



From every angle Mount Taranaki dominates the landscape.

## OUR LANDSCAPE, HERITAGE AND AMENITY VALUES

Taranaki's landscapes, historic heritage and amenity values are important aspects of the environment because they contribute to our quality and enjoyment of life. These features or values hold important social, emotional, historical or cultural significance to people living within and outside the region – and they make Taranaki unique. They are also important economically, attracting many domestic and international visitors to the region.

Mount Taranaki, a landscape of national and international significance, dominates the Taranaki landscape and is the subject of many pictures and postcards. Taranaki's rural hill country landscapes, coastal and marine natural features and rivers and lakes are also distinctive and highly valued. They form an integral part of the region's identity, natural character and appeal. Many have cultural significance for Māori.

The Taranaki region has significant historic heritage resources that provide important links with the past and contribute to an understanding of our history. Historic buildings, structures, places, wāhi tapu and other sites have archaeological, historic, architectural and cultural value. For example, many pre-European archaeological sites include middens, ovens, village or pā sites and urupā (burial grounds). Remnants of early European history include features associated with timber extraction, railway construction, land wars and dairying.

Various use and development activities can impact on landscape, heritage and amenity values. For example, increasing levels of subdivision and building development can impact on landscape values. Site-specific developments may affect wāhi tapu, archaeological sites, heritage buildings and neighbourhood amenity values. Activities such as building, quarrying, logging, grazing and roading development can have varying effects depending on the scale and location of the activity and the degree of sensitivity of the surrounding environment in which

the development takes place. Some development activities can also enhance historic and amenity values by protecting or improving those values.

One of the challenges of effectively managing landscape, heritage and amenity values is that it is often hard to define these values. There may also be a lack of information and awareness of important sites or values. For example, archaeological sites may show indistinct surface features not easily recognised by landowners or may not be visible under vegetation. Good information is necessary to define sites, areas or values, and advice and assistance to landowners and owners of heritage buildings or structures are required to assist in the protection of these values.

## 7.1 WHAT IS THE STATE OF NATURAL FEATURES AND LANDSCAPES?

The term 'landscape' refers generally to a combination of traits that distinguish a particular area. These include landform (which reflects topography, geology etc.), land cover (including vegetation and water bodies) and land use (such as farming). Spiritual and cultural associations that give added meaning to places are also components of landscape<sup>1</sup>.

The protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use and development is a matter of national importance under the Resource Management Act. However, there is no universally accepted definition of outstanding natural features and landscapes. What is outstanding is a subjective judgement which depends on social and cultural perceptions. Landscape is an aspect of the environment that includes natural and physical features as well as social and cultural factors. Important criteria for assessing the significance of natural features and landscapes include:

- natural science factors such as geology and topography and ecological and dynamic components;
- aesthetic values, including memorability and naturalness;
- expressiveness – how obviously the landscape demonstrates the formative processes leading to it;
- transient values such as the occasional presence of wildlife or its values at certain times of the day or year;
- value to tangata whenua; and
- historical associations<sup>2</sup>.

Because landscape assessment involves subjective judgements, it is not possible to apply strictly quantitative measures to describe the current state or condition of natural features and landscapes in Taranaki. However, there are recognised techniques of assessment and evaluation used by landscape architects and other experts in the field. We do know through various studies, public surveys and consultation processes that many natural features and landscapes in Taranaki are highly valued for their scenic, visual or aesthetic appeal or for their social, cultural and historical associations. We know that Mount Taranaki is a landscape of national and international significance<sup>3</sup> and that many other features and landscapes maintain a quality and condition that make them of regional significance.

1 Ministry for the Environment, 2000. *The Impact of Development on Rural Landscape Values*.  
2 Pigeon Bay Aquaculture Ltd v Canterbury Regional Council 1999 NZRMA 209, Environment Court.  
3 Department of Conservation, 2002. *Egmont National Park Management Plan 2002-2012*

District councils in Taranaki play a primary role in managing and protecting landscapes, historic heritage and amenity values.

### (A) SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPES IN THE NEW PLYMOUTH DISTRICT

Mount Taranaki and the Kaitake and Pouākai ranges within the Egmont National Park are identified in the *New Plymouth District Plan* as outstanding landscapes within the district. The plan considers that these landscapes are not under threat from current activities although larger scale developments within the park could have adverse visual effects.

The plan also identifies the following regionally significant landscapes:

- Coastal terrace between Mohakatino and Whitecliffs;
- Whitecliffs and associated conservation forest;
- Sugar Loaf Islands and Paritūtū; and
- eight river mouths: Mohakatino, Tongaporutu, Mimi, Urenui, Ōnaero, Waiongana, Tapuae and Stony (Hangatahua).

The plan notes that while threats to these landscapes are low, there is the possibility of development activities, such as the construction of buildings, that would have high visual impacts on these landscapes.

