

Natural Environment



Natural Environment

Key Issues

The Matamata-Piako natural environment contains outstanding natural features. In some cases, these are of national and international significance. In the majority of cases these areas such as the Kopuatai Peat Dome and the Kaimai-Mamaku Ranges are held as reserve or in public ownership. However there are some significant natural resources held in private ownership. The primary activity affecting the natural environment is changes in land use, such as land drainage, bush clearing, subdivision and development. These activities place pressure on the natural environment by destroying habitat and isolating and fragmenting land. The objectives and rules contained within the District Plan attempt to preserve the key elements of the natural environment which contribute to its natural character. This report assesses whether these objectives and policies are working effectively and efficiently.



Indicators

Pressures:

- Area of indigenous vegetation removed per annum;
- Abundance and distribution of plant and animal pests;
- Isolation and fragmentation of indigenous ecosystems;
- Annual change in the surface elevation of the Kopuatai Peat Dome; and
- Number of resource consents applied for/granted for excavation or other activity within the Kaitiaki (Conservation) Zone.



State:

- Area of exotic forestry within the Kaitiaki (Conservation) Zone;
- Area and distribution of indigenous vegetation;
- Health and condition of natural areas assessed by health/condition classification;
- Community attitude / awareness of natural areas;
- Area of peat soil;
- Area of the Kopuatai Peat Dome;
- Change in landscape types identified by the landscape study; and
- Population numbers of indigenous species.

Response:

- Area of significant trees or indigenous vegetation fenced to prevent grazing;
- Area and percentage of natural areas (by type) legally protected through consent conditions or other methods;
- Number of members of community participating in landcare groups;
- Location, area and type of pest control operation; and
- Area and percentage of natural areas ecologically surveyed.

Results

There are a number of rare or threatened species that are still considered to be living within the District. These include:

Threatened species	Where you might see them
Birds North Island brown kiwi North Island kokako NZ falcon Kereru North Island kaka Australasian bittern Branded rail Marsh crake North Island fernbird	Kaimai/Mamaku ranges Kopuatai Peat Dome
Reptiles Striped skink	Kaimai/Mamaku ranges
Amphibians Hochsetters frog	Kaimai/Mamaku ranges
Mammals Both short and long tailed bat	Kaimai/Mamaku ranges
Fish Giant kokopu Banded kokopu Black mudfish	Kaimai/Mamaku ranges Kopuatai Peat Dome
Invertebrates Te Aroha stag beetle	Kaimai/Mamaku ranges
Plants Stout milfoil Scarlet mistletoe Red mistletoe King fern	Kaimai/Mamaku ranges
Clubmoss Giant Wire Rush	Kopuatai Peat Dome

These species live predominantly within the areas included in the Kaitiaki (Conservation) Zone.

The table on the next page shows the number of resource consents granted for activities within the Kaitiaki (Conservation) Zone. The table shows that during the last five financial years (2009/10 – 2013/14) a total of 11 resource consents were granted for activities within the Kaitiaki (Conservation) Zone.

Resource Consents granted in Kaitiaki Zone	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14
Number of consents	0	0	1	3	1	0	1	5	4	1

