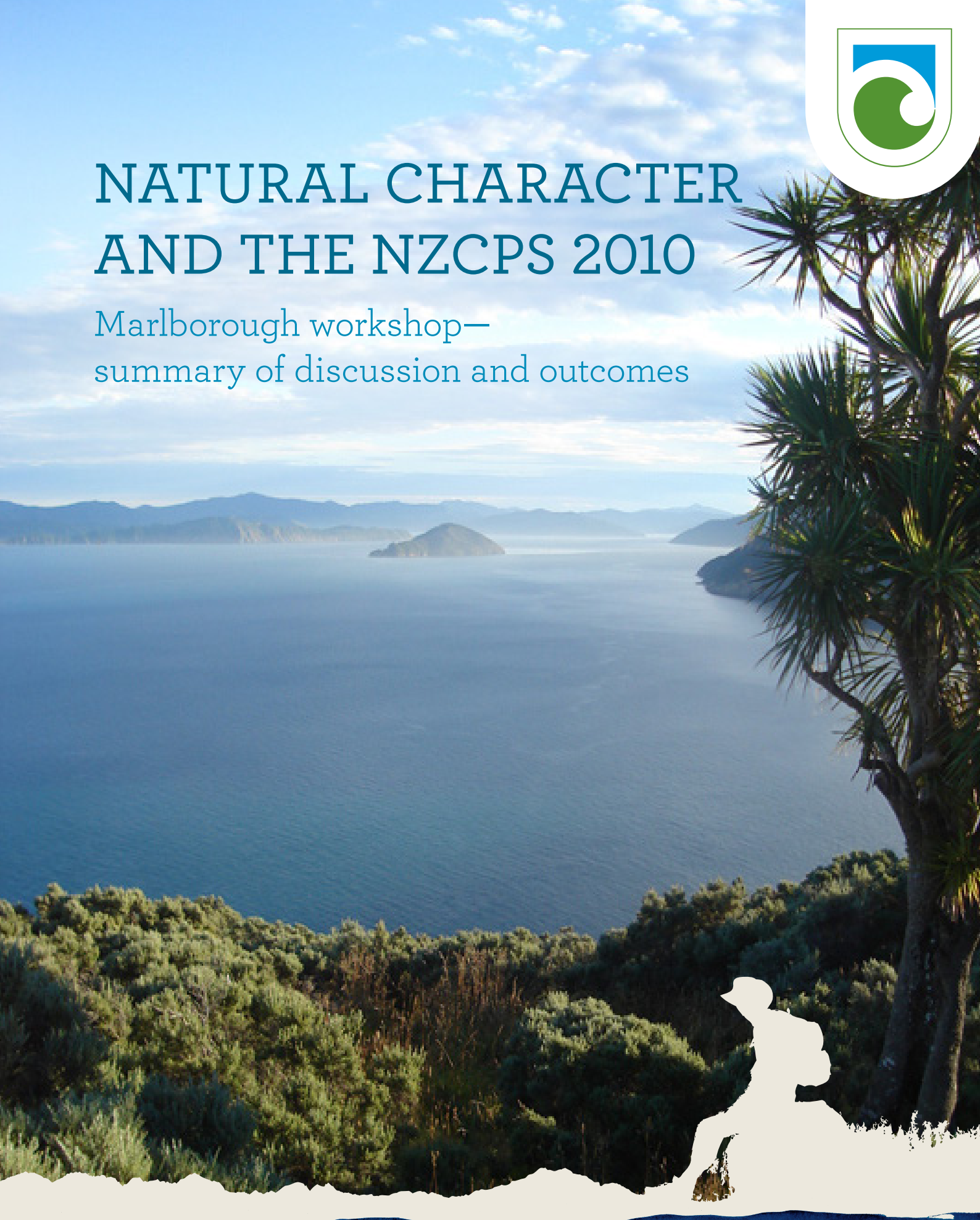




NATURAL CHARACTER AND THE NZCPS 2010

Marlborough workshop—
summary of discussion and outcomes



Cover: View of northern entrance to Queen Charlotte Sound (looking south to Motuara Island and Long Island, with Arapawa Island in the background).

Photo: Roy Grose.

© Copyright October 2012, New Zealand Department of Conservation

In the interest of forest conservation, we support paperless electronic publishing.

CONTENTS

1.	Attendees	3
2.	Report purpose	3
3.	Background	4
4.	Workshop purpose	4
5.	Introduction to Marlborough’s natural character	5
6.	Overview of the Marlborough assessment	6
6.1	Assessment methods including definition, attributes, scale, ranking and describing outstanding natural character	6
6.2	Overview comments on the MDC study	7
6.2.1	Land-typing and mapping of outstanding natural character	7
6.2.2	Scale	9
7.	Other assessment methodologies	9
8.	Defining the coastal environment	10
8.1	Agreements	10
8.2	Follow-up actions	10
9.	Components of natural character	12
9.1	Follow-up actions	12
10.	Assessing and evaluating experiential attributes	13
11.	Outstanding natural character	14
11.1	Follow-up actions	15
12.	Mapping	16
12.1	Follow-up actions	16
13.	Looking forward—points of agreement	16
13.1	Coastal environment identification and mapping	16
13.2	Natural character components	16
13.3	Natural character mapping	17
13.4	Broader conclusions about the workshop process	17
14.	Closing round from participants	18
15.	References	18

Please note this report describes the situation at the time of the workshop, and that some components have been progressed and refined since.

