

Example of an SNA reassessment exercise

(to inform transitional provisions of the NPS)

This SNA reassessment occurred in Timaru District near the end of a ten-year Significant Natural Areas (SNA) survey programme. During the survey, the significance of each site was assessed against criteria in the Timaru District Plan. Near the end of the survey period, the sites were reassessed against new ecological significance criteria in the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement (RPS) 2013.

The Timaru District Plan significance criteria comprise four primary criteria (representativeness; rarity; diversity and pattern; and distinctiveness/special ecological character) and three secondary criteria (size and shape; connectivity; and long-term sustainability). Sites are assessed by ranking site attributes against the four primary criteria and two secondary criteria (excluding sustainability). A combination of primary and secondary criteria rankings, with greater weighting on the primary criteria, determined whether a site was significant.

The Canterbury RPS criteria comprise two representativeness criteria, four rarity/distinctiveness criteria, one diversity and pattern criterion, and three ecological context criteria. Sites are assessed by determining whether the site attributes meet the significance threshold for any one of the criteria.

At July 2016, 772 SNAs covering a total area of 7260ha had been surveyed and mapped in Timaru District. These SNAs were reassessed against the Canterbury RPS criteria in October 2016. This reassessment was undertaken by the ecologist (Mike Harding) who surveyed almost all of the sites. All sites were documented in written reports. The total time required for this desk-top reassessment, including preparation of a spreadsheet and summary report, was 39 hours.

All of the 772 sites were reassessed as significant against the Canterbury RPS criteria. However, 20 of these sites were very small and/or substantially degraded. The significance of these 20 sites depended on the professional judgement of the ecologist, as the Canterbury RPS criteria do not provide clear guidance for such sites.

Conclusions:

1. Reassessment of SNAs against new criteria can be undertaken as a desk-top exercise, at relatively low cost, provided the attributes of each SNA are well known or well documented.
2. Reassessment of SNAs against the proposed NPS criteria is unlikely to result in existing SNAs losing their significance status, unless the original assessments were over-zealous or incorrect (or site attributes have changed).
3. If the original SNA criteria were comprehensive, and the surveys and assessments were robust and professional, the proposed NPS criteria are unlikely to result in identification of a large number of additional SNAs.

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23rd July 2018