

THE 2007 NEW ZEALAND POST MANAGEMENT
EXCELLENCE AWARDS

NOMINATION - 'KAIKOURA DISTRICT COUNCILS
SIGNIFICANT NATURAL AREAS PROJECT'.

Category - The New Zealand Post Process Management Award
- The New Zealand Post Community Relationships Award.

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Brief background of Kaikoura & Significant Natural Areas Project.

Kaikoura – East coast, South Island - 2048 square meters of diverse landscape from Humuri Bluffs in the South to Kekerengu Valley in the North; 2885 meters high in the Kaikoura ranges, and around 1300 meters deep in the Kaikoura canyon.

Population - approximately 4,810 residents (Preliminary Census figures 2006). Kaikoura District Council was formed following local government restructuring in 1989 and is the smallest local authority on mainland New Zealand, with full time equivalent staff of 25 (2007).

What is the Significant Natural Areas (SNA's) Project?

Under Section 6(c) the Resource Management Act 1991, Councils have a responsibility to recognise and provide for the protection of areas of “significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna” as a matter of national importance. The protection against threats to habitats is an issue in the Kaikoura District; threats such as:

- Human activities/development,
- Plant and animal pests,
- Fire and natural hazards.

During the early development stages of the District Plan (namely Section 22 Rural Zone), a working party was created to formulate the rural zone rules and how to manage SNA's as required by section 6(c). Through working party discussions, a “partnership arrangement” was considered the best method for the management of such areas. It was agreed that areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna should not be identified in the Plan and that KDC would work with landowners to create a non statutory approach to biodiversity management.

This philosophy was set in place and now forms the current and successful framework for implementing the SNA project. Council is receiving positive feedback from landowners and from agencies looking to this process as a model to implementing their own.

The project has been implemented since 2003 and has made some heartening progress to date. It's about working with our community, educating & raising awareness, providing incentives, fostering 'ownership' and creating good working relationships along the way; while of course increasing the level of indigenous biodiversity in our district and assisting landowners in managing their special piece of paradise.

The following criteria will explain the project further.

The need for & expected benefits of the project & how it furthers Councils vision and strategic direction.

➤ The need for this project comes from several factors:

Statutory requirements of the Resource Management Act 1991

As noted above, all Councils are required to recognise and provide for the protection of areas of “significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna” as a matter of national importance. Council recognised the need to carry out this work and the importance of the benefits that would come from this, hence the implementation of the Significant Natural Areas Project.

Council’s commitment to a non statutory SNA process

As noted above during the early stages of the district plan, a very strong opinion was evident from the farming contingent of the working party. Their feeling was that SNA’s should be dealt with on a voluntary approach and no rules or sites specified in the plan. From here on in, Council has committed to ensuring this was carried through to the project implementation methods and how landowners were dealt with.

The Council considers that it is critical to gain community and landowner co-operation to the process and that this is more effectively achieved through non-regulatory means. While the Council acknowledges private property rights, the privilege of landownership also carries an inherent responsibility of “stewardship” through retaining the integrity of the land resource for future generations. The Council aims to raise community awareness of areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna and the contribution that they make to the amenity and environmental quality of the district. (See appendix 1 – Section 22 KDC Proposed District Plan)

LTCCP.

As is widely known, the country’s areas of indigenous biodiversity are decreasing. This is the case for our district also. It is in everybody’s interests to halt this decline, not only for our generation but also for those to come.

Goal - To ensure that a planning framework is in place to enable the district to develop, while ensuring that the natural and physical environment of the Kaikoura District is sustainably managed.

Community Outcome	How the Sustainable Development Activity Contributes	Performance Measure
Environmental Protection and Enhancement	Increasing the area of indigenous biodiversity through a partnership with DOC and Kaikoura landowners	Total area of indigenous biodiversity as a percentage of the total district

As reported to Council just recently, the performance measure is to increase the total area of indigenous biodiversity as a percentage of the total district by 1% per annum. Last year that percentage figure sat at 40%. This year the figure has increased to 48.790% (This includes Department of Conservation reserve lands and Queen Elizabeth II Trust covenanted land)

Council's vision and strategic direction.

The community has a distinct vision for Kaikoura. That vision is a sustainable future with tourism providing both economic benefit and enhancing local amenities, but not at the expense of the natural or social environment. While tourism is crucial to the economic health of the district, a significant environmental issue facing Kaikoura is the ever increasing visitor numbers. Research conducted by Lincoln University estimates approximately 1 million tourists visit Kaikoura each year and this number is predicted to increase annually by 14%. Although tourist numbers bring significant economic returns by contributing to at least 30% of the district's employment, such a large number of visitors also place significant pressure on the district's infrastructure, natural environment and community.