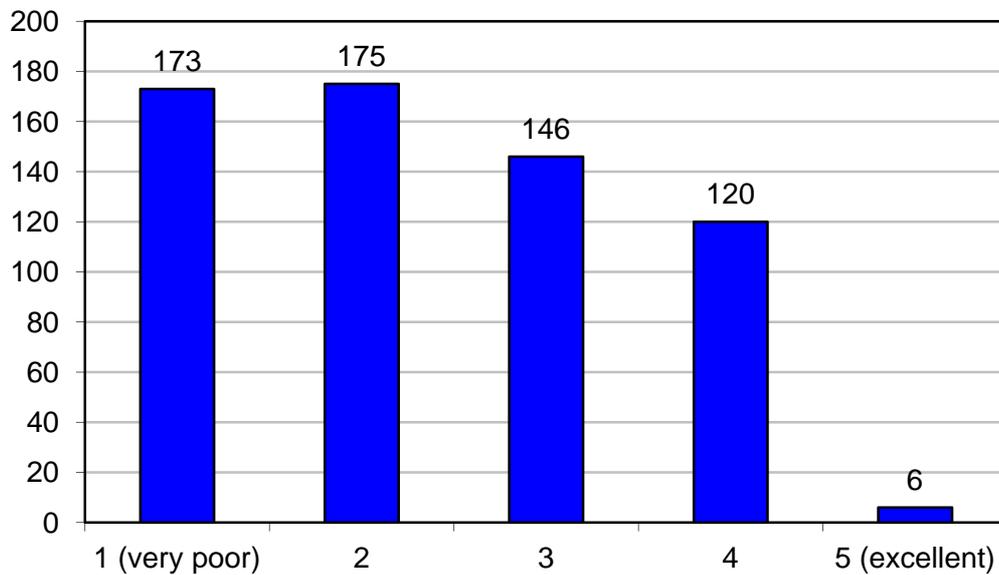
Native vegetation makes up 15% (or 25,062 hectares) of the Matamata-Piako District. 11.5% (or 20,262 hectares) is held within the Department of Conservation Estate and 4,387.6 hectares lies in private ownership. Council owns and manages around 12.6 hectares. The largest area of Council owned and fenced reserve is Hawes Bush, which has an area of 2.2 hectares.

In 2006 Council worked with an ecologist to identify significant native vegetation. 667 units of habitat totalling 3,111 hectares have been surveyed, resulting in 23% of this area (721 ha) being considered significant. Of the total area surveyed, 78% was determined to be indigenous (predominantly native species), 20 percent exotic (mainly non-native species) and 2% percent was not determined. These significant features include native indigenous vegetation, such as native tree stands, areas of bush and wetlands. Native fauna also exists in significant areas.

Late in 2006 Council approved the introduction of funding rounds, allowing landowners and community groups to apply for financial assistance to undertake projects such as fencing significant sites and controlling pests. Landowners who have a significant natural feature on their land can also apply for rates remissions. Funding rounds occur once a year around September. To establish this process, Council has worked with numerous organisations and individuals including Federated Farmers, Department of Conservation and farmers. As part of this process Council may fund an ecologist to survey potentially significant sites that have not already been visited within the District.

As part of the identification of areas of significant native vegetation within the District in 2006, the condition of the vegetation was also assessed. Vegetation units were given a rating between 1 (very poor condition) and 5 (excellent condition). The average condition was 2.36. Only 6 of the 667 units of vegetation surveyed were considered to be in an "excellent" condition. These results are shown in the bar chart on the next page.

Condition of Vegetation Surveyed



In 1840, 95% of the District was covered in native vegetation; this figure was 15% in 1995, most of which is in the Kaimai ranges.

