

Oceans Policy: *Values and Vision*

Submission of the Wellington Regional Council

1. Introduction

The Wellington Regional Council (the Council) is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission on *Oceans Policy: Values and Vision*.

The Council has a number of key responsibilities for the marine environment spanning resource management, biosecurity, maritime transport and oil spill response and planning. In November 1999, Councillors had a workshop on various means of marine protection, and as a result sought to define a vision for the Region's marine environment and determine what role the Council had in achieving this vision. The Council then set in progress a programme of work to gather information on:

- the biophysical marine environment
- how people thought and felt about the marine environment
- how government agencies and others interacted through different pieces of legislation.

The Government's current initiative to develop an Oceans Policy dovetails well with the Council's own work, and is strongly supported by the Council. The fact that the Council commenced work in this area prior to the announcement of the development of an Oceans Policy places it in a good position to respond with some authority to the current consultation by the MACOP.

2. "Values" of Wellington's Marine Environment

Council conducted two types of community survey on the marine environment. A quantitative telephone survey of 1000 people throughout the Region was completed in June 2001. This survey asked specific questions relating to people's values and activities in the marine environment. In May 2001, a qualitative survey of people's attitudes was undertaken. This survey used "focus groups" from each geographical area within the Region. Focus groups were used to determine more in-depth information about what people actually thought and felt about the marine environment.

The quantitative survey produced some interesting results. People rated the marine environment highly, with greater than 85% rating it as very important-to-fairly important. Generally, people appear to value the fact that the marine environment actually exists (economists call this 'option demand'), although many may not have experienced the ocean first hand.

Common activities people have experienced in the marine environment are travelling across Cook Strait on the ferries and general boating or sailing. Other activities less commonly undertaken are whale watching, diving, and deep-sea fishing.

People were asked what is the single most important problem facing the marine environment today. Over 50% of recipients felt that pollution either from rubbish in the sea or from sewage was the most pressing problem. Other problems noted were overfishing, drift net fishing, oil spills, and algal blooms.

In spite of the high rating given to the importance of the marine environment, people did not know a lot about it. Over 65% of recipients declared that they knew not much, or hardly anything about the marine environment.

The qualitative focus group sessions attempted to derive more in-depth responses from people about the marine environment.

Many expressed a dis-satisfaction with the current state of our marine environment. This was often directed at visible forms of pollution like plastic bags and other rubbish floating in the sea, but people also talked about depletion of fish and shellfish in the Region as indicating something was not quite right with our marine environment.

Participants were asked to place their "connection with the sea" on a diagram with other common features like rivers, bush, and cities. The results made interesting reading. Most rated their connection with the sea quite highly, except for those from the Wairarapa who placed more emphasis on lakes and rivers.

Generally, people wish for a clean and sustainable marine environment. They did not want to see rubbish in the water, they want clean safe shellfish to eat, equal access to the sea/beaches, abundant sea life in clean clear seawater on clean beaches.

A final question to recipients was who should be responsible for the marine environment. Many government agencies are tied up in the marine environment. There is an overall perception that most agencies are under resourced and they do not work together. Nevertheless, there was some thinking that the responsibility did not always lie with the government and that people and the community have a role to play. With regard to the Wellington Regional Council, most had some idea about what the Council does, although we could summarise and say many of are uncertain to the specific role of the Council in relation to the marine environment.

3. A 'Vision' for the Marine Environment

The Council has been able to articulate a vision statement for the marine environment for 20 to 50 years time.

New Zealand's oceans are in a healthy state: Informed people make prudent decisions for the benefit of all, now and into the future.

To reach this vision, some changes will need to occur in our society and government across a number of areas. These are described below.

Having clean and healthy oceans: By far the greatest concern of people surveyed is the possible deterioration in the water quality of our seas. This should be given a high priority in vision setting for an Oceans Policy.

Accessibility to the ocean: People wish to have access to the coast, and freedom to move about on the sea. The Council sees this as an important core value of New Zealanders that should not be lost.

Informed Communities: The Council would like to see better informed people and communities on all aspects of the marine environment. An increased knowledge and awareness would lead to a more informed debate about marine issues and problems as they arise.

Science and Information: The Council sees that scientific research and information about the marine environment are necessary if we are to have informed communities and decision-makers. By 2050, the Council hopes that the scientific community would have made some substantial in-roads into the mysteries that make up our deeper oceans. With organisations like NIWA, New Zealand should be taking a leading role in informing the world's scientific communities about the intricacies of New Zealand's oceanic waters and seabed make-up.

A new Sovereign Land: New Zealand's sovereign land is more water than land, some 15 times more water. By 2020, The Council hopes that New Zealand would have successfully negotiated to extend its sovereign land to include the continental shelf. This will make New Zealand one of the few places in the world where its oceanic resources are more diverse (in fish life and other organisms) and rich (in minerals and other deposits) compared with its land based resources.

Sustainable Ecosystems: The Council hopes that in the future a fundamental shift would have occurred in the way we look at our oceans. This shift will have a sustainable ecosystem focus. This approach will be the principal philosophy that will affect all aspects of the coastal and marine resource management.

Resource Utilisation and Conflict Resolution: The Council sees that the existing system of resource utilisation (fisheries and aquaculture) is not allowing the views of all people involved in our society to a fair say. The legislative framework is unable to cope with these conflicting demands, and fails to taken into account the feelings of people and communities. In 2020, the new system of resource

management for the oceans should be all encompassing. People and communities should have the ability to make statements about how the resource (fish, shellfish, minerals, or any other deemed resource) should be used, and the effects of that use will not cause adverse effects on the marine environment. Decision-makers will be better informed, and decisions will be based on the principal of sustainable ecosystems. This new process will attempt to resolve difficult conflict situations that may arise over intrinsic and cultural values, competing demands, adverse effects, and resource rentals.

Marine Ecosystem Reserves: In keeping with sustainable ecosystems, it will be obvious to decision makers that some areas need to be reserved for fish replenishment, and others areas need to be protected to preserve a unique flora and fauna that is endemic to New Zealand waters. By 2020, the Council hopes that we will have a 'floating' system of temporary marine reserves that are 'out of bounds' to all resource users. Our information systems will be so developed that an exact time can be placed on when the restrictions can be lifted from these areas. Other areas will be permanently reserved from all use. These areas will be well known for their unique marine characteristics that would be the centre-piece for marine educational initiatives and scientific knowledge.