

A Submission to Te Ao Turoa – The Natural World

For the Otago Peninsula Community Board

Summary of Submission

- The Otago Peninsula Community Board supports the development of an Environmental Strategy.
- Importance should be placed on the built environment and its values to biodiversity, heritage, culture and well-being.
- The strategy needs to include objectives and priorities that acknowledge the importance and role of people and communities as environmental leaders in local and regional environmental management.
- A more detailed account of the DCC's land holdings would give better context to the strategy.
- The City Council needs to utilise the strategy to develop an environmental ethos running through all of its departments and operations that is inclusive, reflective and conscious of its role and impacts.
- The strategy needs to indicate more clearly how the DCC and agencies will communicate and interact over the raft of plans and policies that manage the environment and how this is shared with the community.
- The strategy should include information on cross boundary issues of environmental and biodiversity management.
- Some of the objectives and priorities need tightening to be more succinct and meaningful.
- The Board supports the concept of mauri and the protection and enhancement of taoka for future generations. It also supports the protection of ecological areas from inappropriate development and the improvement of polluting discharges and pollution, particularly in the Otago Harbour and its adjacent catchments.
- Greater emphasis is required in the future-proofing and planning for biodiversity conservation in light of climate change.
- The strategy needs a clear indication of the need for ongoing research and information and how this might benefit the Council, community and its environment.
- The strategy does not discuss how future technological and information change might be utilised in environmental and biodiversity management.

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to Dunedin's Draft Environment Strategy. The Otago Peninsula is a significant area that is recognised nationally and internationally for its landscape, cultural heritage and biodiversity. These values have drawn people to live, work and actively conserve the values that make the Peninsula unique. The proposed strategy is an initial step forward to looking at the management of the environment and to create a meaningful legacy for future generations. Like any "living document" it must be flexible enough to be able to be adjusted, built upon and grown so that it encompasses new and future challenges.

Discussion of *Background- the Dunedin Context*

One of the concerns about the proposed strategy is the lack of importance placed on the built environment. This is possibly because of the concentration of the document on the natural resources and biodiversity. However, the presence of biodiversity and natural environmental service is very present in the built environment and more should be discussed about its role in the wider environmental context. Examples include farmland, sports fields and domestic gardens that add to a broader range of habitat opportunities.

In the background section only the DCC reserve holdings that contribute to biodiversity are included. There are significant other Council land holdings that contribute including water catchment and forestry land that should be in this synopsis. A more detailed explanation of habitat type would also give this section more coherence and a wider explanation of the uniqueness of the city to a broader audience.

While eco-tourism on the Otago Peninsula is important the natural landscape of the area is a significant reason for visitors to come to the area. More emphasis should be placed on the landscape, coastal areas, harbour and maritime sites and geological landforms that make the Peninsula the place it is. A description of the pressures on key species that form part of the eco-tourism industry would also be useful for the Otago Peninsula.

The lack of connection to the environment raised on page 8 is not solely the reason for the way humans have changed the environment. Daily decision-making that impacts on the environment are often decisions that public have little or no control over. Water usage and sewage pollution are examples, where people use services provided to them from an external organisation like the Dunedin City Council. These decisions don't come about through disconnection to nature but rather through the availability of choice and supply. Parts of this section should be connected with the section on *Unsustainable Resource Use*.

In the *Climate Change* section extension of what the likely changes to biodiversity and ecosystems will be is required. This is particularly relevant to the Otago Peninsula, where climate change will alter exotic and native plant assemblages, sea water acidification will change important marine habitats and terrestrial habitat composition will make changes to

predator/prey relationships. These impacts of climate change have a direct bearing on the Peninsula landscape. They will also change the potential presence or absence of biodiversity and will frame the responses that land and conservation managers make to the changes in the environment.

The *DCC's Role* section of the proposed strategy limits the Dunedin City Council's activities in both the present and future context. Most importantly in this section of the strategy is the need for the Council to show leadership, advocacy and partnership. This section needs to be much stronger in its wording and the Council must make a deeper public acclamation of these facets of environmental management.

In the *Strategic Fit* section of the proposed strategy the national context should be broadened to include The Conservation Act, The Wildlife Act, The Biosecurity Act, The Marine Mammals Act and The Reserves Act. Within the local context of this section of the strategy no mention is made of either the Department of Conservation or the Dunedin City Council's various reserve and species management plans. For a significant part of biodiversity management these plans are critical at a local level. They also often form the basis of working relationships between the City Council, agencies and the community as plans for aspirations and implementation. Finally, crucial questions in any pantheon of policy and legislation are how these documents talk to one another? How the bodies that are responsible for them can ensure that that communication is undertaken in a meaningful way?

Discussion of Environment Strategy Framework

Vision for All, Themes, Objectives and Priorities Pages

The proposed vision is an aspirational one and a positive one. Given the scale of the city and the variation in its natural habitats more detail and focus should be given to those differences and the comparison between rural and urban sites.

Theme 1 Treasuring the Environment

Objectives

The objectives need some sharpening to ensure that their intent is brought into sharper focus and addresses local as well global issues. Proposed revisions of those objectives are presented here in the Board's submission;

- Dunedin's community is connected to the environment and can actively interact with it in positive ways for the benefit of the environment, economy and social well-being.
- Dunedin's community is supported and resourced to actively work together to understand, preserve, enhance and restore the natural environment.

