Chapter 10

Potential roles for coastal protected areas in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation: a case study of dune management in Christchurch, New Zealand

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Abstract
Dunes provide a range of benefits for coastal hazard management. This includes protection from erosion, inundation, and storm surge events, and may include disaster risk reduction benefits in large magnitude events. However, New Zealand's coastal dune ecosystems have become heavily modified in recent decades and the space available for dunes has become severely restricted in many areas. The restoration and protective management of indigenous dune ecosystems is now an urgent conservation issue.

Since plant communities influence dune form and dynamics, the protection of dune biodiversity is important to their coastal hazard management role. The management of dunes as Protected Areas is now a common approach and can be especially important in locations where development and land use patterns have encroached on the space available for dunes, or where intensive management responses to other threats are required.

There are now many examples of dune restoration projects at sites where former dunes had largely disappeared, or where the dune plant community has been impacted by invasive species. These projects provide opportunities to assess the potential for protected area management to deliver benefits for coastal hazard management within an integrated approach to coastal management. Additionally, forward planning for the adaptive management of coastlines is needed in the context of predicted sea level rise, and includes consideration of the values of protected areas and the future roles they may play. This case study presents results from an example of restorative dune management within the Christchurch Coastal Park network with a focus on the potential roles of these parks in disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change.

1. Introduction

1.1 Disaster risk reduction as an aspect of coastal management

International evidence suggests that a variety of disaster risk reduction benefits could be generated from targeted management of coastal protected areas. The disaster risk focus implies that there may be benefits additional to direct coastal protection functions, for example whereby the impacts of a large magnitude event might be reduced by natural ecosystems in the coastal zone (Noguchi *et al*., 2012; PEDRR, 2010; Shaw *et al*., 2012). It follows that the risk reduction perspective involves consideration of the relative benefits of various mitigation measures against both repeat and extreme events.

The need for strategies, planning and implementation of mitigation measures for coastal hazards and climate change is well documented at the national level (e.g. Department of Conservation, 2010; Ministry for the Environment, 2001, 2008). This is reflected at the regional level in documents such as climate change and coastal strategies and in Regional Policy Statements. There has also been some research on processes for coastal adaptation in New Zealand (e.g. Britton, 2010; NIWA, 2011) and elsewhere (e.g. Kay & Travers, 2008; Klein *et al*., 1999). However it is important to note that climate change adaptation considerations extend to managing effects on the natural ecosystems themselves; a subject which has received considerably less attention. Within this context it is timely to consider the existing and potential role of natural ecosystems and coastal protected areas alongside the other mitigation and adaptation measures available.

1.2 Coastal dune ecosystems in New Zealand

Coastal dune ecosystems in New Zealand have been heavily affected by human activities as is common worldwide (Nordstrom, 1994). They are among the most modified of all New Zealand ecosystems having undergone major decline since the arrival of humans (Dahm *et al*., 2005; Hesp, 2000, 2001). The area occupied by dunes is now drastically reduced (Hilton, 2006) and in most places where the underlying landform persists there have been significant changes to the vegetation, morphology, and dynamics of dune systems (Cockayne, 1909, 1911; Dahm *et al*, 2005; Hilton *et al*., 2000). Both active and stable sand dunes were recently rated as 'endangered' against the IUCN Red List criteria for ecosystems (Holdaway *et al*., 2012).

In addition to their conservation values dunes provide protective functions for coastal communities that may be expected to become more important with current predictions of sea level rise (Dahm *et al*. 2005; Spence *et al*. 2007). As described by Carter (1991, p38), dunes also serve as 'natural, front-rank coastal defences'.

1.3 Case study: management of dune ecosystems in Christchurch's coastal parks

The focus of this case study is the coastal parks of Christchurch, New Zealand. These coastal parks are a network of protected areas owned and managed by Christchurch City Council (CCC) on behalf of the community. There are other similar examples of coastal parks under the control of local authorities throughout New Zealand, and these include many examples where beach and active sand dune systems are the underlying landform.