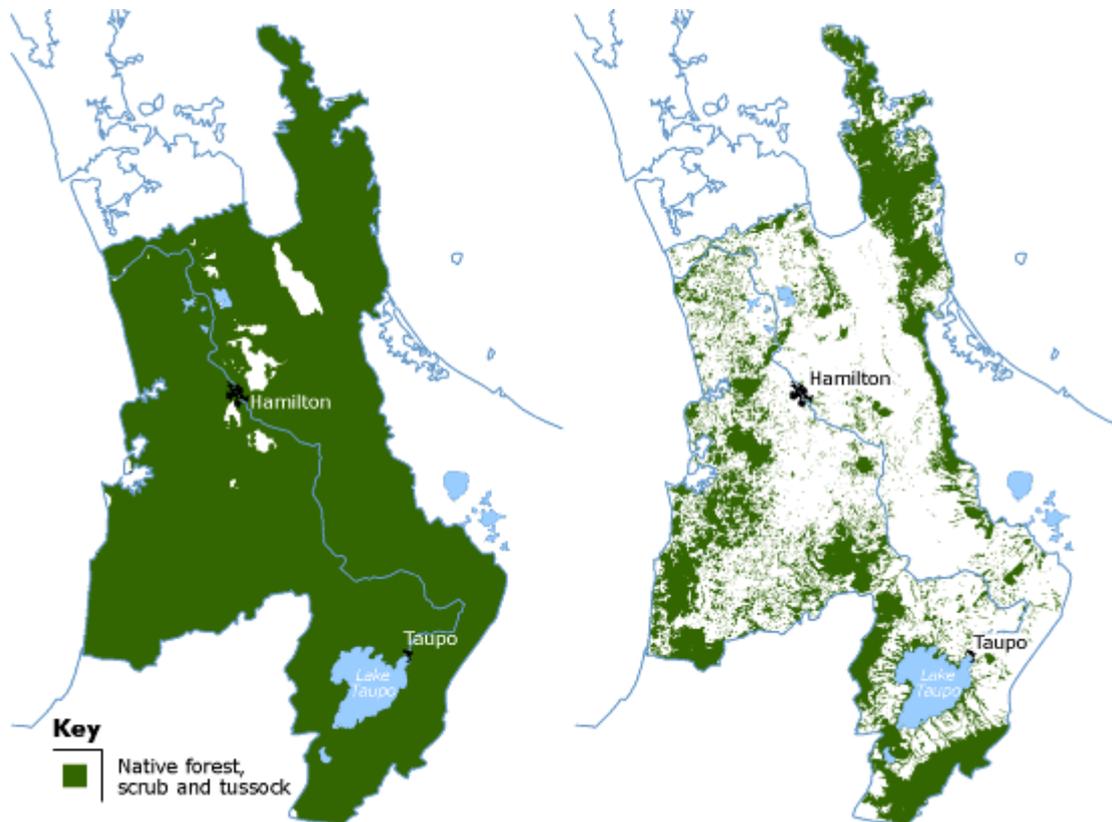
The maps on the next page show the historic extent of native forest, scrub and tussock in the Waikato Region around 1840 and in 1995.



Through provisions of the District Plan, Council is attempting to manage the natural environment; this includes zoning and putting methods in place for the protection of areas of significance.

Within Matamata-Piako, the Kaimai Forest Park makes up an area of 14,670 hectares, and the Kopuatai Peat Dome an area of 5,313 hectares (approximately one third of the Dome is within Matamata-Piako). In addition, Te Tapui Reserve comprises 2,382 hectares. There are also 404 hectares within Matamata-Piako that are protected by covenants from the Queen Elizabeth II Trust.

The maps below show the historic (around 1840, on the left) and 1995 (right) extent of native forest, scrub and tussock in the Waikato Region.



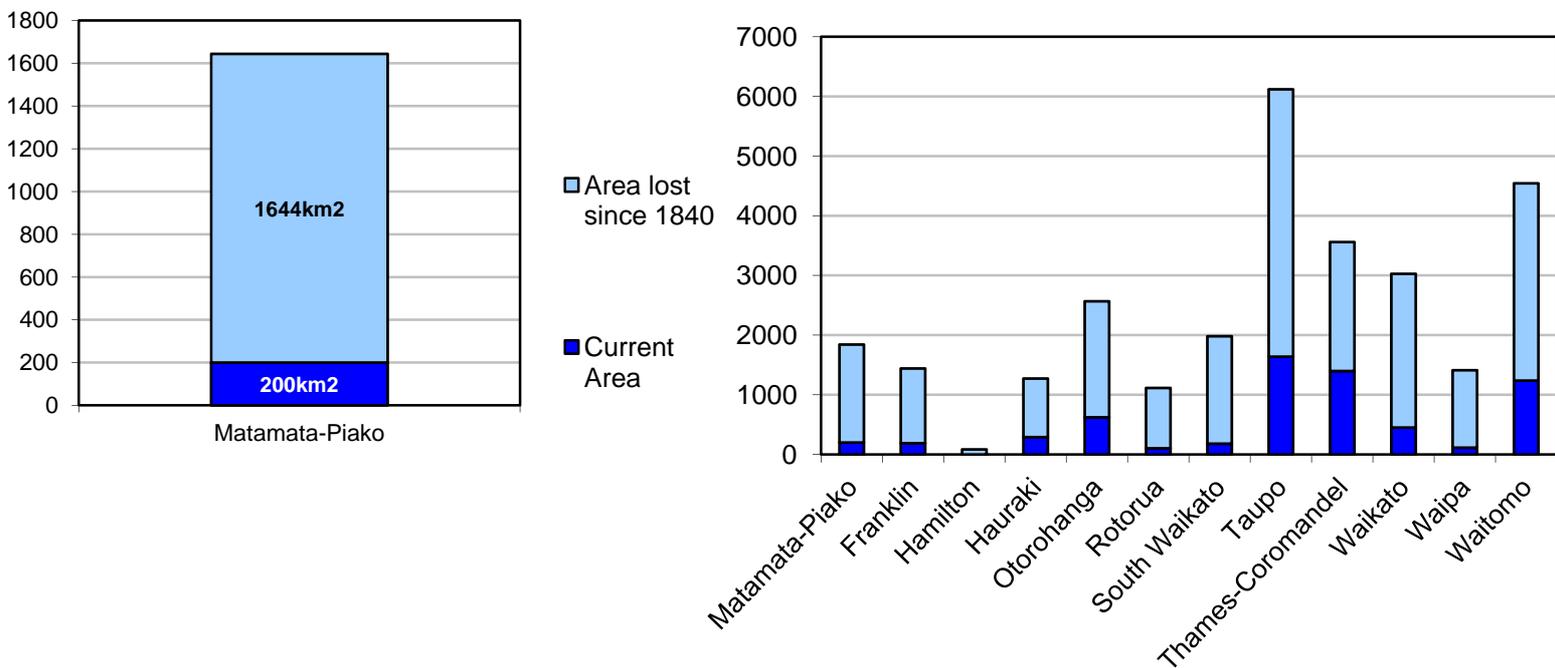
The bar charts on the next page show the loss in areas of native forest, scrub and tussock between 1840 and the late-1990's for the Matamata-Piako District compared to the other territorial authority jurisdictions in the Waikato Region.