1. Attendees

M. James Bentley—Landscape Architect, Boffa Miskell Ltd, Christchurch

Boyden Evans—Director, Boffa Miskell Ltd, Wellington

Di Lucas—Lucas Associates Ltd, Christchurch

Vicky Froude—Director, Pacific Ecologic, Bay of Islands

Andrew Baxter—Marine Technical support Officer, Department of Conservation, Nelson

Pere Hawes—Policy Manager, Marlborough District Council

Clare Wooding—Senior Planner, Local Government New Zealand, Wellington

Sarah McRae—Senior Planner, Department of Conservation National Office, Wellington

Facilitator: Sarah Wilson—Down to Earth Facilitation Limited, Wellington

Note keeper: Kate Brooking—Planner, Department of Conservation National Office, Wellington

Notes:

- This workshop was the second in a series convened by the Department of Conservation's National Office.
- The above attendees are practitioners who have a good understanding of the theory and practice of natural character assessments and/or planning. They include landscape experts, ecological/marine science experts, and planners.
- Most attendees were present at the first workshop held on 2 August 2011.

2. Report purpose

This report is a summary of the discussion of the natural character workshop hosted by Marlborough District Council on 30 September 2011.

The report is not intended to be minutes or detailed proceedings. Its main purpose is to (1) summarise areas of agreement on the natural character assessment methodology that can be used by other councils and practitioners to give effect to the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010 (NZCPS 2010), and (2) identify agreed follow-up actions.

Please note that this report summarises progress at the time of the workshop. A number of the components of the methodologies have been progressed and refined since this workshop.

3. Background

The NZCPS 2010 took effect on 3 December 2010. It requires local authorities to amend all their planning documents and processes to give effect to the NZCPS provisions as soon as practicable. Local authorities, planners, landscape architects, consents officers and other practitioners are now seeking support and possible guidance on how to implement the Policy Statement. In addition, some practitioners have specifically requested guidance on implementing the NZCPS policies that relate to assessing and planning for natural character (Policy 13), restoration of natural character (Policy 14), and natural features and natural landscapes (Policy 15).

The Department of Conservation (DOC) is working together with local government to prepare guidance to assist local authorities to implement the NZCPS 2010. Implementation is being overseen by a DOC / local government steering group formed earlier in 2011. This Steering Group agreed early on to hold a workshop of experts to discuss the issues of natural character and to chart a way forward.

At that natural character workshop held in Wellington on 2 August 2011, it was identified that the Marlborough Natural Character Assessment for the Draft Regional Policy Statement (RPS) was prepared pre-December 2010 and could be a good case study for review against the requirements of the NZCPS 2010.

Boffa Miskell Ltd has led the bulk of the recent work done for Marlborough District Council (MDC) and agreed with the suggestions by MDC that this review would be useful.

4. Workshop purpose

The focus of this workshop was to review a recent local government natural character assessment against the natural character policies of the NZCPS 2010, as a case study for a small group of natural character and planning practitioners to assess in detail so that useful advice can be provided to councils on implementing the NZCPS 2010 and, particularly, policies 13, 14 and 15.

A range of practitioners with good knowledge of Marlborough, from local and central government and private practice, were invited to attend.

The workshop also sought to look at other examples of different methodologies applied at a similar scale.

It was acknowledged that the review of MDC's work may not be able to be fully implemented in Marlborough because of time and cost constraints (depending on the scale of changes that any review might recommend). However, the conclusions could still be useful for other regional and district councils, especially those at the early stages of undertaking assessments.

5. Introduction to Marlborough's natural character

Pere Hawes gave a presentation titled 'A brief tour of Marlborough's coastal environment'. This is summarised below.

With a total length of 1814 km, the Marlborough coastline comprises approximately 10% of New Zealand's coastline. It is a dynamic environment where change can happen quite quickly (e.g. forest regeneration). The Marlborough coastal area has a lot of development activity, including farming, forestry, ports, moorings, marinas and aquaculture (there are 570 consented marine farms in the Marlborough Sounds), as well as residential properties (there are 4000 baches and homes outside the main residential areas). There are sharp transitions between areas (e.g. commercial activity, regenerating forest, pasture) and there is significant community interest in how Marlborough's coastal areas are managed (e.g. biodiversity restoration is being carried out at Kaipupu Point immediately next to Picton's Port area).

Scale is an issue—the Marlborough Sounds look unmodified from afar, but closer inspection reveals forestry, marine farming, baches etc.

- There is a range of different landscape units (e.g. Tory Channel compared with the inner Sounds).
- There is a range of scales (e.g. wharf, residential, farm, Sound).
- The area is mostly accessible by boat rather than road, therefore there is high demand for jetties, wharfs etc.