Christchurch is located in the southern corner of Pegasus Bay, a large sandy bay covering 54 km of coastline on the South Island's east coast (Hicks, 1993). This part of Pegasus Bay is characterized by fine sediments forming sandy beaches, with an increased proportion of larger grained sediments found on beaches to the north (Allan *et al*., 1999; Hicks, 1993; Kirk, 1979). The Christchurch coastal park network consists of 12 parks which together stretch across most of the City's east facing Pacific Ocean coastline (Figure 1).

In terms of the IUCN WCPA definition of Protected Areas these coastal parks can be characterized as Category IV. As detailed by Dudley (2008), Category IV are protected areas sufficient to maintain particular habitats and/or species, and are often fragmented ecosystems that may not be self-sustaining without active management interventions. In addition, Category IV protected areas will generally be publicly accessible and often involve management of areas that have already undergone substantial modification and/or require protection of remaining fragments. All of these conditions are found in the Christchurch Coastal Parks.

These parks are managed by the CCC Parks and Waterways Unit under the Christchurch Beaches and Coastal Parks Management Plan 1995, and guided by the Coastal Parks Strategy 2000-2010 (CCC, 1995; CCC, 2000) in addition to individual management plans in some cases. The Coastal Parks Strategy 2000-2010 details the purpose and priorities for management of these parks (Table 1). The protection of ecological values and the management of sand are key aspects. As is discussed below, both topics are important to the potential disaster risk reduction benefits of these parks.

Since the Coastal Parks Strategy 2000-2010 was written Christchurch has experienced a sequence of major earthquakes including the catastrophic 6.3 magnitude quake of 22 February 2011 which killed 185 people. The earthquake sequence began on 4 September 2010 with a 7.1 magnitude quake centred 40

Figure 1: Overview map showing the location of the Christchurch coastal park network

Table 1: Management priorities for Christchurch's Coastal Parks. Adapted from CCC (2000).

- Ecological protection, enhancement and restoration
  - Native planting
  - Weed and pest control
  - Habitat enhancement
- Planting focus on high use areas
  - Native plants
  - Exotic plants for use as feature trees, shade trees and amenity plants
- Sand management for coastal protection to include the planting of sandbinding and native species
  - Development of back dunes to include picnic areas and walkways
- Walkways
  - Linking of natural areas, and loop walks
  - Improved access for pedestrians and wheelchairs
- Picnic areas
  - Walkways to include more picnic areas
  - In high use areas, more facilities such as barbeques, showers, drinking fountains, and shade trees
- Signs and education
  - More signs depicting interpretive and walkway information
  - More coastal education to encourage better care and respect for the environment
- Other
  - Complete existing landscaping projects
  - Further investigation to support the construction of an artificial surf reef
  - Improved maintenance and rubbish reduction
  - Improved dog control

km west of the city and has included many other large quakes including a second 6.3 magnitude quake centred close to the city on 13 June 2011. In addition to loss of life the earthquakes have caused severe damage to infrastructure, property and land. Total repair costs are predicted to be in excess of NZ$ 40 billion being New Zealand's costliest natural disaster and complete economic recovery is not expected for 50 to 100 years. Although there was little direct damage to beaches, earthquake damage included widespread settlement of land in the east of the city that has resulted in greater vulnerability to flooding, coastal inundation and storm surge events (Figure 2).

These circumstances have contributed to a greater awareness of natural hazard management issues in the post-quake landscape, including greater attention to the potential effects of sea level rise. A recent report which documented key issues for responding to sea level rise recommended that Christchurch prepare a Sea Level Rise Adaptation Strategy as a priority matter (Tonkin & Taylor, 2013). Questions around the maintenance and potential functions of coastal parks are especially relevant and include consideration of disaster risk reduction concepts (Estrella *et al*., 2013; PEDRR, 2010; Shaw *et al*., 2012).

1.4 Clifton Beach study site

The coastal park referred to in this case study is situated to the south of the Avon-Heathcote Estuary outlet where there are two beaches either side of a prominent local landmark known as Cave Rock or Tuawera. The beach to the northwest is known as Clifton Beach (Figure 3) and further to the south is Scarborough Beach (see Figure 4).

