

Biodiversity notes – 18 January 2022 (7.00 - 9.20pm)

Discussion on significance in terms of “significant natural areas”

There was general acceptance that the criteria used to identify what was “significant” were understandable but that the idea that an area only had to demonstrate one criterion to be deemed an SNA seemed to be particularly restrictive.

Discussion about the need to include private land when most of the SNAs are on public land. Explained that the RMA applies to all land and the requirement to protect significant biodiversity cannot exclude biodiversity on private land. Noted that some other councils have tried to do introduce changes for public land only and been challenged in the Environment Court.

Discussion about options to recognise regenerating vegetation where this has been modified in the past. This includes ideas for significance, as seen in other jurisdictions, only being identified when indigenous vegetation has been present for 20 or 30 years (based on aerial photos”).

It was suggested that much of the private land identified as SNAs is not original native forest rather any current biodiversity results from naturally regenerating bush or the efforts of individual landowners planting a mix of indigenous and exotic flora. One suggestion was that where the regenerating bush was less than 30 years old it might perhaps be excluded as a candidate to be designated an SNA.

Concern that landowners feel they are being penalized for looking after the biodiversity on their land over a long time. Discussion that the SNAs are recognizing the existing biodiversity and discussion about how landowners can be assisted to look after biodiversity and what more can be done to help them? What are some options for encouraging biodiversity – some sort of incentive. The issue of reimbursement for things like pest control, fences etc was raised. This will be discussed further at the next meeting.

To comply with the RMA (as it is now) UHCC is required to identify SNAs on private land. However, a number of landowners have wanted to protect the biodiversity on their properties and have, for example, had covenants placed on land titles; and/or worked with QEII. The question was raised as to the status of prior covenants or other legal instruments to protect biodiversity on private property in relationship to SNAs.

Discussion that some landowners are currently clearing vegetation and possible SNAs as a reaction to these areas being identified. It was made clear that landowners need to adhere to the current vegetation rules in the district plan but if the clearance is within these rules that is ok. Discussion about the ‘effects hierarchy’ in the RMA (Avoid, Remedy, Mitigate, Offsetting) and how this works in relation to resource consents.

There was some concern around the site visits and the accuracy of the identification of certain flora. If there are any specific concerns, these are to be addressed directly.

Discussion around the criteria for SNAs. There was some confusion around the “criteria” and the mapping. Explained that the mapping changes are currently being worked on and will be available once

finalised. Discussion about the proposed high and medium SNA areas in the NPS-IB initial drafting and how this relates to the ability to use or develop land.

Discussion that the Government (DOC and MfE) have the power with the NPS-IB, setting the significance criteria for biodiversity. The most powerful thing we can do is submit on the NPS-IB once it is released. Collaboration is needed and it's helpful that everyone wants the same thing

Discussion about the significance of biodiversity to Maori and noted that there are values associated with canopy trees and vegetation providing for traditional food and medicinal uses. Thinking about the vegetation as part of the system and looking after it with a long term view. There was interest in having discussions with mana whenua representatives and having discussion with mana whenua about the group's recommendations to Council.

Discussion around whether resource consent will be harder to apply for once the new NPS-IB rules come into play. Some scenarios were discussed using the current rules vs the *possible* NPS-IB settings.

Discussion about the landscapes and the rules being limiting for properties that want to go off the grid and have multiple dwellings on a property. Noted that these rules are part of the work the landscapes group are looking at and we anticipate changes to them.

Harvesting resources from SNAs other than food and medicine was discussed, particularly in respect of firewood for households that were off the grid. It was recognised that the biological processes of plant degeneration meant that, preferably, trees should be left to rot. People, however, are recognised as part of the ecology and the question was raised as to the quantity of wood a household depending on wood for cooking, heating and hot water would use in a year. This will be considered further in a later discussion on land use and management options.

Some discussion around existing use rights and how this relates to any new rules. Noted that there are only existing use rights under the District Plan not the Regional Plans (eg: anything freshwater related).

Discussion about the role of the NPS-IB Exposure draft we are expecting to have soon and that this will set the parameters for all significance discussions in the future. Once we have access to this, we can examine further as a group. The role of the group may be best fulfilled in identifying issues in preparation for writing submissions on the NPSIB which is due out this year (2022). Submission writing was seen as something that could be undertaken collaboratively as a group and individually.

DISCUSS AT NEXT MEETING

Landowner support, which covers incentives and community groups

Significance of Manuka in UH

Firewood collection

Next meeting proposed: 8th March