Pere described a local situation where a landowner wants to restore the natural character of his land, including by building an eco resort, but gets frustrated over suggested 'natural character preservation' regulatory requirements.

- How do we effectively transcribe what 'natural character' is to the public?
- Is restoration part of preservation?
- How do we address the natural character of the marine benthic environment out to 12 nautical miles?

The inflows to some lagoons in the Marlborough area have been diverted and the lagoons are not in their natural state anymore. Despite this, lagoons are areas of significant iwi occupation and value in Marlborough.

6. Overview of the Marlborough assessment

6.1 Assessment methods including definition, attributes, scale, ranking and describing outstanding natural character

James Bentley gave an overview of Boffa Miskell Ltd's report 'Natural Character Assessment of the Coast' prepared for MDC. He explained that it was a complex task to undertake the natural character assessment because of Marlborough's diversity.

Boffa Miskell was originally engaged by MDC in 2008 to undertake a 'Marlborough Landscape Study' (the natural character components involved looking at rivers and the coastal environment). That study was carried out in 2009 when the NZCPS 1994 was in effect. After the release of the NZCPS 2010, MDC asked Boffa Miskell to update the natural character aspect of the study, particularly in relation to policies 1, 13 and 15 of the NZCPS 2010. This update did not require extensive re-working, as the definition and method fitted the NZCPS 2010 quite well, with a few adjustments such as the new direction relating to the identification of the coastal environment (NZCPS 2010 Policy¹). The definition of natural character has not changed since the 2009 study; it is a well-used definition amongst expert practitioners:

The degree or level of natural character within an area depends on:

- 1. The extent to which the natural elements, patterns and processes occur;*
- 2. The nature and extent of modification to the ecosystems and landscape/seascape;*

The highest degree of natural character (greatest naturalness) occurs where there is least modification. The effect of different types of modification upon natural character varies with context and may be perceived differently by different parts of the community.

This definition is virtually identical to that agreed by most participants of the 2 August 2011 workshop.^{2, 3}

NZCPS 2010 Policy 13(2) recognises a number of attributes relevant to natural character of the coastal environment. In terms of practice, the first thing was to look at the extent of the coastal environment (Policy 1)—in particular, ways to define an inland boundary. For this project, this process involved:

- Identifying where coastal processes are **significant** in that environment
- Applying a 'rule of thumb' of including land up to the first ridgeline (see p. 5 of James' presentation) as part of the coastal environment.
- Noting that the whole of the Marlborough Sounds falls within the coastal environment.

¹ <http://www.doc.govt.nz/publications/conservation/marine-and-coastal/new-zealand-coastal-policy-statement/new-zealand-coastal-policy-statement-2010/policy-1-extent-and-characteristics-of-the-coastal-environment/>

² Department of Conservation 2012. Natural Character and the NZCPS 2010 - National Workshop. Workshop Report 2 August 2011, Wellington.

³ The definition from the 2 August 2011 workshop is: 'natural character' is the term used to describe the natural elements of all coastal environments. The degree or level [of natural character] within an environment depends on:

1. The extent to which the natural elements, patterns and processes occur.
2. The nature and extent of modification to the ecosystems and landscape/seascape.
3. The highest degree of natural character (greatest naturalness) occurs where there is least modification.
4. The effect of different types of modification upon natural character varies with context and may be perceived differently by different parts of the community.

The Boffa Miskell study was region-wide, covering the area of the Marlborough Sounds and Wairau/Awatere Resource Management Plans. The assessment was done at a scale of 1:100 000 for the region, although some areas were mapped at 1:50 000.

The method used seven components to describe and assess natural character. These attributes stem from the definition of natural character and Policy 13(2) of the NZCPS 2010. In summary the attributes used were:

1. Waterscape
2. Landform
3. Vegetation/habitats
4. Biophysical diversity
5. Natural systems and processes
6. Structures and settlements
7. Perceptual and experiential.

James looked at the occurrence of each of these attributes in relation to particular areas and examined the degree of natural character within segments of coastline. From an assessment of the individual attributes he produced an overall score to identify whether an area triggered the pre-determined thresholds for 'high' or 'very high' natural character. The basis of the scoring system was presented to the workshop.

Outstanding natural character was assessed in a separate step. James re-examined the 'high' and 'very high' areas to see if they met the descriptor set for 'outstanding' (i.e. predominantly indigenous/naturalness). The areas identified as 'outstanding' were mapped using a line along the Mean High Water Springs (MHWS). This step poses substantial challenges. For example, it is hard to show on a map the links or contributors to 'outstanding' within the 'wet bits' of the coastal environment, particularly those not visible above water.

The description for areas that contained outstanding natural character was those areas:

... containing a combination of indigenous elements, patterns and processes that are exceptional in their intactness, integrity and lack of built structures and other modifications compared with others in the Marlborough Sounds.

James indicated the locations of 'high', 'very high', and 'outstanding' areas based on the criteria. Due to budget constraints, it had not been possible to map each unit/section identified within the framework.

