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WHANGAREI DISTRICT COUNCIL COASTAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

VISIONARY LEADERS OVERVIEW

The recent changes to the Resource Management Act and the Local Government Act provide more emphasis on community consultation. The Whangarei District Council (WDC) is striving to be visionary leaders to achieve innovation and excellence in strategic planning and in public consultation.

Whangarei District Council is well on the way, with being awarded the New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI) Award of Merit ('A meritorious contribution to the theory or practice of planning'), two years in a row. The first for the Council's Monitoring Strategy undertaken in house, and the most recent in conjunction with Beca Planning, for the Whangarei Coastal Management Strategy.

The Council's mission statement is 'creating the ultimate living environment'. In order to work towards this mission statement the Council has

adopted values including communication, customer first, valuing employees and partnerships, innovation and excellence and visionary leadership. The Council's mission statement also links into the five community outcomes which include 'a community which enjoys and treasures its natural and cultural values'.

The Council's Policy and Monitoring Division is working on achieving this through many of its current projects. The Council has achieved this with both the success of the Monitoring Strategy and Coastal Management Strategy, and is now undertaking an Urban Growth Strategy, as well as the Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP). The Council is leading the country in the concept of having a GE Free zone from the top of the North Island to West Auckland, and Council is currently involved with the Environmental Defense Society in



Sandy Bay, a popular spot for holiday makers. (Photo copyright Malcolm Pullman.)

the preparation of Landscape Guidelines which will become a best practice document for landscape planning.

THE COASTAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Whangarei District Council's jurisdiction includes 270km of coastline along the north eastern North Island. The coastline consists of a large expanse of diverse coastal landforms which have significant natural, cultural, recreational, economic and heritage values. The coastal environment is perhaps the most treasured feature of the Whangarei District. In recognition of increasing concern over the possible threats to the natural character and values of the coastal environment, it was a Council decision to undertake the development of a Coastal Management Strategy, to ensure that these important values and resources are managed in an integrated way for both present and future generations.

The Whangarei District Council engaged Beca Planning as consultants and project leaders to undertake the formation of the Coastal Management Strategy.

The purpose of the Strategy is to set broad policy and direction for the use, management and protection of the Districts coastal environment for the next 20-50 years with local level planning occurring through the implementation of the Structure plans. The Strategy is a living strategic document and is an integral part of achieving the Council's mission statement of 'creating the ultimate living environment.' The Strategy fits into a hierarchy of Council documents, and with other strategic documents feeds into the District Plan, bylaws, management plans and so on.

COASTAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGY POLICY DEVELOPMENT - COMMUNITY DRIVEN

The formation of the Coastal Management Strategy and associated structure plans were essentially a community driven process and were developed through a 'bottom-up approach'. First the views and values of the Districts people and the members of the local communities were sought; in turn shaping the vision and mission statements for the Strategy which provides the foundation for the objective and policy direction. Strategic objectives and policies were formulated to achieve the vision and mission statements. The Strategy and structure plans are based on integrated management and the fundamental concept of partnership between the

Council and the wider Whangarei community. The success of the Strategy will rely, not only on Council initiatives, but with the integrated management with outside agencies including community groups and also on a strong sense of community ownership and kaitiakitanga.

A wide range of consultation techniques were used to engage the wider Whangarei Community in the process, with the focus on participation. Consultation included community questionnaires, beach-user surveys (where Council staff went out to engage with the public), a series of workshops, a number of hui, a community newsletter providing regular updates, information published in the local newspapers and on the Council's website, and meetings with interest groups and landowners as requested. The purpose of this consultation centered on exploring issues and concerns in regard to the coast and possible ideas for better management. Communities were also asked to develop a vision for the Whangarei Coast as a whole, as well as visions for the local areas.

Consultation also occurred with other groups and agencies; a statutory agency Liaison group was established to discuss the draft Strategy and background technical papers with the Northland Regional Council (NRC) and the Department of Conservation (DOC). Workshops were also held with the Councillors to establish their feedback, and a central District wide stakeholder forum was also held with key community stakeholder groups. This formed the base for the formation of the Strategy. The Strategy then went out to the public as a draft document asking for public feedback (submission) and comment. Once feedback was received amendments were made accordingly and the Strategy was adopted by Council as policy in September 2002.

The second stage of the process was the development of the 'high priority' area structure plans. This was undertaken through an extensive two stage consultation process again focusing on community participation.

Stage One focused on translating the District Wide Strategy at a local level and developing a list of issues, concerns, opportunities and constraints for the structure plan area over the next 20 years.

Prior to the consultation workshops an information pack was sent out to each household in each structure plan area, containing an invitation to a workshop, 'ideas catcher map' for people to draw on (enabling issues and options to be developed), and a series of prompt questions used to stimulate ideas, and raise any issues or concerns related to that particular area. People were urged to send in

their information if they could not attend and the workshops were widely publicised in local papers, mail box drops, radio adverts and posters in shops areas.

Consultation was undertaken in a workshop format over two hours. After a short introduction, the bulk of the time was spent working in small groups with blank paper, ideas catcher maps and base maps to record ideas generated. Towards the end of the exercise each table were asked to prioritise their top 3-5 ideas/ issues and report these back to the group generating priorities for the workshop as a whole. Overall there was a strong consensus about the key issues concerning people, however, because all maps and information was collected, it enabled all participants to have their views, ideas and issues recorded.

From the outcomes of the first round of consultation, draft structure plans were developed for each area. The second stage of consultation included taking the draft structure plans back out to the community, for comment and feedback. Each household received a copy of the draft structure plan and an invitation to a drop in centre, where people could turn up at any stage over a 2 hour period to view the maps and discuss any ideas or concerns, with the study team. Feedback packs and prioritisation questionnaires were available for later return (these feedback packs were pre addressed and stamped, to encourage responses).

In addition to these the public consultation rounds, numerous one-on-one meetings were held with landowners, environmental or interest groups with particular concerns, and specific consultation was also undertaken with the Department of Conservation and the Northland Regional Council. Following feedback received from the drop-in centres the draft structure plans were amended accordingly, and both the structure plans and accompanied implementation reports were adopted as policy by Council in November 2003.

The Whangarei District Council, through forward planning has undertaken a community driven, broad strategic approach toward the integrated management of the coastal environment, for both present and future generations with the formation of the Whangarei District Council Coastal Management Strategy and associated structure plans. The Strategy and associated structure plans set a benchmark for community based planning and provide an example of best practice for other local authorities facing similar pressures throughout New Zealand.

For more information visit the Council's website www.wdc.govt.nz