



State of the Environment Report 2002

1 About the State of the Environment Report

1	About the State of the Environment Report	2
1.1	Chairman’s Foreword	3
1.2	Why Produce a State of the Environment Report?	4
1.3	Structure.....	4
1.4	Pressure – State – Response Framework	5
1.5	Environmental Indicators.....	5
1.6	Future State of the Environment Reporting.....	5

1.1 Chairman's Foreword

Welcome to the Northland Regional Council's first State of the Environment Report. This Report provides baseline information on the health of our region's natural and physical resources. It allows us to review what is happening in our environment, determine why it is happening and report on what we are doing about it. This first report is an 'accountability card' – an environmental balance sheet - against which future changes can be measured.

The Regional Council has taken an 'objective approach' in putting this report together and the findings demonstrate that real progress is being made in many areas. Notwithstanding, there are also some major issues that the region faces, particularly:

- The on-going rapid development of our coastal environs as holiday areas and the resultant sewage-disposal problems;
- The poor standard of water quality in some rural areas;
- Risk from erosion in many of the region's coastal settlements;
- Threats to the region's biodiversity from animal pests, weeds and changing land use patterns.

The report has also highlighted the areas where the Council lacks information:

- Sustainable land use management – are our existing practices sustainable? How can we intensify land use without causing environmental degradation?
- The management of our 'at risk' groundwater aquifers and the prevention of contamination - by seawater and land-use activities.

The Regional Council recognises that the region needs timely and accurate information about the environment and it has put in place programmes to monitor the state of the environment and to detect changes. The Council's monitoring programmes will give information on effectiveness of the policies of the Council's various planning documents and will provide vital direction as the Council moves to consider the implementation of more 'effects based' environmental management regimes.

Positive change in Northland's environment will not just happen on its own - we all need to be aware of the issues and there is a challenge for all individual Northlanders to take ownership and responsibility for our environment. A key element to progress is a self recognition of the need for environmental enhancement.

The Northland Regional Council will continue to work with a variety of agencies, including government departments, the three district councils, business, iwi and local communities to effect positive change in the environment.

Northland's on-going prosperity will have a strong reliance on the region's unique environment. Future State of the Environment Reports will map our progress towards the achievement of a 'sustainable development' framework for Northland.



Mark Farnsworth
Chairman

1.2 Why Produce a State of the Environment Report?

Northland is a region of contrasts with its subtropical climate, scenic coastline, remnants of dense native forests and large areas of productive farmland.

The Northland environment is vitally important as its quality governs the way we live and function every day. What is the current state of Northland's environment? Just how clean are our beaches and rivers for swimming? How clean is our air? This report aims to answer some of those questions.

This is Northland Regional Council's first State of the Environment report. It aims to inform both the Regional Council and public on the State of Northland's environment, the human pressures acting on it, and the Council's responses to environmental issues.

This report brings together information gathered by Northland Regional Council's various monitoring programmes, including both State of the Environment monitoring and compliance monitoring required through the resource consent process. Information has also been included from organisations such as the Department of Conservation (DoC), and the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA).

The content of the State of the Environment report is linked to the Regional Policy Statement for Northland. The Statement provides an overview of and direction for the environmental management of the region. To achieve this, it contains objectives, policies, methods and anticipated environmental outcomes. This report also aims to provide information for measuring the effectiveness of our policies.

This report does not aim to provide the solutions to specific resource management problems – rather it provides information to help with environmental decision making.

1.3 Structure

The report has five main sections. The Regional Profile provides an overview of Northland by giving a brief description of the region. This includes climate, landforms, ecosystems, population, water resources and soils. The main chapters of the report are grouped into the following categories:

- Air
- Freshwater
- Coastal
- Land

Each chapter identifies significant resource management issues as contained in the Regional Policy Statement for Northland. Each chapter begins with a summary of the issues, along with the relevant Regional Policy Statement objective.

Case studies in relation to specific environmental issues are included.

1.4 Pressure – State – Response Framework

The format of the report follows the Pressure – State – Response (PSR) framework as published by the OECD and further adopted by the Ministry for the Environment for National State of the Environment reporting.

Pressure – indicators of environmental pressures or issues, such as activities or their effects that are believed to contribute to environmental stress

State – indicators of environmental conditions, such as the state of natural and physical resources and ecosystems

Response – indicators of society’s responses, such as deliberate actions undertaken to address observed environmental changes or adverse effects

The PSR model is not perfect, and sometimes doesn’t best describe the issues in our region. For every issue, cause and effect relationships may not be clear, given the complexities of a wide range of users and environmental systems. However, it does provide an appropriate framework for reporting environmental information, and is used where possible in this report.

1.5 Environmental Indicators

Northland Regional Council cannot monitor and report on every environmental issue in Northland. It is not practical or cost-effective to do so. Environmental indicators have been developed as measures to show trends or changes in the environment, and have been used throughout this report where possible. However, they don’t necessarily explain the causes for environmental change.

In New Zealand, we are only now beginning to develop sound environmental indicators to measure the health of our environment. The Ministry for the Environment has taken the lead in developing indicators through their Environmental Reporting Programme. As these indicators are developed they will be adopted and used to monitor trends in the important environmental issues within the Northland region, and to ensure consistency for national reporting.

More information can be found at www.environment.govt.nz

1.6 Future State of the Environment Reporting

Northland Regional Council is only beginning the task of reporting on the state of the environment. This report is by no means as comprehensive as we would like, and it is hoped that more information can be reported on in the future, especially with respect to trends or changes in the environment.

Northland Regional Council encourages feedback from readers on the report itself and for future directions for state of the environment monitoring and reporting.