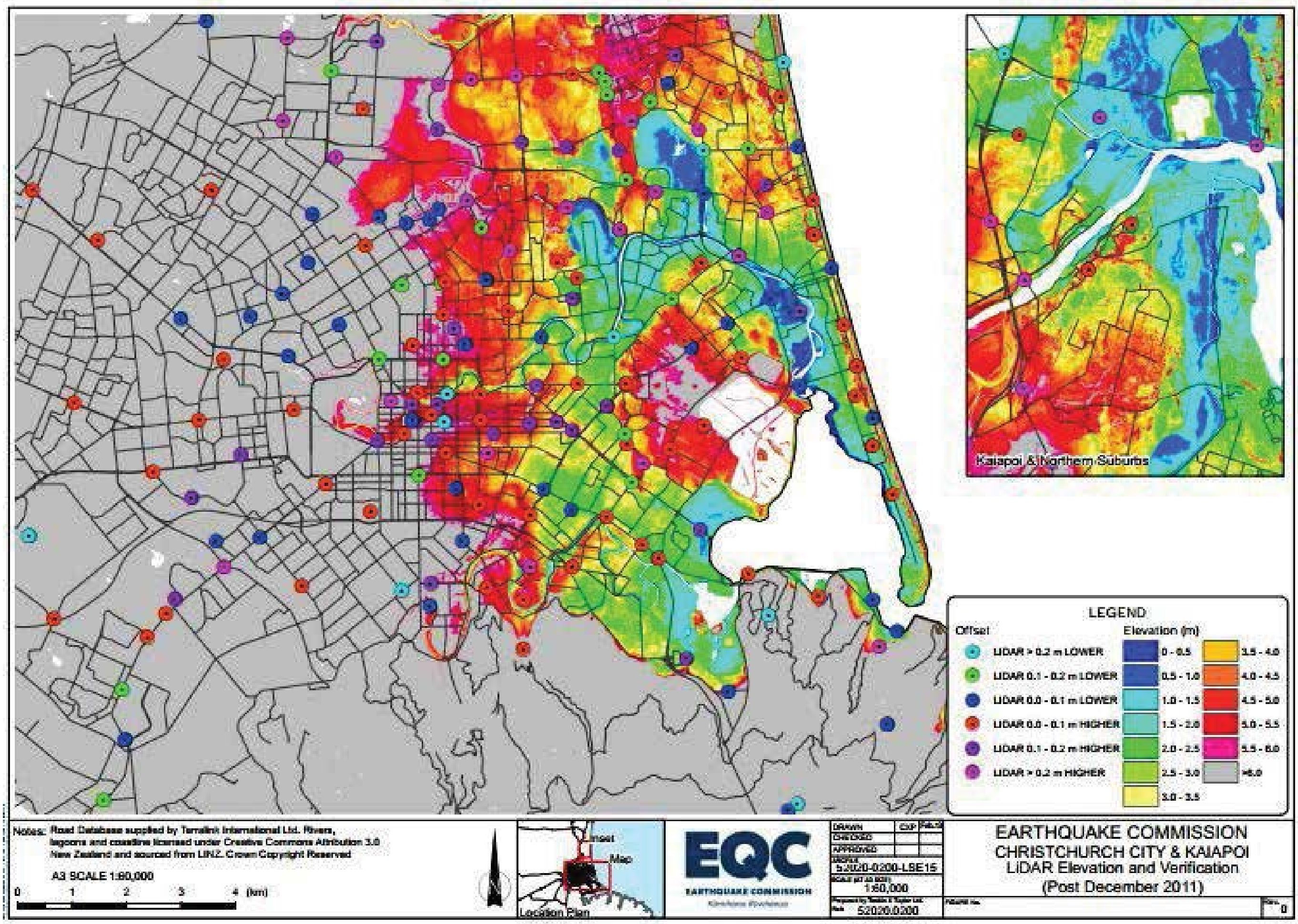
Studies have shown that the beach profile at Clifton Beach has typically been variable, as can be expected due to influences from the nearby estuary outlet (Cope *et al*., 1998). However, a sandy beach environment has been consistently present (Findlay & Kirk, 1988; Kirk 1979; Macpherson, 1978). Historical records show that the beach was backed with sand dunes until the late 1800s. Since then progressive developments, and the construction of hard defences for the protection of infrastructure, have led to degradation of the dune system (Findlay & Kirk, 1988).

