

# Superb or Suburb?

International case studies in  
management of icon landscapes





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Office of the  
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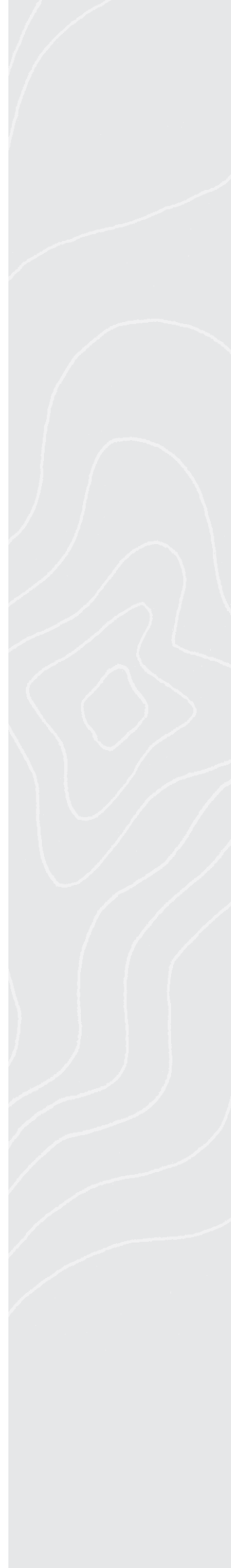
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## Preface

In the second half of the twentieth century many people of more affluent communities have increasingly sought living spaces in icon landscapes. This is in response to a lot of things, including: the desire for vistas, or to be closer to 'nature'; the need for a retreat from the pressures of life in a 'go faster' world; and people wishing to use desirable property to generate wealth for their retirement. Management of the impacts of people living in beautiful landscapes has become a major land-use planning challenge. How can this desire to inhabit these landscapes be met in ways that do not destroy, in the long term, the very values that attract people there in the first place?

New Zealand, in common with many other nations, is becoming increasingly concerned about human settlement impacts on desirable landscapes. In 2001 my team and I examined how these impacts were being played out, via a series of case studies ranging from the Waitakere Ranges in the north to the Queenstown Lakes area in the far south, in our report *Managing Change in Paradise: sustainable development in peri-urban areas*. The study focused on the results being achieved by current planning processes, which unsurprisingly, were very variable. But what caused this variation? I found many reasons but significant ones included: a general inability of communities and local government to develop long-term consensus on just what is valued in the desired landscapes; the fundamental inability of current planning under the Resource Management Act 1991 to address cumulative effects; and the general failure of central government to provide adequate guidance or significant investment in planning and resource information.

These findings reinforced the concerns of many of the inhabitants and administrators of cherished landscapes and ecosystems. However, addressing these concerns is far from simple, because it will

require some very fundamental shifts in thinking about planning approaches. This realisation led to the decision to examine how icon landscapes are being managed elsewhere in the world, in order to see what we could learn from the experiences of communities in other countries.

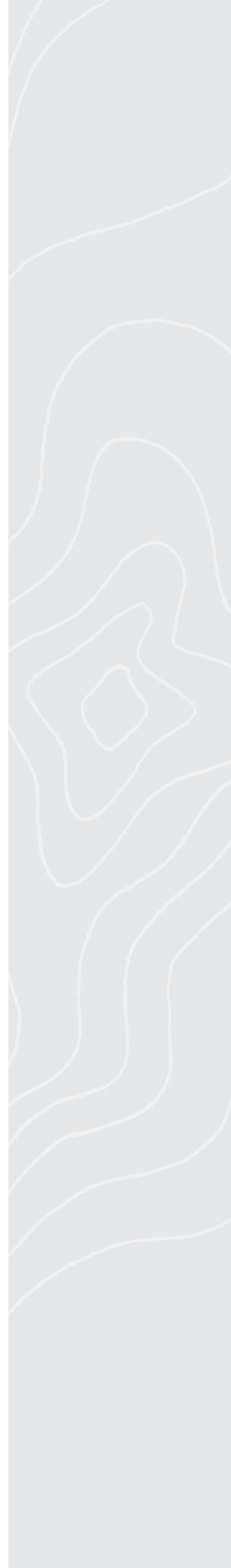
We selected three areas as case studies: the Oak Ridges Moraine in Ontario, Canada, the Cape Peninsula in South Africa and the Peak District in the United Kingdom. Although these areas have very different histories, and political and social contexts, I believe they provide valuable clues to the key ingredients for sustaining critical values in icon landscapes and ecosystems. In the concluding remarks of this report we outline key lessons from the case studies.

Some of the planning approaches we identify are very different from those that shape New Zealand's current models. The determining of whether or not these approaches can help deliver what communities want in our valued landscapes will necessitate a substantive and honest re-examination of our models. Yes, our culture and ways of doing things differ from those of the case study areas, but I don't believe they differ enough to prevent us from taking their learnings very seriously and applying them to our needs. I trust that we will, because failure to do so will guarantee the loss over the next few decades of many of the values we cherish in some great lands and landscapes in New Zealand.



Dr J Morgan Williams  
Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment





## Section 1

# Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's 2001 report, *Managing Change in Paradise: sustainable development in peri-urban areas*<sup>1</sup> highlighted serious concerns about the patterns of residential development in rural New Zealand and at the urban fringe. Residential developments in areas of high landscape value, are exerting pressure on New Zealand's biodiversity, ecology and natural heritage features, and cumulatively detract from our 'sense of place'.

