

B9. Toitū te tuawhenua- Rural environment

Me tupu te ora ki te tuawhenua

Grow your livelihood inland

B9.1. Issues

The Auckland region is not just the location of New Zealand's largest city. Most of the Auckland region's land is rural and contains extensive, productive and valuable areas used for farming (agriculture, horticulture and grazing), rural service industries, forestry and rural recreation. The rural parts of Auckland also contain important natural resources, including native bush, significant ecological areas and outstanding natural landscapes. The contributions made by rural areas and rural communities to the well-being of the region must be acknowledged and enabled.

The outward expansion of urban areas and people's lifestyle choices and recreational activities place significant pressures on maintaining the amenity values and the quality of the environment in rural areas. Specific issues in the Auckland region are:

- protecting the finite resource of elite quality soils from urban expansion;
- managing subdivision to prevent undue fragmentation of large sites in ways that restrict rural production activities;
- addressing reverse sensitivity effects which rural-residential development can have on rural production activities; and
- managing the opportunities for countryside living in rural areas in ways that provide for rural-residential development in close proximity to urban areas and the larger rural and coastal towns and villages while minimising the loss of rural production land.

B9.2. Rural activities

B9.2.1. Objectives

- (1) Rural areas make a significant contribution to the wider economic productivity of, and food supply for, Auckland and New Zealand.
- (2) Areas of land containing elite soil are protected for the purpose of food supply from inappropriate subdivision, urban use and development.
- (3) Rural production and other activities that support rural communities are enabled while the character, amenity, landscape and biodiversity values of rural areas, including within the coastal environment, are maintained.
- (4) Auckland's rural areas outside the Rural Urban Boundary and rural and coastal towns and villages are protected from inappropriate subdivision, urban use and development.
- (5) Auckland's rural areas inside the Rural Urban Boundary are not compromised for future urbanisation by inappropriate subdivision, use and development.

B9.2.2. Policies

- (1) Enable a diverse range of activities while avoiding significant adverse effects on and urbanisation of rural areas, including within the coastal environment, and avoiding, remedying, or mitigating other adverse effects on rural character, amenity, landscape and biodiversity values.
- (2) Minimise the potential for reverse sensitivity effects by:
 - (a) preventing sensitive activities (such as countryside living) from establishing in areas where rural production activities could be adversely affected; or
 - (b) requiring sensitive activities (such as new countryside living) to adopt on-site methods to avoid reverse sensitivity effects on rural production activities; and
 - (c) avoiding subdivision and development that would result in incompatible uses or sensitive activities (such as countryside living) being introduced into areas containing mineral resources identified in the plan for future extraction.
- (3) Encourage improved land management practices in rural production areas to progressively reduce and contain adverse environmental effects.

B9.3. Land with high productive potential

B9.3.1. Objectives

- (1) Land containing elite soils is protected through land management practices to maintain its capability, flexibility and accessibility for primary production.
- (2) Land containing prime soil is managed to enable its capability, flexibility and accessibility for primary production.
- (3) The productive potential of land that does not contain elite or prime soil is recognised.

B9.3.2. Policies

- (1) Avoid new countryside living subdivision, use and development on land containing elite soil and discourage them on land containing prime soil.
- (2) Encourage activities that do not depend on using land containing elite and prime soil to locate outside these areas.
- (3) Recognise the productive potential of land that does not contain elite or prime soil and encourage the continued use of this land for rural production.
- (4) Provide for non-soil dependent rural enterprises (including post-harvest facilities) on land containing elite or prime soil where there are economic and operational benefits associated with concentrating such enterprises in specific rural localities.

- (5) Encourage land management practices that retain the physical and chemical capability of rural soils.

B9.4. Rural subdivision

B9.4.1. Objectives

- (1) Subdivision does not undermine the productive potential of land containing elite soils.
- (2) Subdivision of rural land avoids, remedies or mitigates adverse effects on the character, amenity, natural character, landscape and biodiversity values of rural areas (including within the coastal environment), and provides resilience to effects of natural hazards.
- (3) Land subdivision protects and enhances indigenous biodiversity and degraded land.

