

8.1 CONSIDERATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE SCENARIOS AS PART OF COUNCIL'S COASTAL HAZARD PLANNING

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TE PŪTAKE | PURPOSE

1. This paper reports-back on a request from elected members to provide an update on current requirements for use of climate change scenarios, following recent correspondence from the Minister of Climate Change.

HE WHAKARĀPOPOTO | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. An executive summary is not required.

TE TUKU HAEPAPA | DELEGATION

3. The Strategy and Policy Committee has the authority to consider this matter under the Governance Structure and Delegations 2025-2028.

TAUNAKITANGA | RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Strategy and Policy Committee:

- A. Note the correspondence from the Minister of Climate Change to Local Authorities stating that 'high-end climate scenarios should not be used in council planning and decision making'.
- B. Note that Council's current approach to coastal hazard assessment remains consistent with the current statutory and policy framework.
- C. Note that the direction provided by the Minister of Climate Change has not been implemented by the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport in regard to changing the current statutory or policy framework on this matter.
- D. Note that officers are considering the implications of the Minister's correspondence alongside the findings of the Independent Coastal Science Review Panel and will report back to Council later this year with recommendations on the progression of the Coastal Environment Plan Change.

TŪĀPAPA | BACKGROUND

National Legislation and Guidance Framework

4. The key legislation and guidance relevant to the existing work Council carries out in relation to planning for coastal hazards includes:
 - The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), which identifies the management of significant risks from natural hazards as a matter of national importance and requires councils to have 'regard' to the National Adaptation Plan when preparing or changing district plans.

- The New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010 (NZCPS), which directs councils to identify areas potentially affected by coastal hazards over at least 100 years and to avoid increasing the risk of social, environmental and economic harm from coastal hazards.
 - The National Adaptation Plan 2022-28 (NAP), which identifies actions for managing climate risks and directs the use of a range of climate change scenarios, including higher-end climate change scenarios, when making or changing district plans.
 - The Ministry for the Environment's Coastal Hazards and Climate Change Guidance (2024), which recommends consideration of a range of emissions scenarios and specifically recommends the use of SSP5-8.5 when identifying areas potentially exposed to coastal hazards.
5. This framework requires councils to identify and assess coastal hazard risks and to consider these when making planning decisions.
6. Of particular relevance, both the current National Adaptation Plan and the Ministry for the Environment (now called Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT)) guidance support the use of higher-end climate change scenarios, including SSP5-8.5, alongside other emissions scenarios when assessing climate risks and informing planning responses.

Council's Coastal Environment Plan Change

7. On 10 April 2025, Council approved proceeding with a Coastal Environment Plan Change (the Plan Change). The purpose of the Plan Change is to align the Council with the requirements for managing coastal hazards as outlined in the framework above.
8. The science used to identify coastal hazards has been a point of contention throughout the Plan Change, as briefly outlined below:
- Council commissioned coastal hazard assessments, prepared by the consulting firm Jacobs between 2021 and 2024. Consistent with the frameworks outlined above, the assessments considered multiple emissions scenarios, including SSP2-4.5 and SSP5-8.5, to evaluate a range of plausible future climate conditions and the uncertainty associated with climate change.
 - The methodology and findings of the Jacobs work were subsequently challenged by Coastal Ratepayers United (CRU), which commissioned an alternative review by Dr Willem de Lange. This resulted in differing views between the Council and CRU regarding future coastal hazard risk.
 - In response, Council engaged an Independent Coastal Science Review Panel to review both the Jacobs and de Lange assessments and to provide recommendations on the appropriate scientific basis for the plan change. Council has since received this report and is currently reviewing the recommendations, which will form part of the advice that will come to you later this year regarding how we proceed with the Plan Change.

HE KŌRERORERO | DISCUSSION

Emissions Scenarios

9. Emissions scenarios, also referred to as climate scenarios or climate change scenarios, are future pathways used by climate scientists to explore how greenhouse gas emissions,

population growth, economic development, technology and land use could evolve over time (refer to Attachment 3 for more detail). Of note:

- They represent a range of plausible futures that are used to assess potential climate impacts.
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has used both Representative Concentration Pathways (RCPs) and Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSPs), with SSPs forming the basis of the most recent Assessment Report (AR6).
- While high emissions scenarios, such as SSP5-8.5 and RCP8.5, are now generally regarded by the IPCC and the broader science community as less likely than intermediate emissions futures, they continue to play an important role in climate risk assessment.

10. Consistent with IPCC guidance, best practice is to consider a range of emissions scenarios rather than relying on a single projection due to the degree of uncertainty around the pace of climate change. Of note:

- Considering a range of scenarios enables decision makers to evaluate risks and adaptation needs under conditions of uncertainty
- Use of high-emissions scenarios in analysis does not mean that Council, or any other party, has proposed adopting a preferred planning pathway based on a high-emissions scenario.

The Minister's Letter

11. On 30 June 2026, the Minister of Climate Change wrote to all local authorities providing advice regarding the use of high-end emissions scenarios in council planning and investment decisions.

