replaced it with another form.

The New Cultural Landscape

In our post-colonial world the opportunity arises to create a new cultural landscape. It is a *new* landscape because it has to be rebuilt out of the remnant but collapsing ecology of the colonial agricultural practices which were effectively placed over an inappropriate topography. It is a *cultural* landscape because of the new mix of patterns that emerge to represent the social and economic changes taking place. While some places enjoy the advantage of retaining a natural landscape of beauty and diversity, the majority of our landscapes require intervention and support in order to be placed on a path that will eventually create their own heritage. In many respects the heritage landscape of New Zealand is yet to emerge. Over 1200 years of occupation, our actions have largely been destructive, or negative or at best, neutral. Imagine 1,000 years of positive land management and landscape creation. While some individual and highly important spaces may exhibit heritage qualities as a result of past events or through historical accident, the mature post-colonial heritage landscape of New Zealand is just in its infancy. The new cultural landscape is yet to emerge.

Our professional skills, knowledge base and resources provide us with mapping systems and a scientific database that allows the understanding of a myriad of relationships and inter-reactions amongst the detailed component parts of landscape and land capability analysis. The component parts comprise geology, soil, hydrology, vegetation, ecology, archaeology, visual perceptions and infrastructure. But for the ICM model to work this complexity of overlays and inter-reacting elements must be put into an accessible, interpretive form, so that the users of the information, namely the community, can relate to their particular issue at the landscape level. The context of the space or the sense of place being promoted by the development or by the

district plan rules, require a spatial and pattern language that encourages use and implementation by the most affected party – namely the local community.

When the ICM model is used in a fully developed form, a co-ordinated and intelligent understanding is available to all.

We know and recognise the growing desire to achieve a lasting balance amongst land use activities, the development of infrastructure and the conservation of our indigenous biodiversity – in other words, the sustainable management objective of the RMA. We also recognise that our failure to achieve this has much to do with the direction of modern urban life. Our national pastoral image belies the fact that most people generally lost touch with the land two or three generations ago. In doing so they generally lost touch with the way in which the landscape and the countryside work. Planning for the use and care of a local landscape is no longer an integrated part of a farming family tradition or an individual/family responsibility. This management process has been relegated to appointed third parties and moulded into a bureaucratic process of district plan rules and resource consents. On the whole this process requires a scant comprehension of the parts that make up the landscape.

For example, it is estimated that up to 48% of some Class VI but mainly Class VII and VIII land should be retired from active pastoral land use. This amounts to between 10 to 11 million hectares with the potential retirement amounting to some 5 million hectares. Yet this land is usually zoned for agricultural purposes in rural district plans and some of it is in coastal locations. At the other extreme, the Class I and II soils which constitute the generally accepted high class land of New Zealand, amount to about 1.4 million hectares. At present (LandCare database 2002) 45,500 hectares are actively used for horticultural production, that is a mere 3.25%. Yet this resource is treated as scarce in most district plan land use regimes. Such district plan provisions ignore science, reality and ecological good practice.

The challenge is to ensure that the benefits of developments that are analysed and designed through the ICM model are not thwarted and discouraged by a planning regime that has simply misunderstood the local character.

District Plan Methods – Traditional and Structural

District plans have two traditional methods of establishing the promotional and control regime for land use activity in a given area. First, there is the process of analysis, research and consultation that produces a range of objectives, policies and rules. An observation with a touch of cynicism stretching back over many years is that the rules seem to emerge first, only to stimulate a custom-made set of objectives and policies. Obviously the process was supposed to be the other way around but it is easily manipulated to ensure that the rules reflect and protect the status quo with the objectives and policies following on behind.

The inclusion of ICM model components into the objectives and policies of rural and coastal land use controls has a two-fold advantage. First, the rules emerging to promote basic development opportunities ought to ensure that such development does not bring with it environmental deterioration. Contradictory as it may sound, many rural and coastal subdivision rules exhibit features of ecological failure. The obvious example is the bush-lot subdivision opportunity that appears in many rural district plans. It involves protecting an area of significant native bush on one part of a property in order to create a new rural-residential lot elsewhere on the property. The bush-lot rule gives development (and therefore financial) advantage without any environmental investment. It represents a form of "patch" ecology and usually fails to achieve appropriate ecological connections from one bush area to another. So, while the donor environment stays static, the receiving environment – the beneficiary of the development opportunity - has no environmental enhancement.

By contrast, if the ICM model was driving the bush-lot subdivision rules, the donor environment would need to demonstrate some ecological advantage rather than the securing of the status quo, and the receiving environment would be the subject of some land management and ecological enhancement.

The second advantage to emerge would be that when the "good idea" arrives in the form of an application for resource consent, it can be tested, assessed and measured against a true sustainable management model through objectives and policies that reflect such standards. Obviously the "good idea" would seek to achieve some

development form beyond the scope of the existing rules. For it to be judged fairly, the objectives and policies should present a promotional development opportunity as well as providing the framework for the development controls.

Structure planning provides the alternative method of creating the district plan content. The structure plan is the ideal vehicle for implementing the ICM methodology. It also provides the best context within which to conduct community consultation. From the survey and assembly of community attitudes based on questionnaires, workshops, cottage meetings, direct interviews and so on, the ICM model provides the mechanism for the spatial interpretation of a community's desires. This is the implementation of the earlier point made about the need to take the technical complexities of landscape and land capability assessment and convert them into an accessible model for community understanding. The urgent need is to ensure that a spatial and pattern language emerges from any structure planning documentation. In this way, the community has a long-term relationship and understanding of its own environment and the manner in which changes will occur through the development process. The availability and continuing provision of public open space through the development process is also ensured as an integral part of the ICM model. This is a vital component of coastal development design. The locked away coastline can slowly be released for public enjoyment through the development process.

Conclusion

In the absence of district plan and structure plan support, individual project design – the "good idea" – becomes the method of exhibiting the ICM principles.

Good project design is a bottom-up implementation approach. Ironically, it conflicts with the RMA assumption which is structured as a top-down implementation method. The top-down commences with national policies, then regional planning instruments and district plans. Good project design can fill the gap left between the aspirations and implementation methods of the district plan and the reality of what is actually happening in a specific part of the district.

This paper seeks to stimulate best practice in coastal development projects by returning to an analysis method that values all components whether they are social, economic, cultural or physical. The ICM model is unashamedly promoted as an effective tool. Hopefully, the ICM model will find its way into the district and regional plan toolbox in time so that the "good idea" is not left languishing.

Above all, the second generation of district plans or the refinement of first generation plans need to focus on community linkages and the spatial interpretation of community desires. It is not that the existing community's views should drive the future, but rather that those views should be placed within a spatial and patterned language that allows future options to be developed. Our experience tells us that the ICM model with a community framework provides a best practice outcome for coastal environments. Through this process outstanding landscapes are protected and set aside, heritage landscapes of the future are created and new settlement patterns are placed in a sustainable framework.

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(A slide presentation in Powerpoint format accompanies and supports this paper)