Council is aware of three landcare groups operating in Matamata-Piako that are taking measures to benefit waterways and their margins.

The Mangawara Landcare Group and the Morrinsville Landcare Group aim to improve environmental health by protecting river margins and increasing biodiversity by planting and fencing streams and bush remnants.

The Kaimai Mamaku Catchments Forum has representation from iwi, recreational groups, primary industry and conservation groups and aims to restore forest biodiversity, enhance recreational activities and provide for sustainable land use across the entire Kaimai-Mamaku area, straddling several territorial boundaries. See [Riparian Management](#) for more information about these groups.

Change in areas of native forest, scrub and tussock from 1840 – 1995 (km2)



District Plan Provisions

2.4 Sustainable management strategy

Objective:

- To sustainably manage the natural resources of indigenous biodiversity for ecological, landscape, heritage and natural feature value.

Policy:

- To recognise the effect activities may have on indigenous vegetation and habitat of indigenous fauna.

Section 3.1.2 Natural environment and heritage

Objective:

- To retain and enhance the varied landscape qualities of the District.

Policy:

- The scale, location and design of buildings, structures and activities in outstanding landscape types of the District should:
 - Preserve the elements which contribute to its natural character; and
 - Not detract from the amenity values of the landscape.

Objective:

- To recognize the community desire to return areas in exotic vegetation in the Kaitiaki zone within the Kaimai Ranges to indigenous cover.

Policy:

- Where a resource consent concerning exotic vegetation is required in the Kaitiaki zone, Council will consult with the community under the Local Government Act 2002 about the methods of achieving objectives 1 and 2 including the purchase of land in accordance with section 13.3.6.

Objective:

- To protect and enhance the natural resources within the District that are valued for their intrinsic, scientific, educational and recreational values.

Policies:

- Recreational use of wetlands and bush and the surface of rivers and streams will be allowed where such use is consistent with the conservation objectives of that area. Council may exclude access to some areas of high ecological quality;
- To avoid, remedy or mitigate the adverse effects of activities that have the potential to compromise, damage or destroy significant areas of indigenous vegetation and habitats of indigenous fauna;
- Outstanding natural features, areas of indigenous vegetation or habitats of indigenous fauna are to be permanently protected at the time of subdivision, use and development;
- To maintain and enhance ecosystems with their essential values and qualities;
- Council will encourage landowners to permanently protect natural features, trees and vegetation provisions;
- To encourage a “conservation” education programme in conjunction with other agencies for targeted groups such as farmers, schools, tangata whenua. This programme may be developed in consultation with these groups;
- Council may, where it considers necessary acquire land to protect threatened outstanding natural features;
- Council will advocate and promote the voluntary protection of individual trees or stands of trees;
- Council will advocate that the Regional Council investigate the hydrological dynamics of the Kopuatai Peat Dome with a view to reviewing catchment policies on drainage, water quality and erosion control where necessary; and
- Council will actively support the preparation of a management plan for the Kopuatai Peat Dome and land uses in the vicinity.