In response to this issue, Kaikoura District is becoming well known, both locally and internationally for its commitment to reducing impacts on the environment, that may result from the growing visitor and resident populations. Such a reputation has been developed through a number of programs and initiatives that will be outlined in the following:

Green Globe

This international program sets out a framework that challenges travel and tourism communities, industries and businesses to lessen their environmental impact. This is accomplished by measuring various environmental indicators (Benchmarking) and an annual commitment to reduce the negative environmental impacts highlighted by these indicators.

Kaikoura District Council was the first community in New Zealand to achieve Green Globe Benchmarking in 2002, and then became the first community in the world to be Green Globe Certified in 2004. See www.greenglobe.org for further information.

Actions under the Umbrella of Green Globe

Communities for Climate Protection (CCP)

CCP is also an international program and encourages and enables councils to reduce their green house gas emissions working through a milestone based program. Kaikoura is currently paving the way forward for Councils involved in CCP in New Zealand, being the first local authority to set up an action plan for the Council and community to work towards reducing green house gas emissions. One initiative in the **community** sector that contributes towards the proposed reduction goal is the SNA Project which encourages landowners to protect areas of biodiversity and vegetation on their land.

Trees for Traveller's

Trees for Traveller's is a local Kaikoura initiative where the purchase of trees and shrubs is promoted to offset the emissions that result from every day living and in particular travel. The initiative is focused towards tourists and the significant impact travelling has on increasing green house gas emissions.

Zero Waste

In 2002 New Zealand became the first country in the world to adopt a vision of Zero Waste. Even before the national Waste Strategy was published, some local authorities went ahead and adopted Zero Waste targets. Kaikoura was one such authority, adopting the Zero Waste policy in March 1999. At this time Kaikoura had a solid waste management plan from June 1992 but already the Districts waste management was well ahead of the plan's contents.

➤ Expected benefits of the project & how it furthers Councils vision and strategic direction.

The Significant Natural Areas Project sits under a wider umbrella of environmental initiatives Council is committed to, as noted above. The benefits are wide ranging but in particular include the creation of sound working relationships with landowners, empowering landowners with valuable knowledge and raising awareness, reduction of green house gas emissions, reduction of Environment Court appeals to the District Plan, increased public awareness of biodiversity in general, encouraging landowners to restore and protect areas known to have valuable biodiversity and assisting them in doing so.

Where practical the SNA program provides assistance for landowners to put into place actions to conserve these valuable areas; such as providing assistance relating to funding opportunities, achieving a win/win for the landowners individually, for our community and also the local environment. Kaikoura District Council believes whole heartedly that the voluntary approach to identifying and assisting in managing SNA's on private land is a successful formula.

The community has a distinct vision for Kaikoura. That vision is a sustainable future with tourism providing both economic benefit and enhancing local amenities, but not at the expense of the natural or social environment.

Effective project management techniques.

The Significant Natural Areas Project and its implementation is guided by the project outline in the District Plan.

(http://www.kaikoura.govt.nz/our_services/sustainable_development/district_planning/proposed_dp.htm?xhighlightwords=district+plan to access an on line copy of the plan – section 22)

A working party made up of Federated Farmers, District Council staff/Councillors, Ministry for the Environment, Landcare Trust, Queen Elizabeth II National Trust, and Department of Conservation initiated the project.

Since that time a Biodiversity Officer has managed and coordinated the implementation of the project with assistance by a subsequently formed SNA Landcare Group (DOC, Ecan, Runanga, QEII, landowners, councilors, covenantors, ecologist, East Coast Community Group and Fed Farmers), a successful funding application to the Advice Fund and support from a well known and respected ecologist.

The following are the steps taken whilst coordinating SNA work with landowners –

- Use historical information outlining 'potential' SNA sites to identify properties and confirm current ownership.
- 'First port of call' letter to landowner with Q & A sheet. Follow up telephone calls made to resolve any queries. (See attached)
- Seek landowner permission & support for ecologist to visit property – to confirm historical information on the ground and update as necessary.
- Reports prepared by ecologist and draft version sent to Council. Reports then formatted with digital photos and aerial photos showing site(s).
- Color reports presented to landowner, in conjunction with any relevant and helpful biodiversity related information and a disk of property photos taken by ecologist whilst on site.
- Contact made there after to discuss landowner's views and any further management options available should the landowner be willing. Assistance offered by way of funding applications, project coordination, management plans etc.
- Liaise with other agencies regarding management options if necessary ie: QEII.