6.2 Overview comments on the MDC study

6.2.1 Land-typing and mapping of outstanding natural character

There was a discussion on the use of the land-typing system such as that used for the Marlborough Sounds Resource Management Plan policies and rules, and contained in Appendix 2⁴ of the Plan. Land-typing⁵ is defined in the NZCPS 2010 Glossary.

⁴ http://www.marlborough.govt.nz/Your-Council/RMA/Marlborough-Sounds-Resource-Management-Plan/-/media/Files/MDC/Home/Your%20Council/RMA/MSRMP/rma_v1_ap2.ashx

⁵ <http://www.doc.govt.nz/publications/conservation/marine-and-coastal/new-zealand-coastal-policy-statement/new-zealand-coastal-policy-statement-2010/glossary/>

James confirmed that land-typing provided the basis for his landscape and natural character assessments. Eight broad landscape character areas were defined for Marlborough; one of which was the Sounds. The Sounds was then broken down into a further eight or nine separate units (e.g. Tory Channel has different attributes to other areas).

Some people at the workshop were concerned at identifying 'outstanding' at a broad scale and saw risks in terms of the assumptions applicants and planners might make about natural character values at a finer scale. It was also difficult to represent the marine elements below the water's surface, and the ecological patterns and processes, as well as significance of natural character from the water's edge up to the ridgeline. Remote open space in open water—this component also needs to be built in.

The draft map shows a ranking for parts of the coast at a broad scale. Base descriptions of natural character would be important to provide the context and assist understanding, particularly when applying the framework to RMA decision making.

Outstanding natural character is currently shown in the Marlborough report as a ribbon adjacent to the land area. Andrew Baxter commented that there appeared to be little or no subtidal values built into this ribbon. There needs to be marine information built in and he acknowledged that such information is patchy for parts of Marlborough's coast. Andrew proposed an adaptive approach to building the natural character frameworks, by using known information and identifying gaps. The framework would be updated as information grew.

The workshop also discussed the exact requirements of Policy 13(1)(c) and its reference to *mapping or at least otherwise identifying areas of high natural character*.

Practitioners agreed that the natural character across much of the Marlborough Sounds could be ranked 'high', and that at a national scale the natural character of the Sounds is outstanding. However, this general assessment would not be very helpful to MDC in its resource management decision making.

More detail was required to identify what made the area and its constituent parts important for natural character, as well as to identify 'high' and 'outstanding' areas. Sustaining individual parts will help maintain the natural character of the whole Sounds area.

It is assumed that many councils will not have the resources to do the finer detail assessment work on their own. Regional and district councils could be encouraged to get together to do their assessments collaboratively.

It was agreed that scale issues are complex and natural character descriptions and assessments, including assessments of 'outstanding' natural areas, can be very difficult to show on maps. Many of the workshop participants agreed that a combination of the land or ecosystem typing approach currently set out in the Sounds Plan⁶ and the evaluation by Boffa Miskell would be useful and appropriate. The two can work well together and would address issues of scale, as well as describing the component parts that make up the whole and the 'outstanding' category.

There is a challenge in identifying and then assessing natural character at suitable scales to provide a strategic overview of what is important while also giving direction for finer-scale decision making.

⁶ <http://www.marlborough.govt.nz/Your-Council/RMA/Marlborough-Sounds-Resource-Management-Plan.aspx>
Appendix 2 in Volume 1 of the Marlborough Sounds Resource Management Plan sets out Natural Character Areas. Relevant provisions are set out in Volume 1 (Chapter 2—Natural character) and Volume 2 (Rules).

6.2.2 Scale

Boyden Evans referred to recent work done by Boffa Miskell for the Horowhenua District Council (HDC) to identify the inland extent of the coastal environment and sector boundaries, where each sector has a combination of features that make it distinct from adjoining areas. The 'final' map of the 35 km-long Horowhenua coast illustrates the natural character ranking of each sector—from 'outstanding' to 'low'. Boffa Miskell advises that it is important to map the character ranking of all of the coastal environment and not just the high and outstanding areas.

The Horowhenua project is quite different from Marlborough's, as it is a much smaller area and a lot more of the attributes and values could be described and assessed to a close level. The base scale used was 1:50 000. The study recorded attributes for each area at a more detailed scale, although caution should be exercised in interpreting boundaries and details at anything finer than 1:50 000.

By contrast, Marlborough is larger. The mapping scale used for the study is 1:100 000, and some areas used 1:50 000.

7. Other assessment methodologies

Vicky Froude gave a presentation to the workshop on her QINCCE (Quantitative Indices for measuring the Natural Character of the Coastal Environment) methodology followed by questions. Aspects of this methodology have also been fine tuned for regional application since the workshop.

Vicky's presentation aimed at informing the participants about the general process and was not specific to the Marlborough study. Vicky is part of a consortium that has been engaged by Northland Regional Council and the three Northland district councils to undertake a coastal assessment to identify Northland's coastal environment, outstanding natural landscapes and natural features, and natural character. This assessment will map all terrestrial and marine areas with greater than 'high' natural character, and set thresholds for and delineate all areas of outstanding natural character.