Anticipated Environmental Results:

- Protection in perpetuity of outstanding natural features and resources;
- Greater public awareness and support for protection of the natural environment;
- To permanently protect significant examples of specimen trees and stands of native bush or trees (Typical performance measure: reduction in number of trees destroyed in the district);
- Reduction in the risk of serious or irreparable damage being done to trees through lack of knowledge or undue haste; and
- To achieve permanent protection and sustainability of the Kopuatai Peat Dome and other important wetland areas.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

Are the District Plan's objectives and policies the most effective and efficient way to achieve the following anticipated environmental results?

- *Protection in perpetuity of outstanding natural features and resources;*
- *Greater public awareness and support for protection of the natural environment;*
- *To permanently protect significant examples of specimen trees and stands of native bush or trees (Typical performance measure: reduction in number of trees destroyed in the District);*
- *Reduction in the risk of serious or irreparable damage being done to trees through lack of knowledge or undue haste; and*
- *To achieve permanent protection and sustainability of the Kopuatai Peat Dome and other important wetland areas.*

Outstanding natural features and resources in the District are threatened by activities that would modify, destroy or compromise their outstanding qualities. The District contains some nationally and regionally outstanding natural features which Council must ensure are protected from adverse effects. In the majority of cases areas such as the Kopuatai Peat Dome and the Kaimai-Mamaku Ranges are held as reserve or in public ownership. The challenge for the District Plan is to ensure protection in, and adjacent to, these areas by managing activities with adverse effects and to ensure protection of outstanding natural resources in private ownership.

The RMA requires Council to recognise and provide for the protection of outstanding landscapes from inappropriate subdivision use or development [S6 (b)] as a matter of national importance. Council recognises that certain landscapes are particularly sensitive to change and others are more able to absorb change or development. There has been a significant loss of indigenous vegetation, habitats of indigenous fauna, and of indigenous species as a result of development. In 1840, 95% of the District was covered in native vegetation, however in 1995 this figure had decreased to only 15%. It is noted that clearance of native vegetation has occurred to the same extent in many other parts of the Waikato Region.

Through provisions in the Plan, Council is attempting to manage the natural environment including protection of significant landscapes. The methods employed under the District Plan include zoning and putting methods in place for the protection of areas of significance.

The Kaitiaki (Conservation) Zone is applied to significant natural landscapes and habitats where the geographical spread of areas or features is sufficient to justify zoning rather than individual scheduling of areas. This zone applies to specific areas to ensure protection or enhancement of their natural, intrinsic, or other recognised values. It covers the Kaimai Ranges, Western Ranges, Peat Dome, riparian areas and Kahikatea floodplain forest remnants over 4,000m² in area.

The Kaitiaki (Conservation) Zone in the Kaimai Ranges includes all the land held in public reserve and generally the land down to the bush line at the base of the ranges. Provisions are designed to achieve the conservation emphasis of the zone and to ensure that any development or activities are restricted to minimise the adverse effects on the environment. Mineral or peat processing is prohibited in this zone which recognises the significance of features within this zone and promotes such activities in less environmentally sensitive areas so that their adverse effects can be more appropriately mitigated. Activities including farming that existed as at November 1996 are likely to hold existing use rights and therefore they may continue in accordance with section 10 of the RMA.

Buildings are discretionary activities within the Kaitiaki (Conservation) Zone to ensure an appropriate location, scale and design are achieved relative to the visual impact, the impact on ecology and fire fighting facilities. This activity status is an effective way of achieving the following policies:

- *'The scale, location and design of buildings, structures and activities in outstanding landscape types of the District should:*
 - *preserve the elements which contribute to its natural character; and*
 - *not detract from the amenity values of the landscape'* and
- *'To recognise the effect activities may have on indigenous vegetation and habitat of indigenous fauna.'*

These policies recognise the intrinsic values of the significant landscape types of the District and are designed to minimise the effect of activities located in environmentally and visually sensitive areas.

