Evaluation of New Zealand’s National Coastal Policy Statement: Has It Been Effective?

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INTRODUCTION

New Zealand’s Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS) was gazetted in 1994. Section 57 of the Resource Management Act requires that there shall be at least one NZCPS in place at all times, containing matters of national importance. It was the first national policy statement prepared in New Zealand as part of resource management legislative reforms carried out in the late 1980s and early 1990s, aimed at ensuring sustainable management of New Zealand’s natural and physical resources. It is the only mandatory national policy statement and it is still the only policy statement translated into Maori (New Zealand’s second official language). This article reports on the findings of an independent review of the NZCPS. It also outlines changes in New Zealand’s coastal management regime at the national level and the effect of those changes on the role and content of the NZCPS. The evaluation was difficult because this is the first review carried out on a national policy statement in New Zealand, so the meaning of the term “effectiveness” has various interpretations.

2. Sections 6, 7, 8 and Section 58 of the Resource Management Act 1991 (and amendments to 2004).

A Board of Inquiry\(^5\) was appointed by the Minister of Conservation to inquire into the draft NZCPS,\(^6\) hear submissions and make recommendations about the wording of the final NZCPS. The Board of Inquiry played an important role in determining the content of the NZCPS, the prescriptiveness of policies and the interpretation of key terms associated with the NZCPS, such as *Kaitiakitanga* (stewardship by Maori) and “significant.” The NZCPS has no direct influence on use, subdivision or development, apart from Ministerial decisions about restricted coastal activities and the need for councils to “have regard” to the NZCPS in the preparation of plans and policy statements and in consideration of resource consents. Therefore, there have been considerable difficulties in attributing successful environmental outcomes to individual NZCPS policies or methods used in sub-national plans and policy statements.

**Resource Management Act: Context for the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement**

The Resource Management Act identifies the coastal environment\(^7\) as an area of national priority in planning for sustainable management. Estuarine environments at the mouth of streams and rivers are also included in the Coastal Marine Area, an area seaward of Mean High Water Springs (MHWS) out to the 12-nautical mile limit. Particular coastal matters of national importance to be provided for include the preservation of the natural character of the coastal environment, maintenance and enhancement of public access to and along the coastal marine area, and the relationship of Maori and their culture and traditions with ancestral lands, water, sites of particular cultural and historic significance, *waahi tapu* (sacred places) and other *taonga* (gifts). However, Maori generally feel that there remain a number of barriers that prevent effective participation by Maori in resource management planning processes, particularly in relation to coastal planning.\(^8\)


7. Although it varies considerably around the country, the coastal environment is generally an area that includes land-based coastal features such as dune systems, coastal cliffs and rocky features out to the 12 nautical mile limit of New Zealand’s territorial sea.