

Speech –Coastal Restoration Trust of NZ Conference

Petone 21 March 2018

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E mihi ana ki te rangi

E mihi ana ki te whenua

E mihi ana ki nga maunga

E mihi ana ki nga wai koriporipo

E mihi ana ki te hunga mate

E mihi ana ki a tātou, te hunga ora

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

Thanks to Mayor Ray Wallace – Hutt City Council is hosting the event

Thanks to the Trust for inviting me and for being a voice for coastal ecosystems.

At the risk of preaching to the converted, I want to start by emphasising the importance of the coast – the boundary between land and sea.

This dynamic area of land is where most New Zealanders get to know the marine environment. Most of us will remember childhood days wandering the beach and picking up shells, paddling through rock pools, or snorkelling. This is how we first got to know starfish, kina, seaweeds, whelks, and the myriad other organisms that make the sea a special place.

Most New Zealanders live close to the coast, and for most of those people, the beach is the the place they visit most often to enjoy the outdoors.

Almost all our trade is by sea, and ports are the visible coastal infrastructure that supports this and much of our communication with the world by undersea cable.

Other coastal infrastructure— roads, railways, changing sheds, boat ramps, navigation aids. In urban areas it is hard to find a piece of coast that doesn't have important public infrastructure.

The foreshore and seabed debate has highlighted for all politicians just how important our beaches are, to iwi Maori and to New Zealanders generally,

And yet, the coast is also the place that we abuse. Stormwater and sewage discharges, seawalls, marram, the loss of most bird breeding colonies, plastic – these are all the result of our use of the coast, and our desire to live on it.

But they are not inevitable results. We can manage stormwater differently, treat our sewage and discharge it to land, re-plant dunes, clean-up beaches, keep our dogs under control, and set aside safe places for birds.

Learning to minimise our impacts and live in harmony with the coast is essential.

We need to learn to love, rather than want to control, its dynamic nature. Sand is made to move, cliffs to erode, and the sea to rise and fall. We need to stop treating that as a threat, and adjust how we live to fit in. Not only will that bring us the joys of a healthy coast, but also reduce the risks and costs of living near it.

As Minister of Conservation, I am responsible for the Resource Management Act coastal regime, including the NZ Coastal Policy

Statement (NZCPS). I also approve all regional coastal plans. The plans apply only to the wet part of the coast – the foreshore and seabed. But NZCPS applies to the coastal environment, which includes those areas above high tide that you are focused on – dunes, beach terraces, cliffs, salt marsh, and so on.

The RMA is often seen as legislation that stops us doing things. A cost. A barrier to economic growth. I see it very differently, particularly for the coast.

To have a sustainable economy, and an environment that people want to live and play in, we need to ensure that we do things in the right place, and in the right way. And that's what the RMA coastal regime is all about. It allows us to ensure that things that need to happen on the coast – ports, swimming, boating – can do so in a way that minimises their effects on other uses and on the coastal environment.

That is achieved in several ways.

First, we must keep things off the coast that don't need to be there.

In the past we saw the coast as a cheap and easy place to put things. For example, a survey of rubbish tips in the late 1980s, found that every tip except one new landfill in the Nelson/Marlborough area was in a watercourse or estuary. Old style tips were a double sin. We pushed into our estuaries resources that should have been recycled, and in doing so, we made our estuaries unavailable as fisheries nurseries and playgrounds.

We have got a lot smarter since the RMA was enacted in 1991, but we need to get smarter still. For example, we have stopped tipping solid rubbish, but we still treat the coast as a good place to dump our contaminated stormwater.

Wellington Water found in a study of the Lambton Harbour catchment, that around 2000 kg/yr of zinc goes into the harbour from the stormwater system. That comes mostly from car tyres and roofs. There's also 160 kg of lead and 230 kg of copper, again mostly from cars and houses. These are not things that marine animals like. But if we put our stormwater into gardens, the soil would absorb those pollutants. And if we gave the people who don't really want to drive to work better public transport, more cycleways, and the chance to walk along a nice waterfront, we would have less heavy metals to deal with, people would be happier and healthier, and we would spend less on our transport system.

And if we harvested a lot of rainwater and used that for things that don't need drinkable water, we would reduce both stormwater management costs and drinking water supply costs, and interruptions to water supplies would cause less problems. The Department of Conservation uses rainwater from the roof of their national office building to flush toilets. Imagine if every office building and house did that.

That approach is one that the RMA coastal regime is trying to promote – looking at the alternatives, and avoiding the problem altogether, or locating things in places where they are less of a problem.

One example of the latter that is worth mentioning is the development of inland ports. Wiri Inland Port is one example. Trucks bring containers to the port, and they are marshalled there. When a ship arrives, the containers for that ship are put on a train and sent to the port. That frees up coastal space for other uses and avoids the need for new reclamations. And it also means trucks don't have to grind their way through peak traffic in Auckland and can get more done.

The second approach we are encouraging through the RMA coastal regime is to locate things in the best place. For foreshore and seabed, the RMA coastal regime allocates space. We can save space up for important things that we may need in future. We can ensure that developments are concentrated rather than spread out across the whole coast. We can ensure that we use existing infrastructure rather than unnecessarily building new things.