B9.4.2. Policies

- (1) Enable the permanent protection and enhancement of areas of significant indigenous biodiversity and rehabilitation of degraded land through subdivision.
- (2) Enable subdivision for the following purposes:
 - (a) the creation of parks and reserves, including esplanade reserves;
 - (b) the establishment and operation of infrastructure;
 - (c) rural production purposes;
 - (d) marae, papakāinga, urupā and other activities that support Māori relationships with their land where this land is managed by the Te Ture Whenua Māori Land Act 1993; and
 - (e) special circumstances that provide for significant benefit to the local rural community, and that cannot be met through the use of existing titles.
- (3) Provide for the transfer of the residential development potential of rural sites from one place to another, as well as the rearrangement of site boundaries.
- (4) Provide for new rural lifestyle subdivision in locations and at scales and densities so as to:
 - (a) avoid areas that would undermine the integrity of the Rural Urban Boundary or compromise the expansion of the satellite towns of Warkworth and Pukekohe, and rural and coastal towns and villages;
 - (b) protect areas where natural and physical resources have been scheduled in the Unitary Plan in relation to natural heritage, Mana Whenua, natural resources, coastal, historic heritage and special character;
 - (c) avoid land containing elite soil;

- (d) avoid where practicable land containing prime soil;
 - (e) avoid areas that would constrain the operation of existing mineral extraction activities or areas containing mineral resources identified in the plan for future extraction;
 - (f) maintain or enhance landscape, rural and, where relevant, coastal, character and amenity values;
 - (g) avoid the potential for reverse sensitivity effects that could hinder the continued operation or growth of existing rural activities, or the establishment of new rural activities; and
 - (h) safeguard the operation, maintenance, upgrading or development of existing or planned infrastructure.
- (5) Encourage the amalgamation and transfer of rural sites to areas that can best support them.

B9.5. Principal reasons for adoption

The purpose of sustainable management includes safeguarding the life-supporting capacity of natural resources now and in the future. This includes protecting the productive potential of the land to provide for present and future generations as well as indigenous biodiversity. It is also to maintain or enhance the character of rural areas for their contribution to regional amenity values, particularly the landscape and natural character.

Rural and coastal towns and villages, and areas zoned for countryside living, play an important role in enabling people to live, work and play in rural areas. They also can accommodate a portion of Auckland's growth.

Auckland, especially areas in Franklin, has land of high productive potential for farming classified as elite land (Land Use Capability Class 1) and prime land (Land Use Capability Classes 2 and 3). This land is mapped on the Land Use Capability maps. The priority in these areas is to maintain the potential for these high quality soils to be used for agricultural purposes, rather than activities that are not dependent on soil quality.

There are other areas of rural Auckland that support specialised horticultural production which are not on Class 1, 2 or 3 soils. These areas have other advantages such as climate, drainage, water availability or established infrastructure that are equally beneficial as soil quality. No matter what type of rural production occurs, retaining land with high productive potential for primary production provides flexibility to improve economic performance, sustainably manage land resources and enable communities to pursue sustainable lifestyles.

Significant areas of land with high productive potential have been lost to the expansion of urban areas and countryside living development. While countryside living opportunities need to be concentrated around the Rural Urban Boundary, they should also be located out of the way of any future urban expansion. As a consequence there will be a loss of some productive land. Countryside living produces a pattern of relatively small sites that

are impractical for primary production due to their size and the expectations of owners and occupiers. New countryside living subdivision is directed away from elite and prime land and from other rural areas with recognised local production advantages.

The provisions of the Unitary Plan include provisions that assist in managing activities and their effects on the rural environment to retain and use its productive potential, biodiversity values, rural character and amenity values. This involves recognising that a rural lifestyle is attractive to many people so that countryside living is enabled in identified areas, while also recognising the importance of protecting the productive potential of rural land as well as its rural amenity values.

The policies seek to ensure that uses and subdivision do not undermine or significantly compromise the productive potential of Auckland's rural areas, while maintaining those qualities which the community values. The policies therefore prevent urban growth and restrict inappropriate activities from certain locations.

The subdivision policies also enable the transfer of the residential development potential of new and existing sites from one place to another, and for title boundaries to be adjusted or relocated to locations where they will more usefully enable the rural development potential to be realised.