- Dunedin leads in addressing local issues through good environmental practices, science and promotion and shares that leadership with its community.
- Dunedin’s environmental practices and management creates a city with one of the great urban and rural environments in the world in addressing issues at a local, national and global level.

Priorities & Current Goals

The immediate reaction to the priorities found within the proposed strategy is how will this be achieved? There is a disconnection between the priorities and some of the DCC’s roles within this section of the proposed strategy. Moreover, without more detail from the Implementation Plan (page 18) some of the priorities may languish in actually being achieved. For example to tell the stories of the environment that is intended to create awareness a significant plan of interpretation, education, promotion and interactive event management is required. There is little in the corresponding Implementation Plan that will achieve that goal and more thinking on this aspect of these priorities needs to be developed.

One aspect of the “*Treasuring Environment*” section that is also concerning is that the only provider listed is the DCC’s Parks Department. The problem in this part of the proposed strategy is that there appears to be no integration or recognition of a need for an environmental consciousness amongst all Council departments. In day to day management of Council and public infrastructure, each department has an impact on the environment, and biodiversity. Whether it is water, waste, roading, property, traffic management, dog control or environmental health, their actions in the management of their sphere of interest impacts on the environment. Biodiversity in particular transcends legal reserve boundaries and what is required here is the environmental strategy to create a cohesive environmental conscious organisation for the benefit of the community and the environment. This is where internal advocacy within Council is required, not just externally to outside agencies. This is where this document can create its strength and should be used.

Theme 2 Healthy Natural Environment

Objectives

The objectives found within this section are straight-forward, perhaps the only comment that could be made is rewording them slightly to read;

- Dunedin actively protects and conserves its natural heritage, biodiversity, landscapes and ecosystems.
- Dunedin actively restores repairs and enhances its natural heritage, biodiversity, landscapes and ecosystems.

Priorities & Current Goals

The Board supports the concept of mauri and the protection and enhancement of taoka for future generations. It also supports the protection of ecological areas from inappropriate development and the improvement of polluting discharges and pollution, particularly in the Otago Harbour and its adjacent catchments.

The proposed strategy states “Ecosystem services are restored and enhanced.” However, much more needs to be done than too actively “encourage opportunities.” The City Council must show leadership in biodiversity restoration and enhancement and that requires the spade to go in the ground.

Theme 3 Environment for the Future

Objectives

While the focus of theme 3 of the proposed strategy is laudable, the focus must also include biodiversity, landscape, culture and heritage. Climate change will have significant effects on biodiversity and landscape and the environment for the future must also include its protection for future generations. For the Otago Peninsula and Dunedin City this is imperative as a significant slice of our economy is based on biodiversity tourism. Without objectives to make it cope with the predictions of climate change our community and region will suffer. More importantly, in theme two the notions of mauri and taoka were central objectives, without future objectives in biodiversity, landscape, culture and heritage will we lose those in this predicted future?

The proposed strategy should have a vision for biodiversity and landscape because our own well-being is so dependent upon the ecological services that it provides. Water catchments, wetlands, marine environments, sand dunes and forest areas are central to our own abilities to combat the future under the climate change scenario. Potential objectives that should be added may include;

- Dunedin prepares for the climate change challenge by ensuring that its natural areas and landscapes are resilient and able to provide the essential ecological services necessary for human and biodiversity well-being.
- Dunedin adapts its enhancement, restoration and conservation of natural areas for the benefit of biodiversity and human well-being.

Priorities & Current Goals

A similar discussion over the objectives of the “Environment for the Future” can be made for the priorities. Once again there is no recognition of the priority that should be given to biodiversity and landscape as a source of ecological services and this is essential.

Implementation

The proposed strategy suggests that *“this strategy sets the strategic direction and is not an implementation plan,”* for many people including the Otago Peninsula community this is disappointing. The City Council must act and be seen to act upon the laudable themes, objectives and priorities of the proposed strategy. Otherwise the strategy is simply a plan of good intentions. It is proposed that some of the aspects of the strategy will be implemented through existing projects and plans. However, there are weaknesses in that approach, principally around existing human and financial resources. There needs to be more discussion on how this will be achieved.

Conclusions

The City Council have taken a broad approach in the management of Dunedin’s environment which is understandable in light of its complexities and community variances. For a community like the Otago Peninsula such a strategy is vital to the long term sustainable management of its natural resources, landscape and biodiversity. In particular the reliance of the Peninsula on wildlife tourism is a major concern, especially in light of the need to future-proof its economic, intrinsic and cultural value to our community. It is this area of the proposed strategy that needs a greater level of detail and a stronger approach in light of the changes brought about by climate change.

Perhaps the most important thing for the City Council and its support of the community and environment is the development of an ingrained environmental consciousness running through the organisation. The strategy attempts this, but it needs development and expansion. The City Council have made a positive start by acknowledging the importance of the environment to the city and the Otago Peninsula. It is hoped that through consultation the detail of the strategy can be found to meet the needs of the community and its environment.

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