

INTRODUCTION

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THE PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) regional councils like the Taranaki Regional Council are required to monitor the overall state of the environment of the region. Monitoring the state of the environment is important because it tells the Council and the wider community how successful we have been as a community in promoting the sole purpose of the RMA – the sustainable management of our natural and physical resources. While the report looks back on environmental trends and changes over the past five to 10 years or more, its fundamental outlook is forward looking. It will help us answer such questions as:

- in what direction is our environment heading?;
- have our policies and programmes been effective in promoting sustainable management and will they continue to be effective in the future?; and
- what changes are required and what standard of environmental quality do we wish to see in Taranaki?

The purpose of this report is therefore to provide high quality environmental information that is accessible and understandable to the Taranaki community at large, and upon which sound resource management decisions can be based in future.

THE CONTENT OF THE REPORT

The content of this report primarily reflects the responsibilities that local government has under the RMA. Under the RMA regional councils are responsible for:

- the control and management of water, air and land (in relation to land for the purposes of soil conservation and the avoidance or mitigation of natural hazards);
- the control of the coastal marine area (in conjunction with the Minister of Conservation);
- the control of the discharge of contaminants into the environment;
- the control of the use of river and lake beds; and
- the establishment and implementation of policies and methods for maintaining indigenous biological diversity.

District councils are responsible for:

- the integrated management of the effects of the use, development or protection of land such as development and subdivision;
- the avoidance or mitigation of natural hazards;
- the management of storing, using, disposing and transporting hazardous substances; and
- the maintenance of indigenous biological diversity.

Objectives and policies for managing resource management issues and land use effects that are of regional significance ie: issues of importance to the region as a whole are set out in the *Regional Policy Statement for Taranaki 1994* and the reviewed *Proposed Regional Policy Statement for*

Taranaki released in 2006. Some of these issues, such as those dealing with natural features and landscapes, historic heritage and amenity values and the natural character of the coast, arise from the effects of land use which are dealt with largely by district councils. However, the Taranaki Regional Council has adopted policy on these issues in accordance with its statutory functions.

While Local Government manages a diverse range of responsibilities in relation to the environment as a whole, some aspects are managed by central government agencies such as the Ministry for Agriculture and Forestry, the Ministry of Fisheries and the Department of Conservation. Where information was easily obtained on environmental matters that are not strictly under the management of Local Government, such as the management of fish stocks, or changes in the condition of the conservation estate, this has been included in this report. However, the primary focus is reporting on the state of those aspects of the environment managed under the Resource Management Act.

The report has 11 chapters as follows:

1. INTRODUCTION

The Introduction provides an outline of the purpose, content and organisation of the report.

2. TARANAKI – THE PEOPLE AND THE PLACE

This chapter contains a brief outline of the natural and physical features of the region, its human history and development and social and economic characteristics. Such information provides a context vital for understanding environmental conditions, pressures and responses in Taranaki.

3. LAND, SOIL AND BIODIVERSITY

This chapter addresses soil erosion and soil health issues and the management of contaminated sites and hazardous substances. Biodiversity, or biological diversity, means the variability among living organisms and the ecological complexes of which they are a part. The biodiversity section of this chapter looks at biodiversity on land.

4. FRESH WATER

The chapter on fresh water considers a wide range of issues relating to fresh water, rivers and lakes. Reporting on water quality considers the effects of point and diffuse source discharges on water quality in rivers, streams and lakes and forms a major part of this chapter. Water quantity is addressed from the point of view of water flows, use and availability. Also reported on are groundwater quantity and quality. Fresh water biodiversity, in terms of ecosystems (rivers and wetlands), invertebrates and fish, is considered. Finally, public use and access to rivers and lakes are examined.

5. COASTAL AND MARINE ENVIRONMENT

This chapter discusses coastal water quality, natural character of the coast, biodiversity of the coastal marine area and public use and access to the coast. Coastal erosion is addressed in the Natural Hazards chapter.

6. ATMOSPHERE

This chapter addresses overall air quality in Taranaki as well as issues surrounding greenhouse gases and climate change.