- Rates relief automatically available for land formally protected.

The most effective management tool of this project is believed to be the fact that it is voluntary – this allows a transparent approach to the project which is a winning factor with many landowners.

Participatory approach and ‘Buy in’.

The Council considers that it is critical to gain community and landowner co-operation to the process and that this is more effectively achieved through non-regulatory means. Landowners with a ‘potential’ SNA are usually written to in the first instance, introducing them to the project and including a Q&A sheet for their information. This intends to cover all the questions that are likely to come up in the first instance. Landowners are then contacted by phone a week or two later to address any concerns they may have, and to arrange a site visit with the ecologist if appropriate. Some landowners will come on board at this stage, others will take a while longer to think it through, and some will say no at this point.

The Council aims to raise community awareness of areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna and the contribution that they make to the amenity and environmental quality of the district. This process also significantly contributes to protecting and retaining these areas for future generations.

Innovation and originality.

Kaikoura District Council is proud to say we are taking the lead in many environmental initiatives including the SNA Project, setting us aside from the rest. These initiatives are listed briefly as follows –

- A Non regulatory SNA Project - Kaikoura District Council is one of the few Councils undertaking such a project on a voluntary basis. Several other South Island councils have approached the Biodiversity Officer wishing to discuss the project and gather ideas to be built into their own processes.
- Biodiversity Officer - We are also one of the only Territorial Local Authority in the country employing a Biodiversity Officer. For the smallest TLA on the mainland, this is particularly unique, considering it is more a role of Regional Councils.
- Green Globe - Kaikoura’s involvement in Green Globe provides a model for sustainable management of the community and district. As noted Kaikoura District Council was the first community in New Zealand to achieve Green Globe Benchmarking in 2002, and then became the first community in the world to be Green Globe Certified in 2004.
- Communities for Climate Protection - Kaikoura is currently paving the way forward for Councils involved in CCP in New Zealand, being the first local authority to set up an action plan for the Council and community to work towards reducing green house gas emissions.

Successful results – financial and non financial.

Kaikoura District is becoming well known, both locally and internationally for its commitment to reducing impacts on the environment and sustainable management.

Non financial

- Greater community awareness of biodiversity
- Greater understanding of environmental issues and sustainable land management
- Better knowledge of own land/importance of features allowing ownership, passion and appropriate management where practical – through the production of SNA reports for landowners and time spent with ecologist.

- Marked increase in the number of QEII covenants being registered in the district and the 'expressions of interest' to both Council and QEII itself is on the rise. Since 2003 when the project commenced there is now 874.8909ha of private land protected by way of QEII covenant, 9 prospects approved and moving toward full registration, 1 subject to board approval and 6 expressions of interest 'on the books'. **Prior to this there were no covenants registered in the Kaikoura District.** See the Biodiversity Bulletin attached for further information or www.kaikoura.govt.nz.
- Development of good working relationships between Council and landowners
- Improved Council reputation with 'non beauracritic' project.
- Greater awareness of each parties position
- Good inter agency relations ie between Council, Environment Canterbury and Department of Conservation.
- Fulfilling statutory requirements particularly section 6c.
- Biodiversity Bulletin – regular newsletter created outlining updates on the project amongst other news of the biodiversity world in Kaikoura. (Attached and also see www.kaikoura.govt.nz for a copy of the latest bulletin).

Financial.

- Reduced appeal costs to Environment Court
- Greater case for securing external funds for both KDC and landowners – two successful application have been made on behalf of KDC since 2002 – for the employment of a half time Biodiversity Officer and for the contracting of an ecologist for site surveys and report writing. Two successful applications have been made on behalf of landowners of the assisting protection of SNA's.
- Reduced compliance costs by non regulatory methods
- Encouraging landowners to consider alternative forms of income from properties.
- Rates rebate available to landowners for covenanted land (www.kaikoura.govt.nz)
- Biodiversity Officer available to make funding applications on landowner's behalves.

The project was 'good, sensible and the right thing to do'.

In terms of Significant Natural Areas, there's no two ways about it - voluntary is the only way to go. It is 'the good, sensible and right thing to do'.

Learning from other Councils misfortune and listening to our landowners has set Kaikoura District Council off on the right track of making this project an informative, enjoyable and valuable experience for all involved.