2. Methodology

2.1 Background

The current focus on restorative management of the dune ecosystem at Clifton Beach represents a substantial change in the management of the coastal park from its former state. For several decades the site was characterized by a depleted dune system with limited

Figure 2: Recent imagery showing the low lying eastern suburbs and ground level changes resulting from the Canterbury earthquakes.



Source: Earthquake Commission.

Figure 3: Clifton Beach at Sumner, Christchurch, showing the coastal park area currently being restored.

Figure 4: Historical photo of Clifton and Scarborough beaches either side of Cave Rock / Tuawera ca.1895 showing some of the early infrastructure developed in the coastal zone. The tramway no longer exists.

vegetation. This was accompanied by substantial wind erosion which frequently led to sand being deposited on nearby roads and otherwise lost from the active beach system. In some parts of the beach dunes were completely absent and at times there was no physical barrier between high seas and local roads.

The success of various methods for the restoration of dune ecosystems in New Zealand has been generally well researched and will not be covered in detail here. A key aspect is that appropriate sand binding species are critical for the natural repair process on the seaward face of dunes following storm events (Given, 1981). Although a variety of species have been used to stabilize dunes the indigenous sand-binding species (Figure 5) are now regarded as being the preferred option in New Zealand (Bergin, 2008; Bergin & Kimberley, 1999; Bergin *et al*., 1997, 1999; Dahm *et al*., 2005; Unsworth *et al*., 2003). Marram Grass has been used worldwide and proven successful in stabilizing areas of unstable sand, but creates steep parabolic dunes that are prone to wind erosion and blow outs (Gadgil, 2002; Hilton *et al*., 2005).

An important aspect for management is the perception that a community-based approach is beneficial for the restoration and ongoing maintenance of coastal dunes (Dahm *et al*., 2005; Dahm & Spence, 1997; Fagan *et al*., 1997; Jenks, 2005). Reasons for this include promoting increased community awareness and/or participation with dune management projects, and instilling a dune care ethic to assist the human behaviour change often necessary to achieve long-term success. An aspect of this is assisting communities to understand the coastal environment's natural processes and dynamics (Dahm *et al*., 2005).

2.2 Management, restoration, and monitoring activities

Reserve management activities at Clifton Beach are consistent with recommended methods for dune restoration using indigenous species in New Zealand (Bergin & Kimberley, 1999). These methods have been adapted for the local conditions of the site and the resources available to implement them over a realistic timeline (Orchard & London, 2012). They are being progressively implemented to sections of the beach as part of the Sumner Coastcare Project. This is an example of where a partnership has formed between the local community, city council, and other stakeholder organizations interested in improving the values of local coastal parks.

A collaborative and community-based vision for the area was established and management objectives were identified at the scale of the site. These included a specific restoration plan for the dune system at the site, together with a monitoring plan and other initiatives to promote education about the area and the dune restoration initiative. These activities also sit within the wider context of relevant CCC plans and strategies, and the

Figure 5: The indigenous sand binders Spinifex (Spinifex sericeus), left, and Pīngao (Ficinia spiralis), right.

latter are enabling and supportive of the approach being taken. Some of the key management actions for this site are:

Management planning:

- Development of an overarching plan or strategy for the coastal parks confirming objectives for protection and management
- Development of individual management plans to detail specific restoration interventions, long term maintenance, and other aspects of park infrastructure for particular areas

Restorative management:

- Recognizing and supporting the biodiversity values of indigenous ecosystems at these sites. Management objectives include recovery and protection of indigenous plant communities appropriate to these sites using local (eco-sourced) varieties
- Ensuring sufficient maintenance resources are available to address ongoing threats to the park and its values (including to newly restored areas)
- Keeping the community involved and informed about the site

The availability and enthusiasm of volunteers within the community (both individuals and groups) has been a key aspect of the restorative management process. Implementation of a regular maintenance programme to help ensure the establishment and survival of new dune vegetation and coastal forest is one aspect where community participation has been especially useful.

