

UPDATE ON NZCPS SAND DUNES POLICY WORK

Background

In July 2009, the Board of Inquiry reported to the Minister of Conservation, recommending a redrafted New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS). The Board recommended the inclusion of a policy on the protection of active coastal dunes of national significance, based on the suggestions of Dr Hilton.

The dunes policy was not included in the final NZCPS 2010, which came into effect in December last year. The reason for this was that the dunes policy was a new proposal which had emerged during the Board's consultation process – it was not part of the publicly notified version of the proposed NZCPS. This means that landowners who would be affected by the policy did not have an opportunity to comment.

Cabinet did, however, recognise that the proposed dunes policy had merit, and agreed to further explore the issue, and to provide an opportunity for affected parties to comment.

Sand dunes policy as recommended by Board

The Board recommended that the following policy be included in the NZCPS:

Protection of active coastal dunes

All decision makers must recognise and protect active coastal dunes of national significance, including those listed in Schedule 3, including by:

- (a) avoiding subdivision, use and development that adversely affects the geomorphology, ecology and botany of these dune systems, including disturbance to coastal sand systems in the adjacent coastal marine area;
- (b) ensuring that activities within, adjacent to, or down-drift from these dune systems do not result in the establishment of invasive exotic plants;
- (c) avoiding damaging off-road vehicle use;
- (d) encouraging the restoration of degraded dune systems;
- (e) ensuring public access respects the values of dune systems, for example by providing public information; and
- (f) monitoring dune system condition.

Officials have subsequently discussed making minor changes to the wording of the policy, but any version of the policy published for consultation is likely to remain very close to that which appeared in the Board's report.

The Board recommended that Schedule 3 to the NZCPS should contain maps of 60 active coastal dunes of national significance, to which the policy would apply. The proposed wording of the policy was not exhaustive, so councils could also identify dune systems other than those in Schedule 3 as being nationally significant.

The Board's report (p364 Vol 2) cites the criteria used for identifying the dunes listed in Schedule 3:

- the system has distinct geographic boundaries;

- loss of the system would significantly threaten the distinctive biodiversity of active dune systems;
- the system is relatively intact (i.e. is not fragmented);
- the flora of the system has characteristic dune species, including both rare and representative species; and
- the system is likely to support indigenous native dune fauna.

Next steps

The Department of Conservation is in the early stages of work to explore the dunes policy further, and to plan for a consultation process.

If Ministers agree, there will be a public consultation process on the dunes policy, most likely in May and June 2011. Contact will be made with landowners who may be affected by the policy.

The consultation will be a chance to test questions such as whether there is support for inclusion of a dedicated policy on active coastal dunes of national significance; whether nationally significant dunes should be identified in a schedule or whether councils should be guided by criteria to do their own assessment; and whether the original list of 60 dunes is about right.

Let us know your views

There will be an opportunity for input into the public consultation process once that has been given the go-ahead. In the meantime, the Department of Conservation welcomes your thoughts on:

- How should the Department ensure a reasonably robust list of nationally significant active coastal dunes?
- Who should we talk to in order to get expert opinion on this list?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of scheduling a list of identified dunes versus letting councils identify those in their region according to criteria?
- Are there any other issues relating to the policy which you would like to comment on?

Please contact Amber Duncalfe at the Department of Conservation at aduncalfe@doc.govt.nz or on 04 471 3233 if you wish to comment on these or other issues.