A range of other methodologies was also discussed, including land-typing and the way that Boffa Miskell Ltd staff have developed their methodology as they undertake projects throughout the country.

8. Defining the coastal environment

Defining the coastal environment was the first stage of the Marlborough project.

Policy 1 of the NZCPS 2010 lists ten matters to be recognised within the coastal environment and notes that the actual extent and characteristics will vary from place to place. Currently, there is no official guidance or endorsed methodology for 'identifying the inland extent and characteristics of the coastal environment'. People involved in defining the extent of the coastal environment should carefully consider the context and the issues to be managed. A single line on a map may struggle to show the different management requirements within the coastal environment.

The Marlborough project involved the development of a framework that identified three zones relevant to defining the coastal environment—A, B, and C (See Fig. 1).

There was general agreement by the workshop participants that this approach was appropriate for Zones A and B. However, there was debate about Zone C and how it might either be included in the coastal environment or otherwise considered, as the effects of activities in Zone C or beyond have the potential to impact Zones A and B in the coastal environment (e.g. damming of waterways, nutrient runoff, etc).

The most recent approach to defining these zones is reprinted here with the permission of Boffa Miskell Ltd (Figs 1 and 2).

In terms of helping the community to understand these zones, perhaps it would be helpful to clarify that 'coastal landscape' includes seascape and subtidal elements (e.g. the water and the seabed).

There is often a very high degree of public interest when the definition and boundary of the coastal environment is considered, with strong support for any technical reports and recommendations on environment boundaries being released for consultation at the same time as council's draft provisions. This is particularly the case in Marlborough. MDC will be adopting this approach for consultation on the results of this work as well as the results of the natural landscapes and natural features report (also prepared by Boffa Miskell Ltd as part of these investigations).

8.1 Agreements

- It was acknowledged at the workshop that making the schematic diagrams more broadly available would be very beneficial for other councils undertaking similar work. DOC will follow this up with Boffa Miskell Ltd and Marlborough District Council.

8.2 Follow-up actions

- James will talk with Pere re: making changes to the definition of the Zones to reflect the amendments suggested at the workshop (e.g. taking care to carefully describe the scale of influence of coastal processes in determining Zones B and C). Pere is happy to make the changes that have already been recommended.
- Andrew will liaise directly with James regarding his specific suggestions for identification and mapping of marine elements, processes and patterns for the Marlborough coast.
- Marlborough District Council, Boffa Miskell Ltd and DOC will liaise on options to make information available to other practitioners, including local government.

BML has developed the following model to determine the **Coastal Environment**, as interpreted under Policy 1 of the NZCPS 2010. Essentially the Coastal Environment contains two zones of significance:

Zone A This zone includes the **CMA** and the **Active Coastal Interface Zone**. The CMA includes the sea, rocks and part of the beach up to the mean high water spring (MHWS) mark and extends out to sea for twelve nautical miles. The Active Coastal Interface is where the sea is the dominant element, and the primary or significant influence on landform, vegetation, and perception. The Active Coastal Interface varies in width, but generally extends inland of the MHWS mark and comprises the inter-tidal area above MHWS, beaches, lagoons, estuaries and their margins, rocky peninsulas and coastal cliffs.

Zone B The **Coastal Dominance Zone** generally includes the land up to the first coastal ridge or escarpment (with the width varying generally between 100m to 500m from the back of the beach within flat to gently undulating environments, although will extend further inland where the landscape becomes more complex, such as the Banks Peninsula, where this zone may extend inland for several kilometres). This zone is where coastal processes are dominant or significant and may include inland cliffs, settled (or modified) dune lands, farm land and coastal forests.

Beyond the Coastal Environment, is a third zone, where coastal processes, influences and qualities are not significant/dominant but form part of the coastal landscape.

Zone C **Coastal Context Zone**. This zone is where coastal processes inland of the Coastal Environment have an influencing presence on the landscape and would include developed back-dunes which no longer exhibit significant coastal processes, coastal plains, and containing hill-slopes. This zone generally extends some 1.5 to 2km inland (or where coastal influences have sufficiently diminished). It is also recognised that some activities occurring within this zone can significantly affect the coastal environment (Zones A and B) either perceptually or physically to varying degrees. The inland extent of Zone C will not be mapped, as it falls outside of the Coastal Environment.

The Coastal Environment and the Coastal Context Zone can collectively be referred to as The Coastal Landscape.

Figure 1. The coastal environment—zones of significance.⁷

⁷ Reprinted with the permission of Boffa Miskell Limited.