For this site a monitoring programme was developed to measure the success of the key actions and provide useful information for future management decisions. Monitoring is undertaken biannually and consists of dune profiles along fixed transects, vegetation plots, and photo-points. In addition, a survey of public perception on support for restoring and protecting the dune ecosystem at the site was conducted in 2012 (Anderson *et al.*, 2012). A quantitative approach was employed using a questionnaire distributed around the local Sumner area and to people using recreational areas along the coastline. A total of 160 responses were received. The questionnaire identified perceptions on the status quo management of the coastal area and preferences towards five foreshore development proposals which had previously received media coverage within the community. Focus groups were also organized with recreational users of the area and local Sumner residents to provide additional information on attitudes to foreshore management and potential developments.

The change in management towards restoration of indigenous plant communities in the coastal park creates an opportunity to measure changes in other attributes of the site that may be useful to objectives such as disaster risk reduction. Relevant research questions include whether specific management interventions (in this case focused on the indigenous plant community) may also offer co-benefits in terms of improved disaster risk reduction benefits relative to previous state. Related questions could include how disaster reduction benefits of dune systems might be maximized at sites such as this where urban infrastructure is in close proximity.

3. Results

The monitoring programme has clearly shown changes in the dune system in response to the new management activities. The most obvious examples are the areas in which dunes had formerly disappeared. Even though the space available for the rebuilding of dunes in this area is very limited, a consistent line of dunes of up to 1.5 m in height above the high tide beach has been achieved providing a protective barrier between local roads and buildings and the sea (Figure 6).

The dune crest is now approximately 1 m above the level of the road. The width of the dune system has also been successfully increased and now is approximately 25 m in this location. This represents a substantial volume of sand that has been trapped within the reserve area through the ecological functions of the restored plant community (Figure 7). Beach nourishment has not been required.

Figure 6: The east end of Clifton Beach in 2003 at the time dune restoration was first initiated (left) and at December 2013 (right). Note that before the change in management the level of the road was higher than the level of the beach and there were no protective dunes present.

Figure 7: An example dune cross section from the eastern end of Clifton Beach, December 2013, in the same location as the photo-point in Figure 6. The dune height datum is the level of the road.

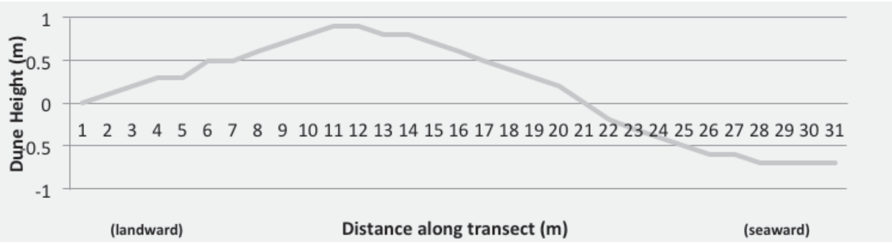


Figure 8: Example of changes in the percentage cover of fore-dune plant species within a 10x20 m monitoring plot over a 1-year period at Clifton Beach with strong Spinifex growth evident.