In addition to concerns about the outcomes of planning approaches in New Zealand, concerns about the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) process also surfaced. Current approaches to managing peri-urban development are perceived to entail cumbersome bureaucratic processes with little certainty for developers and other interested parties. Alongside this, are the high and sometimes prohibitive costs that confront individuals and organisations working to preserve and protect existing landscape, ecological and amenity values in the face of changing and intensifying land-use pressures.<sup>2</sup>

The conclusion of *Managing Change in Paradise: sustainable development in peri-urban areas* stated:

*Rather than making a number of recommendations for future action, we feel it is more appropriate to identify key questions and to stimulate debate around a range of possible solutions and set an agenda for ongoing dialogue.*<sup>3</sup>

We hope that this report is a useful contribution to that debate and will stimulate the search for solutions.

The Commissioner believes there is value in looking to other countries for new ideas and innovative approaches that may assist New Zealand planners and communities to achieve better outcomes in the peopling of significant

landscapes. This report documents the approaches to managing a significant landscape area, in three different countries. The case studies are:

- The Oak Ridges Moraine, Ontario, Canada.
- Cape Peninsula, South Africa.
- Peak District National Park and Peak District, United Kingdom.

Within the context of residential development pressures, for each case study this report aims to:

- outline the pressures on natural landscape and ecological values
- outline the relevant legal and constitutional framework
- outline the current policy and planning process
- consider how management sustains the values associated with biodiversity, ecosystem services, production systems, recreation, and heritage and landscape attributes
- consider how cumulative effects are managed
- illustrate how the community is involved in decision making
- consider how management provides for the rights and responsibilities of indigenous peoples
- discuss any emerging trends or issues.

New Zealand can learn from the experience of other countries - the case studies provide generous food for thought and discussion. The concluding chapter of this report draws on the three cases studies to present some key lessons for New Zealanders to consider.

## 1.2 Methodology

The case studies have been chosen on the basis of both practical considerations, such as the availability of relevant information and accessibility to personnel involved in the decision-making process, and relevance to the New Zealand situation, including:

- the presence of high natural landscape and ecological values
- intense or increasing pressure from

subdivision, residential and/or tourist development

- importance to the local economy
- recognition of the significance of ecological services and recreational opportunities provided to the community
- the existence of alternative approaches to addressing development pressures
- extent of similarities and contrasts to the New Zealand cultural context, including indigenous peoples, colonisation, western democracy, standard of living and quality of life.

The research for this project has involved a desktop study of each of the case studies. Substantial information has been considered and informed further by personal communications with people involved in developing, administering or commenting on the land management approaches. People resident in the case study areas who are familiar with the local planning framework have reviewed the case studies for factual accuracy.

## 1.3 What this report is not

This report does not specifically aim to consider the management of urban sprawl in the chosen case study areas.

Whilst key lessons are gleaned from the case studies, they have not been systematically analysed or compared with the New Zealand approach - councils and communities themselves need to decide how the various mechanisms might work to achieve the outcomes sought in their locality. In doing so, the differences of the New Zealand culture and history of land settlement should be borne in mind.

There is an international model worth mentioning here that is not covered in this report: the World Conservation Union (IUCN) category V protected landscape. This approach for protected private land is being promoted by the Environment Defence Society in Auckland, most immediately with the Waitakere Ranges in mind, but with a

view to thinking about other New Zealand landscape areas (see [www.eds.org.nz](http://www.eds.org.nz)). Given the work being done already in looking at the applicability of this approach to the New Zealand situation, a case study based on this model is not repeated here.

## 1.4 PCE mandate for project

This report is produced pursuant to the Commissioner's mandate in the Environment Act 1986. In particular:

*s16(1)(f) To undertake and encourage the collection and dissemination of information in relation to the environment: and*

*s16(1)(g) To encourage preventative measures and remedial actions for the protection of the environment.*

Section 17 of the Act also states that in performing these functions, the Commissioner, at his discretion, shall have particular regard to, amongst other things:

*... (b) Areas, landscapes, and structures of aesthetic, archaeological, cultural, historical, recreational, scenic, and scientific value*

*... (d) The effects on communities of people of -*

*(i) Actual or proposed changes to natural and physical resources:*

*(ii) The establishment or proposed establishment of new communities:*

*... (g) Alternative means or methods of implementing or providing for any such proposal, policy, or matter in all or any of its aspects ...*

## 1.5 How to use this document

Readers are encouraged to consider: the similarities and differences between the case studies and the New Zealand situation; what lessons might be learnt from the experiences of other countries; and, how this learning could be applied to management of the valued landscapes in their region. Some concluding remarks, lessons and questions are provided at the end of this document to stimulate your thinking.

Abbreviations and footnotes for each chapter are at the end of that chapter. All references are at the end of the document, and are grouped by chapter. The appendices are listed at the end of each chapter and are located on the PCE's website ([www.pce.govt.nz](http://www.pce.govt.nz)), along with links to some of the documents referred to in the report. Useful websites to visit for more detailed information are also provided at the end of each chapter.

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment. 2001. *Managing Change in Paradise: sustainable development in peri-urban areas*.

<sup>2</sup> The Commissioner's recent report *Creating Our Future: Sustainable Development for New Zealand* points out: *The extensive criticisms of the RMA have largely been about process, rather than the substance of the Act, and the broader goal of advancing the country towards sustainability has largely been forgotten in disputes over detail with the RMA. The RMA was a farsighted piece of legislation. However other mechanisms are also needed to advance sustainable development.*

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment. 2002, p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment. 2001, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