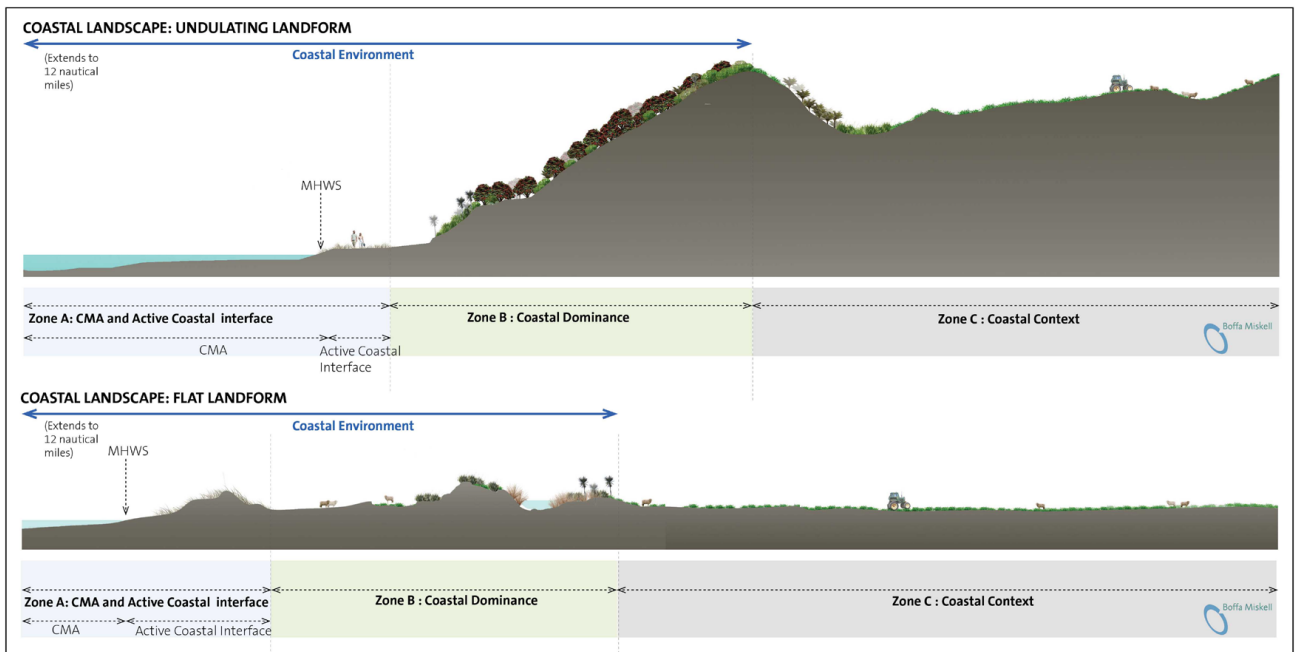


Figure 2. Extent of the coastal environment.⁸

9. Components of natural character

For the Marlborough work, Boffa Miskell applied a method using the seven attributes introduced in Section 6.1 to describe and measure natural character.

The workshop discussed these attributes and the way they are described in Boffa Miskell's draft findings, and agreed that a table with two columns describing their components would be useful. The columns would identify '**Elements**' (i.e. what is the natural character), and '**Integrity**'.

Discussion of each of the attributes reached a number of conclusions:

- 'Natural systems and processes' currently includes currents, sedimentation, waves etc. Could it be interpreted to include biological processes including migratory routes of animals? The workshop agreed it would be useful to clarify the title by calling it 'Natural **physical** systems and processes'.
- 'Vegetation/habitats' could be rephrased as 'community/habitats' and therefore bring in the concept of ecological processes and patterns that NZCPS 2010 Policy 13 (2)(a) covers. 'Exotic' could be removed, as it is a form of modification.
- 'Structures and settlements' are probably not elements of natural character and are more related to integrity, and could be removed.

9.1 Follow-up actions

- James will reformat this table into two columns ('elements' and 'integrity of those elements'), revise the descriptors, and circulate the revised table to MDC and DOC for comment.
- James will think about descriptors of integrity (i.e. assess the extent to which the elements are intact and/or its integrity).

⁸ Reprinted with the permission of Boffa Miskell Limited.

10. Assessing and evaluating experiential attributes

There is significant debate amongst people involved in describing and measuring natural character, as well as policy writers, about the experiential or perceptual attributes of natural character and how they form part of the assessments and management responses. This matter was also discussed at the national workshop in August 2011.

Differences occurred between ecologists and landscape practitioners in the workshop about how experiential matters are best addressed in the natural character assessment and evaluation process. Generally speaking, the ecologists were more comfortable with focusing on the objective biophysical components that are measurable and taking these as a proxy for the human experience. The landscape practitioners believed that human values and experiences are core to the assessment of natural character, both in terms of what the NZCPS expects as well as what the community relates most strongly to.

So far, MDC has consulted with the community twice to explain and seek feedback on the Regional Policy Statement review and the future direction for the Sounds. When the first RPS was prepared, it was assumed by the council and many in the community that the Sounds is a working environment. Today this perspective is different. For the council and community, the Sounds is strongly felt as being a place for recreation and perceiving and appreciating the natural environment. This trend has grown stronger as more people come to live in or visit the Sounds.

Sarah McRae commented that the Natural Character Areas (NCAs⁹) in the Sounds Plan were included in the late 1990s. At the time, the areas were embraced by many of the Sounds residents and users as being an honest breakdown of the Sounds' character that captured what was special about the Sounds as a whole, as well as the constituent areas. The areas also captured marine as well as terrestrial components. The NCAs were built from the knowledge of biophysical values (e.g. geology, hydrology, biodiversity) but omitted experiential component. This gap was primarily due to resource constraints at the time.