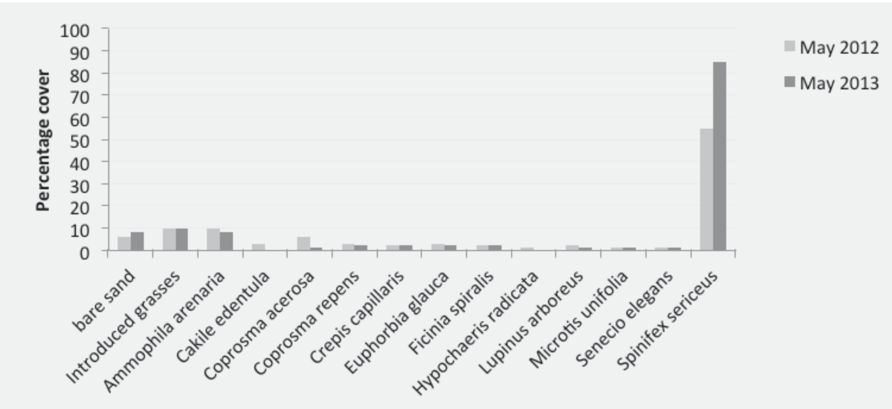


Figure 9: Photo-points taken in December 2011 and May 2013 from the same monitoring plot as Figure 8.

In addition to providing a direct barrier to coastal inundation this sand reservoir may provide some degree of risk reduction benefit in large and repeat events through dissipating wave energy should the sand be washed into the surf zone. The sand trapped in the dune system represents sand that would have otherwise been lost from the active beach system in the local area (Carter, 1980).

Early indications show that the reintroduction of Spinifex has been particularly successful at the site, both in terms of improving indigenous vegetation cover (Figure 8) and extending the current dune system seaward (Figure 9).

The public perception survey revealed considerable support for the change in management towards restoring and protecting the dune ecosystem. Dune restoration was the most popular of the five foreshore development proposals canvassed, followed by re-creation of a high tide beach along the coastline currently protected by a seawall (Figure 10).

These results demonstrate considerable support within the community for the use of natural solutions to coastal protection and foreshore management. This is consistent with other public perception surveys on coastal management options which have found support for soft engineering techniques that help retain the natural values of the coastline (e.g. Polyzos & Minetos, 2007).

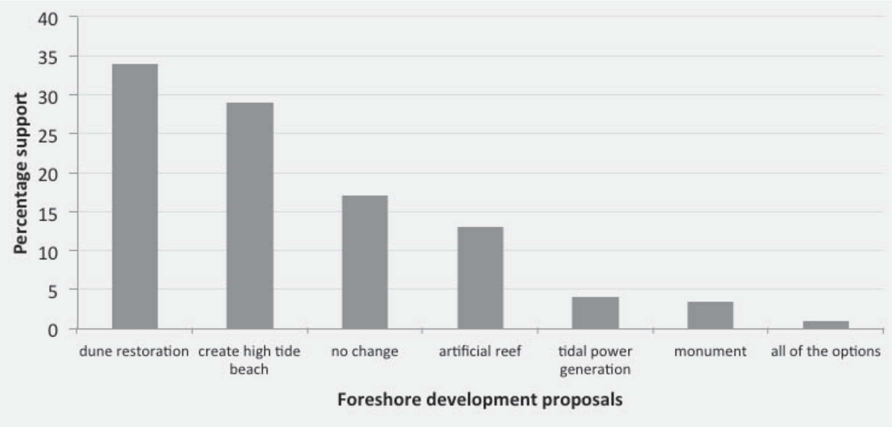
4. Discussion

Results from the Clifton Beach site demonstrate that degraded dunes can be successfully rebuilt through restorative management assisted by protected area status. It is important to note that there have been many similar results already reported in the New Zealand literature (Bergin, 2008; Bergin *et al*., 1997; Dahm *et al*, 2005; Jenks & Brake, 2001; Dahm & Spence, 1997).

Additional points of interest related to management of the Clifton Beach site include

- The presence of, or plans for, a variety of amenity developments within or close to the active dune system of the coastal park consistent with being a high usage area. These include a high

Figure 10: Popularity of development types for the Sumner foreshore. (Adapted from Anderson *et al*., 2012).



density of formed beach access-ways, a coastal trail, and a surf lifesaving club building and associated infrastructure;

- The presence of urban infrastructure in close proximity to the back-dune area; and
- Variation in the natural landforms which are present behind the active beach and dune system. The west end of the beach is backed by volcanic cliffs whilst at the east there is a considerable coastal plain behind the beach (now occupied by Sumner village).

These circumstances create an excellent opportunity to consider how coastal parks in constrained locations might be used for a variety of purposes and how these can be best integrated to achieve multiple benefits.

