

ISSUES

Introduction

This Chapter 7 provides a policy framework for managing the District’s rural land resource. The Chapter prioritises the use of productive land, especially high value productive land, for plant and animal production purposes, while providing for other activities that occur in rural areas on less productive land.

The recent Rural Land Use and Subdivision (RLUS) review culminated in Plan Change 60 (PC60) which was made operative in June 2019. PC60 comprehensively revised the policy set and rules for rural areas. PC60 confirmed that we continue to protect our highest quality land for productive use and avoid urban development on highly productive land where other feasible options exist for locating urban growth. PC60 also confirmed that we continue protection for rural character and rural landscapes. It is too soon to evaluate the outcomes of the PC60 provisions. The findings and recommendations of the RLUS review and the steps taken by PC60 to implement the recommendations are summarised at the end of this two pager.

PC60 did not review: (i) Coastal Tasman Area; (ii) Integrity of the spatial pattern of rural zoning; (iii) Rural landscape values; and (iv) Rural Residential zone minimum lot sizes. Consequently, the scope of this current assessment is limited to these topics. CTA is the subject of a separate report.

Spatial pattern of zoning

PC60 increased the rigour of the policy framework but did not review the integrity of the spatial zone boundaries. This may be reducing Plan efficiency, if not effectiveness. This Plan review provides a timely opportunity to address the issue and to ensure that spatial zone boundaries correctly reflect the underlying value and established use of the land. Currently the process of updating the productive land classification is underway. This TRMP review also provides an opportunity to identify new Rural Residential and Rural Industrial locations needed to support district growth.

Rural production landscapes

The current broad policy approach to rural character provides little guidance to decision makers regarding what values are to be protected as there are different types of ‘rural production (working) landscapes’ in the district, often with differing values (e.g. plantation forestry, pastoral farming, dairying and intensive horticulture). Rural character and amenity is key to the assessment of the impacts of further subdivision and development on the surrounding environment. Further breakdown of landscapes and their associated values may provide better guidance to decision makers; improve the quality and consistency of decision making; and result in better environmental outcomes.

Rural Residential zone minimum lot sizes

Review of Rural Residential zone minimum lot sizes in relation to rural or rural residential character and amenity is needed for several reasons:

- (i) The site sizes are largely legacy sizes carried through from earlier plans or based on wastewater servicing capability of the various locations. Since the inception of the TRMP, wastewater system technology has advanced, enabling smaller site sizes.
- (ii) The current policy approach directs rural lifestyle development to the Rural Residential zone or Rural 3 zone where the land is not of high productive value. It also directs the efficient use of these zones for this purpose.
- (iii) The protection of productive land is not a primary concern within the Rural Residential zone but adverse effects of residential activity on local character in the rural environment and cross boundary effects on neighbouring productive activity are a concern.

MANDATORY STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Relevant amendments to the RMA - Councils must deem “boundary activities” to be permitted if criteria are met. This includes affected neighbours’ written approval. It may reduce effectiveness of setback provisions designed to minimize cross boundary and reverse sensitivity effects.

Proposed National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land, 2019 (NPS-HPL) - This NPS is expected to take effect mid 2020. TRMP provisions provide an example of how HPL is to be managed in line with the proposed NPS, in that framework for the district’s rural area is based on the productive capacity of the land and soil resources. TRMP chapter 7 and chapter 6.2 provisions will need review to ensure they align with the final NPS-HPL.

National Environmental Standards for Plantation Forestry, 2018 (NES-PF) - Plantation forestry is relevant to the rural objectives and policy in context of production effects. The rural zone rules have specific rule sets relating to Plantation Forests, Horticultural Plantings, and Spray and Shelter Belts. These need review in context of the NES-PF.

RECOMMENDATIONS

High Level Direction of Change

- We continue to protect our highest quality land for productive use and avoid urban development on highly productive land where other feasible options exist for locating urban growth.
- We also continue to protect rural character and rural landscapes.

Recommendations

1. Spatial pattern of zoning –

Update Tasman’s productive land classification system and review current rural zone boundaries when the updated land classification is available.

2. Rural production landscapes –

Do further work to break down rural landscape types and their associated values.

3. Rural Residential minimum lot sizes -

Review the Rural Residential zone minimum lot sizes in relation to effects on rural residential character within the zone and rural character and amenity in the surrounding rural environment and effective management of wastewater charges.

4. Proposed NPS-HPL - Review plan provisions to ensure they align with the final NPS.

5. NES PF - Review Plan provisions regarding “Plantation Forests, Horticultural Plantings, and Spray and Shelter Belts” for relevance and clarity in context of the NES.

Rural Land Use and Subdivision review, 2013 and PC60, 2019 - Findings and recommendations of the RLUS review and the steps taken by PC60 to implement the recommendations (not part of current review)

1. Managing the effects of land fragmentation on the productive value of land and protecting productive opportunity - Chapter 7.1

The review found that for the productive zones Rural 1 and 2, the policy set was largely achieving the 7.1.2 objective of avoiding the loss of productive land, but this was less evident for high productive land. Land uses and activities that are ‘non soil-based’ were increasing on high productive land. There was also an overall trend toward an increase in the number of small titles. A further issue was that the subdivision rules did not match the strength of the policy set, and key definitions required updating.

Review recommended a raft of changes to address the issues - which PC60 implemented including: (i) Strengthened policy framework to further protect productive opportunity in both Rural 1 and 2 zones and provision for more flexible living opportunities without subdivision.

Rule changes included: (v) a new subdivision regime designed to limit subdivision of productive land into the future; (vi) improved setback from boundary rules; (vii) further encouragement for amalgamation of land titles to improve productivity; and (viii) policy guidance regarding the effects of small lot subdivision on productivity.

2. Providing opportunities for a range of activities other than plant and animal production in rural areas - Chapter 7.2

The review considered the chapter 7.2 policies moderately successful in that the TRMP identifies specific zones (Rural Residential, Rural Industrial) for other key 'non soil' based activities that occur in rural areas. However, as mentioned above, land cover data and resource consent information showed the continued urbanisation of productive land, particularly Rural 1 land.

The review recommended a raft of changes to address the issues - which PC60 implemented, including: (i) clarifying that activities other than plant and animal production activity were provided for in specific zoned locations (Rural Residential and Rural 3 (where land not of high productive value) for rural lifestyle living and Rural Industrial zones for industrial activities with a functional need to locate in a rural area); (ii) stronger policy discouragement for business activities that were not related to plant and animal production activity; (iii) new policy framework for zoned rural residential development; and (iv) policy reaffirmation that adequate separation of incompatible activities was needed.

Rule changes included: (v) improved inter-rural zone setback rules; and (vi) reduction in the consent status for subdivision below the minimum lot size in the Rural Residential zone.

3. Managing the effects of activities in rural areas, including cross boundary and reverse-sensitivity effects, and effects on rural character and amenity values - Chapter 7.4

The review highlighted that for the Rural 1, 2 and Rural Residential zones, the policies lacked specific focus on rural character and amenity matters particularly in relation to cumulative effects and the subdivision and use of small lots.

The review recommended changes to address the issues - which PC60 implemented, including: (i) policy guidance regarding the effects of small lot subdivision on rural character and amenity; and (ii) improved inter-zone setbacks.

PC60 implemented the substantive recommendations relating to 7.4 policy objective set, whereas recommendations relating to the rationalising and streamlining of the policy set with the Chapter 9.2 Landscape provisions were not. These are recommended for attention in this review.