⁹ Appendix Two, Marlborough Sounds Resource Management Plan
http://www.marlborough.govt.nz/Your-Council/RMA/Marlborough-Sounds-Resource-Management-Plan/-/media/Files/MDC/Home/Your%20Council/RMA/MSRMP/rma_v1_ap2.ashx

11. Outstanding natural character

Slides 8 and 9 of James' presentation summarised the proposed approach to identifying outstanding natural character. The preliminary result of this assessment was summarised in slide 9.

The approach has been to identify 'the best of the best'. This approach involved the following considerations:

- Do the whole assessment for Marlborough before identifying what is 'outstanding'.
- Look at the term 'outstanding' in relation to the existing RMA and NZCPS 2010 provisions for natural features and natural landscapes, and ask the question *how does this approach work in relation to natural character?* With help from peers and ecologists within Boffa Miskell Ltd, the study worked with the following descriptors:

***Outstanding** is a comparative evaluative term meaning to stand out, exceptional, pre-eminent, clearly superior to others in the same group or category.*

***Outstanding Natural Character:** the coastal environment may be outstanding where it has very high levels of natural character. It was determined at the Boffa Miskell workshop that outstanding natural character is separately assessed.*

*An assessment establishing whether a coastal sector contains outstanding natural character is undertaken only when all or part of the coastal environment is initially assessed as containing **very high levels of natural character**.*

- Areas with outstanding natural character are the areas with the highest area of 'indigenouness'—the full expression for 'outstanding natural character' in the Marlborough study is *containing a combination of indigenous elements, patterns and processes that are exceptional in their intactness, integrity and lack of built structures and other modifications compared to other areas in the Marlborough Sounds.*
- The above definition is such that experiential aspects are not explicit.
- The way the methodology works is that the outstanding areas are drawn from areas assessed as having 'very high' natural character ('outstanding' is a subset of 'very high'). Not all that is 'very high' is 'outstanding'.

Workshop participants confirmed that, based on their own knowledge and experience of the region, the areas proposed to be classified as 'outstanding' looked 'about right'. The same participants noted the challenges in how this information is portrayed through maps and in other ways. There was also a challenge in ensuring that the natural character of other areas was also recognised.

Outstanding Natural Features (ONF) assessment: James explained that in applying the methodology, a place may be 'high' across a number of elements (but not 'very high') but could still trigger 'outstanding' because of the combination of the attributes.

In relation to the natural character assessment, Di Lucas commented that it would be good to see recognition of how things in combination might achieve 'outstanding'. She referred the workshop participants to Stephen Brown's work in the Coromandel, which includes a landscape and coastal character study.

It was also noted that the differences between 'outstanding landscapes' and 'outstanding natural character' need to be clearly recognised. Not all areas in the Sounds that have 'outstanding landscape' have 'outstanding natural character', and vice versa. Practitioners need to be careful translating 'outstanding' in landscape v. 'outstanding' in natural character.

The workshop considered the question of how ‘outstanding’ would work within the natural character framework in Appendix 2 of the Marlborough Sounds Resource Management Plan¹⁰. This Framework was synthesised by Lucas Associates, supported by Landcare Research Ltd land typing¹¹ and technical input from DOC marine and terrestrial ecologists. The framework identifies 19 natural character areas (11 land areas and 8 marine areas), and the distinguishing natural character components within each of the areas. Are these components ‘outstanding’ characteristics for each unit? Or rather a descriptor of what is present?

Pere reported his thinking on options to present the natural character knowledge for Marlborough and where this information might be held. He preferred a combination of mapped and descriptive information, reflecting the balance of quantitative and qualitative results. Provisions specific to the Marlborough Sounds would be in the Regional Policy Statement to preserve the ‘jewels in the Crown’. Qualitative and other descriptive material could be made available to explain and promote further understanding.

A key challenge is for communities and plan users to understand why an area is classified as ‘outstanding’. A further challenge then is how best to articulate this information and where it should be located (e.g. regional policy statement, unitary plan, or a reference document).

The material in Appendix 2 of the Sounds Plan contributed to the proposed approach. It is also presented in a way that has received community support as well as being recognised in RMA decision making. There could be major benefits in making this information more explicit. One option would be to have it available as a technical reference resource for RPS and unitary plan users.

11.1 Follow-up actions

- Boffa Miskell Ltd, Lucas Associates Ltd, Marlborough District Council and Department of Conservation will discuss how to combine the approach used in Appendix 2 with the new study results; how the combined approach could be presented and where it would best be located (e.g. in the unitary plan or as a technical reference document).

¹⁰ Appendix 2, Marlborough Sounds Resource Management Plan
http://www.marlborough.govt.nz/Your-Council/RMA/Marlborough-Sounds-Resource-Management-Plan/~/_media/Files/MDC/Home/Your%20Council/RMA/MSRMP/rma_v1_ap2.ashx

¹¹ Lynn, I.H. 1996: Land types of the Marlborough sounds. Contract report LC9697/049, Landcare Research NZ Ltd, Lincoln, Canterbury, New Zealand.

