

Looking After the Natural Environment



A guide to protecting environmental values
when preparing resource consent applications



Introduction

This guide seeks to help you to identify natural environmental values that might be affected by your resource consent application. Under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), an Assessment of Environmental Effects (AEE) must accompany **every** application for resource consent. This guide will help you ensure that your AEE contains the information we need to know to process your application promptly and accurately. Further sources of assistance are listed at the end of the document.

Environmental values and the Resource Management Act 1991

An important part of the purpose of the RMA is to “safeguard the life-supporting capacity of air, water, soil, and ecosystems”. The way that the RMA deals with natural environmental values is by focusing on **habitats**. The protection of areas of significant native vegetation and habitats of native animals is an important factor under the RMA, and needs to be addressed where relevant in resource consent applications.

Habitats are the physical surrounds where native plants and animals occur.



Careful development of this type of site would retain as much vegetation as possible.



The value of this vegetation might be overlooked. It supports several threatened species of birds and lizards.

Habitat for native animals under the RMA is not just areas of native vegetation, but other areas where vegetation is not often disturbed. That is why environmental values are not only found in native vegetation, but all areas of potential habitat for native animals such as lizards, birds and insects.

As a consent authority Rodney District Council is responsible for processing land use and subdivision resource consents. One of the Council's functions under the RMA is the "maintenance of indigenous biological diversity". This means that when processing resource consent applications, an important consideration for us is whether the application will cause the **variety** or **number** of native plants and animals to diminish - whether "environmental values" will be diminished.

"Indigenous Biodiversity" means the numbers and variety of native plants and animals.

An application which demonstrates that it will maintain or improve indigenous biodiversity will be considered more favourably than applications which threaten biodiversity.

Will your proposal affect environmental values?

Any effects of your proposal on environmental values need to be identified in the AEE. The AEE should give ways that the effects can be avoided, remedied or mitigated.

A proposal might be positive in terms of the effect of the activity on natural values. An example might be where a development proposal involves developing surface water ponding for stormwater, in place of existing underground services (such works would increase the habitat available for native plants or animals).

Examples of adverse effects on environmental values include:

- a reduction in the amount of natural vegetation
- the pollution of waterways
- the draining of wet areas
- the introduction of noise, pests, roads or other things that disturb sensitive areas, or
- any other adverse impact on habitats.

If there is not enough information about effects of the proposal on environmental values, the resource consent application could be delayed, either by a request for further information from the reporting planner, or by the application being rejected on grounds of being incomplete.

How do I recognise areas with environmental values?

Environmental values occur in the habitats of native plants and animals - the places where native plants and animals can establish and thrive. Some habitats are obvious, such as native forest. Other habitats are less apparent but any impacts on the habitats should be addressed in your AEE. Areas which typically make good habitat include:

- The coastal margin
- Water bodies and their margins (lakes and streams)
- Swamps (often on the margin of a water body)
- Areas of relatively undisturbed vegetation (shrub-land, its margins, "scrub", forest).

Photographs of areas with environmental values in Rodney are provided in this guide. An important resource for identifying large significant areas of habitat in Rodney is the District Plan. The Plan contains maps showing the locations of Significant Natural Areas. However, there are other areas not mapped in the District Plan which have environmental values, and which should be considered when preparing your AEE. For these, you should refer to the "Additional Information" section of this brochure, or contact us here at the council.



These wetland areas have high habitat value, good diversity of native plants, and lend themselves to weed control and other compensatory measures.

How do I maintain natural values?

As a rule of thumb, areas supporting native plants and animals should be no worse off as a result of the activity for which resource consent is sought. Environmental values could be diminished by a proposed development in a number of ways. Therefore in your application for resource consent, think about ways to either avoid impacts to environmental values, or to compensate for the impacts.

Examples of avoiding or compensating for adverse impacts on environmental values are:

- > Avoiding disturbance to natural areas by thoughtful subdivision design/ layout of lots and demonstrating how the development will minimise impact on existing natural values.
- > Minimising earthworks and maintaining or restoring natural drainage patterns and wetland areas.
- > Planting appropriate native species to:
 1. enhance stream banks
 2. enhance swampy areas
 3. enhance scrub or forest
 4. join fragments of existing vegetation.
- > Fence areas with natural values to exclude pests and reduce disturbance.
- > Manage natural areas by weeding, controlling possums and other pests.
- > Fauna, capture & relocation programmes.

Obtain expert advice

If you think your proposal might have adverse effects on environmental values, and you are unsure how best to avoid, remedy or mitigate the impact of your activity, expert advice can help to:

- Confirm whether the environmental values are significant; and
- To identify ways that effects can be avoided or otherwise compensated for.

Experts who can assist include planners, biologists, environmental consultants and ecologists.



An example of a streamside reserve created upon subdivision.

Additional information sources

Rodney District Council

1. Maps in the District Plan show the locations of Significant Natural Areas
2. The Council has an application guide and checklist with information about what should be included with resource consent applications.

Department of Conservation

Holds most of the original field records which identified the Significant Natural Areas.

Ministry for the Environment

The Ministry has guidelines for AEES and other resources for preparing resource consent applications.

Quality Planning website

A lot of information can be found at www.qualityplanning.org.nz

Biocommunity New Zealand

A website established by Local Government New Zealand - www.biocommunity.org.nz

Biodiversity NZ website

www.biodiversity.govt.nz

If in doubt, find out...

Your RMA application is more likely to quick and successful if it is comprehensive and accurate. We'll do all we can to help make sure it is, but we need to work with you. If you need our help, call us toll-free on **0800 426 5169** and ask for an appointment with a Consents Officer.

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