4.1 Protected area status and role of coastal vegetation

Current evidence strongly suggests that protected area status is an important aspect of effective management in addition to restoration activities where required. Protection of the plant community is particularly important due to the influence of plant cover on the size and dynamics of the sand reservoir. This includes the critical role of plants in natural dune recovery processes following periodic erosion events (Dahm *et al*., 2005).

Although the protection of sand binding species is especially important, the potential role of back-dune vegetation and coastal forest should not be overlooked. Although there has been only limited work on relationships between coastal forest and coastal protection or disaster risk reduction in New Zealand, benefits may include a degree of mitigation against rushing waters and debris flows, and against damage from wind events (Carter, 1991; Dahm *et al*., 2005; Shaw *et al*., 2012). In Japan and Sri Lanka, post-disaster studies suggest that a thick swath of coastal vegetation can produce risk reduction benefits in large events such as tsunami. In both countries governmental responses following such events have included recommendations for the re-establishment of protective coastal forests (Figure 11).

In New Zealand the protection and/or recovery of coastal forests is also a highly desirable activity for biodiversity conservation since lowland forest and coastal vegetation types are among the most heavily modified habitats on a national scale (Ministry for the Environment & Department of Conservation, 2007). When considering adaptation to climate change, the role of coastal forests could also be important assuming that landward migration of coastal riparian systems will need to occur. In coastal dune environments this is likely to involve a sequence of mobilization and redeposition of sand during storm events. Without suitable conditions sand may be transported further inland and effectively lost from the active beach system, contributing to the progressive depletion of the dune system in that location.

4.2 Spatial considerations for maintaining protected area functions

The above discussion illustrates that spatial considerations are a key management concern. These include the inland extent available for adaptation of coastal protected areas vulnerable to sea level rise. The location and style of development permitted within or adjacent to coastal protected areas may also become increasingly important to maintaining both their ecological and disaster risk reduction functions.

Post-tsunami studies in Sri Lanka found that the determination of development setback distances for mitigation of tsunami risk was complicated by small scale topographical variations that might channel water further inland (Kaplan *et al*., 2009). This demonstrates the importance of understanding the underlying landforms, and ideally accommodating these within the design of protected areas and/or development setbacks. In Christchurch similar aspects have been evident in the pattern of damage experienced in the Canterbury earthquakes which has drawn attention to avoiding areas of heightened vulnerability to natural hazards at both macro and micro scales.

The Clifton Beach site provides a useful case to consider the relative benefits of

Figure 11: Example of a coastal forest restoration programme implemented in Sri Lanka following the 2004 tsunami.

different options for hazard management, amenity, and ecological benefits, in relation to urban dune ecosystems as protected areas. The role and thus management of the coastal park is complex due to many competing interests for land use in the area, and options for adaptation are limited. Ideally, a buffer area behind the current dune system would be a feature of the coastal park, performing a climate change adaptation function with regard to the expected inland migration of the beach and dune system, whilst also contributing to amenity values through providing shade, shelter from wind, and interactions with nature (Sallis *et al*., 2006).

However, the space available is already constrained and potential coastline retreat is expected to be in the order of a 60 m migration inland for a sea level rise of 1.0 m (Tonkin & Taylor, 2013). The area affected is currently occupied by a range of infrastructure including buildings, below ground services, and a major road, and even if natural dune system migration was possible this would push the dune system hard up against coastal cliffs at the west end of the beach. Such settings challenge thinking on the longer term role of the coastal park.

The likely scenario is that dune systems will migrate inland as far as they are able until they run up against existing urban infrastructure. Where the latter is to remain within the coastal hazard zone it will require protection which may necessitate the use of hard defences or other engineering solutions for making the infrastructure more resilient to periodic events. However such hard defences must also be designed to cater for a range of event types and magnitudes over long periods, and ideally be integrated with natural environment values where possible (Granja & de Carvalho, 1995). To assist this, natural solutions such as dunes and forest may have a continuing role to play albeit within a progressively modified or ecologically 'engineered' protected area concept. This can clearly be accommodated within IUCN Category IV and VI Protected Area definitions and may be the best option for adaptive management of the existing protected areas whilst taking other resource and hazard management considerations into account.