12. Mapping

The workshop participants agreed that representing areas with ‘outstanding’ natural character is challenging. Identification of the outer Sounds as ‘outstanding natural character’ is supported, although mapping needs to avoid giving the impression that important seaward and landward natural character matters are not important to the ‘outstanding’ ranking. Concepts such as ‘wild’, ‘scenic’, and ‘seascape’ risk being lost in the mapping.

The assessment scale in the latest natural character report is fixed at 1:100 000. Some areas need a different scale—this should be noted upfront in the report (and acknowledged in the policy framework).

The workshop participants agreed that problems with scale might be remedied by doing the mapping at a different scale in the planning maps. The statutory documents could provide supporting information and linking provisions, with further background supplied in technical documents.

12.1 Follow-up actions

- Pere and James to give Andrew the output of the next phase of the mapping exercise.

13. Looking forward—points of agreement

The report by Boffa Miskell Ltd for Marlborough District Council reviewed the existing information against the NZCPS 2010; in particular, a proposed approach to give effect to Policy 1 (Coastal Environment) and Policy 13 (Natural Character).

Points of agreement from the workshop are outlined below.

13.1 Coastal environment identification and mapping

- The proposed approach supports identification of the inland extent of the coastal environment.

13.2 Natural character components

- Detailed description of the attributes that make up natural character is an area requiring more work from practitioners.
- Identification of the marine ecological components can be constrained by a lack of information. Natural character assessments need to be upfront on what information is there and what is not. Practitioners need to use more of the existing knowledge for seaward natural character components, including knowledge about processes and patterns.
- Natural character assessments, evaluations and the statutory provisions that flow from them will be stronger if qualitative approaches carefully complement quantitative results.
- Results based on available hard data and descriptive data—which is what can be concluded based on available information—need to be clearly distinguished.

13.3 Natural character mapping

- The workshop has identified some challenges in mapping natural character, including describing natural character as a whole, and identifying what is ‘outstanding’ and ‘high’.
- Landward and seaward assessments of natural character will not necessarily yield the same results. The difference in the results of these assessments can be difficult to represent just on a map.
- The assessment and mapping is fixed at a certain scale. Some areas need a different scale. This should be noted upfront in the report (and acknowledged in the policy framework). Marlborough District Council may require finer-scale results to support decision making in relation to some areas.

13.4 Broader conclusions about the workshop process

- Planners and other experts working together to prepare information for regional and district planning responsibilities is strongly supported.
- Technical material and planning provisions should go out together to the public.
- Data constraints and limits on access to information need to be acknowledged and, where possible, addressed (e.g. lack of marine information, no access to information about Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) on private land). Not having access to this data can be a real constraint on getting a good result.
- The workshop process might be beneficial for other regions undertaking natural character assessments. Northland Regional Council and the three district councils have engaged a consortium that includes Vicky to map natural character. Bay of Plenty, Canterbury and West Coast are also considering commissioning work. DOC should be contacting these councils to see how information from the Marlborough workshop can be usefully shared.
- Guidance for local authorities and other practitioners—should the final material be provided for other regions, or would a workshop summary be better, to illustrate the methods available to assess natural character? The summary is desirable in the first instance and can be delivered more quickly.

14. Closing round from participants

Workshop process

- It was a very productive day with constructive discussions.
- We got further than thought we would. Dealing with a real case study was helpful.
- There was good discussion and debate. It was good to step back and look the issue as a whole.
- The relatively small size of the workshop group allowed us to get into specifics.

Methodologies for natural character assessment, evaluation and statutory provisions

- We do not think we should be saying that there is just one approach to use and that it can be applied everywhere.
- Planners and technical staff should be encouraged to work together.
- The workshop did not address definition or evaluation.
- Any general guidance provided will require consistent methodology.
- Assessment processes are more difficult to apply in the marine environment.
- It is important that local government agencies try to provide guidance to help themselves. The outcomes of this workshop should assist other councils.

How can local government be supported to implement the NZCPS 2010 coastal environment and natural character provisions?

- DOC and the workshop participants want to support the Marlborough District Council and other councils so they can make progress with implementing the NZCPS 2010.
- The type of detailed assessment required for the NZCPS is hard for councils with limited budgets.
- Regional and district council collaboration on work like this should be encouraged.
- How can the information arising from this workshop be used to assist other regions starting out on assessments? We need to help other agencies avoid having to replicate this process.

15. References

Davidson, R.; Duffy, C.; Gaze, P.; Baxter, A.; DuFresne S.; Courtne, S.; Hamill, P. 2011: Ecologically significant marine sites in Marlborough, New Zealand. Marlborough District Council and Department of Conservation.

Department of Conservation 2012: Natural character and the NZCPS 2010—national workshop, 2 August 2011: workshop report. Wellington.

Boffa, F.; Lucas, D.; Baxter, A. 2012: Natural character think pieces. Section 5 and appendix 1 in Department of Conservation 2012: Natural character and the NZCPS 2010—national workshop, 2 August 2011, workshop report. Wellington.