12. The Minister reaffirmed the Government's expectation that councils continue to plan for climate risks and support community resilience to future climate impacts.

13. However, the Minister emphasised that high-end emissions scenarios, including Shared Socioeconomic Pathway (SSP) 5-8.5 and Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) 8.5, should not be adopted as the primary planning assumption for council decision making. Instead, these scenarios should be treated as less likely, high-impact futures and used primarily for stress testing and contingency planning purposes.

14. The Minister advised that councils should use a range of credible climate scenarios when assessing planning and infrastructure decisions and consider the costs and affordability implications associated with higher end climate assumptions.

Council's Current Approach

15. Consistent with the legislation and guidance framework outlined above, Council's coastal hazard assessments considered a range of climate change scenarios, including SSP2-4.5 and SSP5-8.5.

16. The use of SSP5-8.5 does not mean Council has treated it as the most likely future outcome. Rather, it was assessed alongside other scenarios to understand how coastal hazard risks may change under different climate futures. This approach was, and remains, consistent with current national guidance, which supports the use of higher-emissions scenarios, specifically when assessing coastal hazard risk.

17. While the Minister's correspondence does not alter the current statutory or policy framework, it signals a potential shift in the Government's expectations regarding how higher-emissions scenarios should be applied in planning and investment decisions.
18. We understand that Council's approach to this matter is aligned to that of other Councils. For example, the Chair of the Greater Wellington Regional Council recently responded to the Minister's letter (Attachment 3) noting a similar position around the use and application of climate change scenarios in-line with current guidance from the MCERT.

He take | Issues

Implications for the Coastal Plan Change

19. Under the current legislative and policy framework the Minister's direction, in and of itself, does not necessitate any immediate change to Council's existing coastal hazard assessments or current analysis approach. However, it will be a relevant consideration for the future progression of the proposed Coastal Plan Change.
20. In addition, the Independent Coastal Science Review Panel has recently provided advice on the coastal hazard science underpinning the proposed Plan Change, including climate change scenarios, sea-level rise assumptions and the treatment of uncertainty.
21. Officers are currently considering the implications of both the Minister's correspondence and the Review Panel's findings, alongside emerging legislative reform relevant to climate adaptation planning, including the Climate Change Response Amendment Bill. Together, these matters may influence the future direction of the Plan Change, and officers will report back to Council later this year with recommendations on its progression.

Ngā kōwhiringa | Options

22. As outlined in this report, no immediate changes to Council's current analysis approach for coastal hazard assessment is required as a result of the Minister's correspondence.
23. Officers will report back to Council later this year with recommendations on the future progression of the proposed Plan Change. In developing this advice, officers will consider the findings of the Independent Coastal Science Review Panel, the Minister's correspondence, and any relevant changes to legislation, national policy, the National Adaptation Plan, the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT) guidance, or other emerging information.

Mana whenua

24. Climate change, coastal hazards, and the management of the coastal environment are matters of significant importance to mana whenua. While this report relates to the use of climate change scenarios, it does not propose any changes to Council's current approach. Officers will continue to engage with mana whenua through future work on the Coastal Environment Plan Change.

Panonitanga Āhuarangi me te Taiao | Climate change and Environment

25. This report relates to the climate change scenarios used to assess future climate risks and inform planning decisions. It does not propose any changes to Council's current

approach, which remains consistent with the current statutory and policy framework, including MCERT guidance, and considers a range of climate change scenarios when assessing coastal hazard risks.

Ahumoni me ngā rawa | Financial and resourcing

26. There are no specific financial or resourcing implications arising from this report. Any financial, resourcing, or budget implications associated with options for progressing the proposed Coastal Environment Plan Change will be identified and discussed in a future report to Council later this year.

Tūraru ā-Ture me te Whakahaere | Legal and Organisational Risk

27. This report does not identify any specific legal or organisational risks. Council's current approach remains consistent with the current statutory and policy framework and national guidance for coastal hazard assessment. Officers will continue to monitor any changes to legislation, national policy and guidance and advise Council through future reporting.

Ngā pānga ki ngā kaupapa here | Policy impact

28. There are no direct policy implications arising from this report. Any policy implications associated with progressing the Coastal Environment Plan Change will be addressed in advice that is currently being prepared for Council.

TE WHAKAWHITI KŌRERO ME TE TŪHONO | COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

Te mahere tūhono | Engagement planning

29. While the Coastal Plan Change is of significant interest to mana whenua and the wider community, this report does not recommend any changes to Council's current approach and will inform future advice to Council.

Whakatairanga | Publicity

30. There are no decisions to be communicated from this report. An update will be provided to Council later this year.

NGĀ ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. Attachment 1 - Hon Simon Watts' Letter Regarding Climate Change Assumptions in Council Planning
2. Attachment 2 - Emissions Pathways
3. Attachment 3 - Letter from Daran Ponter Chair to Minister Watts regarding climate change assumptions in Council Planning