4.3 Natural solutions within an integrated approach to hazard management

New Zealand coastal literature suggests that dune restoration should not be seen as a means of preventing natural erosion processes. These processes can become a source of 'erosion hazard', a term which refers to situations where there is likelihood of loss (e.g. of assets). However the distinction between erosion hazard and other coastal hazards is important, and there is a need for action across a range of risk concepts (Jacobson, 2004). Dunes can certainly be beneficial in short-term events, and disaster risk reduction provides a useful perspective due to its focus on short duration high intensity events.

Mitigation strategies for *future events* of this type have received less attention compared to responses to longer term coastal erosion trends. This may in part be due to experiences of loss being a key driver behind the development of risk management responses in general (Dahm, 2002), compounded in New Zealand by an absence of large magnitude coastal disaster events in recent history.

In contrast, Japan has had a long history in both recovery from tsunami and the use of coastal protected areas for disaster risk reduction. Evidence from post-disaster studies suggests that structural protection benefits from sand and soil accumulation around the footings of hard defences, and potentially also from bio-shields, may be of benefit in catastrophic events (Feagin *et al*., 2010; Harada & Imamura, 2005; Tanaka, 2009). In the case of the 2011 tsunamis many coastal defences that were engineered to withstand tsunami were instead toppled by the force of the initial waves, leading to the perception that complementary and overlapping lines of defences may be a better option for disaster risk reduction (Renaud & Murti, 2013; Shaw *et al*., 2012).

Studies elsewhere have also concluded that hard defences may not provide a long-term solution when used in isolation due to maintenance problems, or being undermined by repeated exposure to hazard events (Granja & de Carvalho, 1995; Tonkin & Taylor, 2013). Even in constrained locations the presence of a dune ecosystem can facilitate the accumulation and seaward advance of sand deposits following periodic erosion events (Dahm, 2011). This in turn may improve the risk reduction attributes of an engineered system in relation to the range of hazard types that may be the subject of a future event.

5. Conclusions

This case study demonstrates a range of possibilities and issues for managing coastal protected areas for disaster risk reduction in a manner compatible with other resource management and conservation objectives. Key aspects include responding to current threats whilst also planning for future scenarios in a dynamic environment. For dune ecosystems the protection, and where necessary re-establishment of appropriate vegetation is an example of where protected area status has an important role to play. Specific management interventions are typically required to address threats to key system attributes and this is exemplified by the critical role of natural dune rebuilding processes between storm events and the plant communities that facilitate them.

Coastal systems also exemplify the importance of spatial considerations for effective protected area management. This includes attention to adjacent land uses and requires a particular focus on the land available to maintain or restore natural values. In addition to opportunities for engineering anthropogenic benefits, spatial adaptation of the natural system must be taken into account. In situations where the land availability is limited, a combination of hard, soft, and 'green' engineering approaches may offer the best approach to disaster risk reduction whilst also providing some opportunity to maintain the natural and other values of coastal areas. However forward-thinking strategic planning is perhaps the most essential activity to reduce the number of areas potentially exposed to these difficulties and ensure that there is room for the inland migration of coastal systems wherever possible.

At sites such as Clifton Beach spatial constraints could lead to the loss of the natural coastal dune system. To address this there are possibilities for hybrid configurations to retain some values and benefits, such as supporting the front face of a fore-dune by a line of hard defences. Where spatial availability leads to the complete loss of opportunities for natural riparian systems it is important to recognize that the reliability of hard defences may also become questionable in large magnitude events. This suggests greater emphasis on managed retreat of infrastructure as the best long-term solution where possible, and in turn places greater emphasis on forward thinking land-use planning as a key activity for coastal management. In this respect coastal protected areas and 'green infrastructure' can be expected to have an important and continuing role to play as inland migration of coastal systems occurs. To address adaptation needs it makes sense to plan for plausible scenarios now to enable the greatest range of mitigation measures to be usefully employed.

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