And we can ensure that in deciding on a location, we take into account how the coast will change – natural dynamics and the effects of climate change.

And the third approach is to do it right. The RMA coastal regime allows us to ensure good design of the things that happen on the coast. Instead of a seawall that would make the erosion problem worse, perhaps a groyne (low wall), or managed retreat, or mangroves are the solution.

And it allows us to protect sensitive and valuable features. For example the NZCPS identifies nationally important surf breaks that must be protected. The Board of Inquiry also recommended that the same approach be considered for dunes, which I am sure is a suggestion many of you would support. That hasn't been done yet, but it is an issue that should be examined when we next look at in the NZCPS.

If you haven't read the NZCPS, I would recommend that you do so. It isn't poetry, but it provides a clear set of objectives for coastal management, and policies that cover much of what will be of concern to you – the need to take a precautionary approach, strategic planning, reclamations and other activities, biodiversity, biosecurity, the natural character of the coast, natural features and landscapes, historic

heritage, public open space, walking access, vehicle access, water quality, sediment, and coastal hazards.

You will be particularly interested in Policy 26 which stresses the importance of natural defences in long term sustainable responses to coastal hazards.

I have recently released the review prepared by DOC on the effectiveness of the NZCPS on RMA decision making that was a requirement in Policy 28. I want to thank the Trust for contributing to the review.

The review found the need for guidance to support the coastal hazard policies in the NZCPS. This guidance has now been completed and along with the recently updated MFE guidance on coastal hazards and climate change will assist councils plan for storm events such as Gita.

I am pleased to see the NZCPS is making a difference and helping local authorities make better decisions and take a more strategic and integrated approach to coastal planning. There's still a long way to go.

The review also found while some local authorities have embraced the NZCPS and made good progress, others had work to do.

Other findings included:

Councils who resource and implement a strategic and integrated approach to managing their coastal areas are making better progress in using the NZCPS to achieve good coastal management.

Lack of accepted and consistent methods has been a problem in identifying and mapping values relating to natural character, outstanding natural landscapes, and other coastal values.

Consistent ways of working and further implementation guidance are still needed for councils.

The views among sector groups on the implications of the Supreme Court's 2014 King Salmon decision for resource management planning and decision making are strongly divided.

As Conservation Minister I am particularly interested in looking at ways DOC can support councils in implementing the NZCPS, for example with coastal mapping information and by promoting better co-ordination of coastal management with urban development and freshwater management.

The Review completes the first stage of monitoring the policy and points to the further monitoring work that is needed to provide a national perspective on coastal management trends.

Good planning depends on having communities that understand coastal processes, and want to have their coasts well managed. That is where societies such as yours, and the restoration community, play such an important role.

It is one thing to walk along a beach watching the waves and picking up shells. It's quite another thing to understand what that sand is doing, where it is going, why the beach is sometimes sand and sometimes rock platform. You can help people to gain that understanding.

There is a local bill in Parliament at the moment, seeking an easier approval mechanism for removing mangroves. That's because many people see mangrove spread as a problem. The real problem is sediment. We mistreat the land, resulting in sheet and gully erosion. The sediment goes into our rivers, damaging water quality and ecosystems. Then it flows into the coast, where it kills

shellfish, turning sand and shell bottom systems into mud. Which mangroves love. So mangrove spread is good, because it makes that new mud bottom a productive marine ecosystem. But it is a symptom of a serious problem – sedimentation. We need to leave the mangroves where they are, but go back upstream and fix the root problem – unsustainable farming practices and badly controlled urban developments. Once that is fixed, the mangroves will probably retreat again, as shell banks and rock platforms reappear.

That's what happened in Whaingaroa Harbour, where riparian planting in the catchment reduced sediment inputs, and existing sediment flushed out, leaving rock platforms and recovering seagrass beds.

We have a terrible ability to destroy, and a marvellous ability to help the coast to recover. Groups like yours are vital to ensure we do the things that will make the biggest difference.

With climate change, including sea level rise, our natural coastal edges will become even more important. Mangroves, kelp beds and saltmarshes help to reduce wave energy, reducing the risk of erosion, and reducing storm surge impacts. And dunes, spits, and other natural features allow the coast to absorb sea and wind effects, keeping the land further back safe.

These under-rated ecosystem services will be vital as our climate changes. We cannot afford the sort of hard structures that would do the same job, and we would not be as happy living with the resulting coastline.

And our biodiversity also needs beaches, dunes, saltmarshes, and other natural features, and the help of agencies and volunteers. Restoring spinifex and pingao not only brings those plants back, and provides weaving materials for iwi, but also provides the homes for native invertebrates that have suffered as a result of loss of coastal vegetation.

As Minister of Conservation I will be working to ensure that we value and respect our natural coastal edges, and that the regulatory and central government environment in which you operate helps rather than hinders the amazing work that restoration groups are doing.

Thank you again for allowing me to be part of this conference.

No reira tena koutou, tena koutou, tean tatou katoa