In 2006, the New Plymouth District Council undertook a review of changes in rural landscape character in the district since 1995<sup>4</sup> to contribute to an upcoming review of provisions in the district plan relating to the rural area. The review concluded that generally landscape qualities and values had not significantly changed (Table 7.1). However, landscape values of the ring plain, particularly on the northern slopes of Mount Taranaki and the Pouākai and Kaitake Ranges had been affected to some degree by increased building density, and whilst this area had not lost all its rural character it was an area in transition from a purely rural area to something else.



Mimi River mouth.

Table 7.1 Changes in rural landscape character in New Plymouth District since 1995<sup>4</sup>.

Landscape unit	Observed changes
Mount Taranaki	No noticeable change to landscape qualities or values
Pouākai and Kaitake Ranges	No noticeable changes
Sugar Loaf Islands and Paritūtū	No changes observed in the past 11 years
Coastal terraces and hills: Whitecliffs north to Mohakatino	No significant changes identified
Whitecliffs: cliffs and coastal hills	No noticeable changes
River mouths north of New Plymouth	Very little change has occurred. In one or two places an additional bach has been added but otherwise these landscapes remain unchanged
Eastern hill country–bush	No noticeable changes except for some new landslips
Eastern hill country–mixed uses	Some new buildings have been introduced but have not adversely affected landscape qualities and values
Frontal hill country and Waititi coastal hills	Some additional buildings on the slopes above the Mimi River mouth but pastoral farming activities prevail
Ring plain	Landscape change has occurred which has affected landscape character and values. New development and scattered buildings have occurred up to the bush line of Mount Taranaki and the northern slopes of the Pouākai and Kaitake Ranges. Building density has increased since 1995 and is beginning to affect the area's rural and landscape character. The area is showing signs of becoming a 'threshold area' - an area in transition from a rural character
Waititi coastal flat	Small amount of new development to the east of the Mimi River mouth around Urenui and at Waitoetoe and Waititi Stream mouth
Waitara coastal plain	Retains a mixed use character – Motunui plant, settlements, railways, factories and airport as well as pasture, rivers and streams. Highly visible by residents and state highway traffic

4 LA4 Landscape Architects, 2006. *Review of the New Plymouth District Landscape Assessment*. Report to the New Plymouth District Council.



Mount Taranaki and rural landscape, Stratford District.

## (B) SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPES IN THE STRATFORD DISTRICT

Mount Taranaki and the Egmont National Park dominate the landscape in the Stratford District. The hill country in the eastern portion of the district also possesses significant scenic natural features and landscape qualities. Scenic landscape qualities of particular significance include views of Mount Taranaki from State Highway 3, Pembroke Road, Monmouth Road, Opunake Road and Manaia Road north of Opunake Road and the views of both the mountain and the hill country from Sangsters Hill and from the Strathmore, Pohokura, Whangamomona and Tāhora Saddles along State Highway 43.

There have been some developments along State Highway 3 in the past five years but these have not had significant adverse effects overall on landscape qualities.

## (C) SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPES IN THE SOUTH TARANAKI DISTRICT

Mount Taranaki is visible from many parts of the South Taranaki District and so, not surprisingly is regarded as a significant landscape feature. Other key landscape features in the district include:

- the Egmont National park noted for its significant indigenous forest and associated habitat;
- the volcanic ring plain surrounding the mountain including the distinctive lahar mounds in the northern part of the district;
- the coastal strip which runs the entire length of the western and southern boundaries of the district and includes dunelands and uplifted marine terraces;
- the rivers flowing from the mountain in a distinctive radial pattern; and
- the rugged eastern hill country comprising strongly rolling to steeply dissected hills.

These natural features and landscapes contribute to the high quality of the environment in the South Taranaki District and feature prominently in what residents like most about living in South Taranaki<sup>9</sup>.

The South Taranaki District Council is to undertake a landscape assessment of the district to enable it to protect and enhance outstanding landscapes from the adverse environmental effects of activities in the future.

## 7.2 WHAT IS THE STATE OF HISTORIC HERITAGE?

The protection of historic heritage from inappropriate subdivision, use and development is a matter of national importance under the Resource Management Act. The relationship of Māori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral lands, water, sites, wāhi tapu and other taonga is also a matter of national importance that must be recognised and provided for.

A total of 1,345 heritage buildings, structures or items have been identified by the three district councils (Table 7.2), a reduction from the 1,405 sites identified in the 2003 *State of the Environment Report*<sup>6</sup>. Heritage buildings include houses, churches, towers, memorials and commercial buildings. Historic heritage items identified include a wide range of elements important to the district's historic heritage and which may be architectural, cultural, historic, scientific or technological in nature.



Mount Taranaki and lahar mounds, coastal South Taranaki.

<sup>5</sup> Hastings, A and N. Newman, 2008. *Taranaki Community Survey: Report to the Future Taranaki Facilitation Group by the Nielsen Company.*  
<sup>6</sup> Taranaki Regional Council, 2003. *Taranaki-Our Place, Our Future. Report on the State of the Taranaki Environment - 2003*