7. LANDSCAPE, HERITAGE AND AMENITY VALUES

This chapter looks at Taranaki's natural landscape features, historic heritage resources such as our historic buildings and places and archaeological sites and amenity values – those things that make up or detract from an enjoyable and pleasant living environment.

8. NATURAL HAZARDS

The chapter on natural hazards reports on the main natural hazards in Taranaki – flooding, volcanic activity, earthquakes, high winds and land instability and erosion, including coastal erosion.

9. WASTE

This chapter looks at the situation with regard to waste and how it is managed in Taranaki.

10. ENERGY

This chapter looks at energy production, distribution and use in Taranaki. It looks at both renewable and non-renewable sources of energy.

11. TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

This concluding chapter draws together the underlying directions of and approaches to managing the environment described in the previous chapters and comments on what this means for sustainable development in future.

HOW THE REPORT IS ORGANISED

Each of the chapters 3 to 10 covers particular aspects of the environment, for example, land and soil, fresh water and the coastal and marine environment. Each chapter:

- begins with an opening scene-setting introduction which explains why this part of the environment is significant for Taranaki people, and what the major pressures on the environment are;
- describes the current state of each aspect of the environment – core information is presented on the state of the environment and key trends or changes over time;

- outlines the management responses to environmental conditions now and in the future. Information is presented on what is being done now to address issues raised in the preceding text and what might be done in future;
- provides a summary of progress in implementing regional objectives and policies in relation to the chapter topic; and
- provides regional comparisons where relevant information is available. This information enables comparisons to be made between environmental conditions and trends in Taranaki and other parts of New Zealand.

The organisation of the report follows the Pressure-State-Response model widely adopted overseas in state of the environment reporting. The report format is similar to that adopted for the Council's previous state of the environment reports in 2003 and 1996. However, the format has been revised slightly by bringing to the front of each chapter, the values of and pressures on that aspect of the environment, that in previous reports were spread throughout each subsection of each chapter. This provides readers with a broad context for each chapter, for example on fresh water, before information is presented on the state or condition of the environment and management responses.

PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION

The Taranaki Regional Council has had the benefit of another five years of data collection and analysis since it last reported in 2003. In a number of cases data has now been collected over a sufficiently long time period specifically for state of the environment monitoring purposes to enable statistically robust, long-term trend analysis to be undertaken. This was generally not the case for the Council's 2003 report. Trend analysis can indicate with a high degree of certainty whether the data collected is showing an improvement or deterioration (or no change) in environmental conditions.

The New Plymouth, Stratford and South Taranaki district councils have assisted in the preparation of this report by providing information on environmental conditions and trends for which they are responsible. Other agencies or organisations such as the Department of Conservation and Ministry of Fisheries have similarly assisted in this way. Dozens of businesses, industries, individuals and community groups have contributed information on their environmental work including information for case studies and information on their level of spending on environmental improvements over the last five years.

Information provided from all such sources has been a valuable addition to the report enabling the Council to present relevant and up-to-date information to the community. Those who have contributed to this report through providing information or in other ways are acknowledged at the beginning of the report.

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Every attempt has been made to present the information in a form that is understandable to the community. At the beginning of most chapters there is a box entitled 'At a glance'. This provides a very short summary of the key points contained in the chapter. Throughout the chapters, information is provided with a reference (footnote) to reports or databases containing more detailed information for those who want it. Wherever possible, maps, diagrams and photographs have been used to demonstrate environmental conditions and trends. Case studies of particular programmes or examples are presented for added interest and to showcase practical examples of the Taranaki community 'at work' on protecting and enhancing the environment in which we live.

SUMMARY REPORT

Much of the information presented in the following report is of technical and scientific nature. Furthermore, the report has endeavoured to be comprehensive, covering environmental issues of interest or concern to the Taranaki community. It is therefore a relatively large document. The Council has also summarised the main findings of the report to present to a wide audience including schools and community groups.

WEBSITE

The full report and summary document are available on the Taranaki Regional Council website www.trc.govt.nz.

CONTACTING THE TARANAKI REGIONAL COUNCIL

If you wish to contact the Council on matters raised in the report you can do so by

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by writing to the Council at:

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Stratford

or by calling into the Council offices at 47 Cloten Road, Stratford.