Also within the Kaitiaki (Conservation) Zone any alteration to landform, trees or other vegetation or any other physical feature which involves: the diversion or modification of natural watercourses, rivers or ponding areas; the clearing of trees or other vegetation, or earthworks, excavation, including the depositing of spoil, soil, or other materials; is also a discretionary activity. The discretionary activity status is an effective way of achieving the objective *'to sustainably manage the natural resources of indigenous biodiversity for ecological, landscape, heritage and natural feature value'* as it requires a resource consent to be gained where a thorough assessment of effects can be undertaken. This ensures that all adverse effects from these activities are avoided, mitigated or remedied if consent is granted.

Between 2009/10 and 2013/14 a total of 11 resource consents were granted for activities within the Kaitiaki (Conservation) Zone. This is considered to be less than minor as there are 24,048 hectares of land in Kaitiaki (Conservation) zoning and in each case conditions were placed on these consents to minimise any potential negative effects.

In 2006, Council worked with an ecologist to determine significant native vegetation within the District. This process was undertaken to recognise that although Council has protected a lot of outstanding natural landscapes and features through the Kaitiaki zoning, there are still significant natural features that add to the overall biodiversity and natural character of the District. 667 units of habitat totalling 3,111 hectares have been surveyed, resulting in 23% of this area (721ha) being considered significant. Of the total area surveyed, 78% was determined to be indigenous (predominantly native species), 20 percent exotic (mainly non-native species) and 2% percent was not determined. These significant features include native indigenous vegetation, such as native tree stands, areas of bush and wetlands. These are recognised as unscheduled significant natural features. Although we do not have any evidence as to how many of these features have been damaged or altered it is recognised that the rule; *'any damage, alteration or destruction of any significant indigenous vegetation or habitat or indigenous fauna requires a discretionary activity resource consent'* is an effective way of achieving the AER *'to permanently protect significant examples of specimen trees and stands of native bush or trees'*.

In late 2006 Council approved the introduction of funding rounds, allowing landowners and community groups to apply for financial assistance to undertake projects such as fencing significant sites and controlling pests, and to apply for rates remissions. To establish this process, Council has worked with numerous organisations and individuals including Federated Farmers, Department of Conservation and farmers. Council may fund an ecologist to survey potentially significant sites that have not already been visited within the District. Council has \$35,000 available annually to assist landowners in terms of ecological assessments, assistance with fencing, project costs and rates remissions.

To be eligible to receive Council funding the area must be protected in perpetuity through some form of legal instrument. This can be done by scheduling the area in the Plan, a legal covenant or a Queen Elizabeth II (QEII) Trust covenant or the like. This ensures that the significant natural feature is not only protected now with its current landowner but it is also required to remain protected through all future landowners. The QEII Trust covenant is the most widely used legal instrument for obtaining significant natural features funding. As at July 2008 there were 404ha protected in perpetuity by these covenants. However it is noted that the significant natural features funding for projects, including fencing is not obtainable if it is a legal requirement to be done, for example through consent conditions of a subdivision. The number of applications received and approved for funding will provide useful information over the coming years on Council's progress towards increasing the area of outstanding features and resources protected in perpetuity.

This non-regulatory method is an effective way of achieving the policies '*Council will encourage landowners to permanently protect natural features, trees and vegetation provisions*' and '*Council will advocate and promote the voluntary protection of individual trees or stands of trees.*' It is an efficient way of achieving the AER '*protection in perpetuity of outstanding natural features and resources*' as it encourages landowners who want to protect these areas rather than enforcing rules. Through the advertising of the funding round in local newspapers and Council publications the AER '*greater public awareness and support for protection of the natural environment*' is being achieved as it makes the general public aware of the fund and its objective. In addition, every landowner who has an identified significant natural feature is contacted annually to inform them when the funding round is commencing and to encourage them to apply.

It is recognised that it is not just the objectives, policies and rules in the Plan contributing to the natural environment, there are external factors such as changing perceptions of environmental issues and changing lifestyles such as the desire for residential living in traditionally rural areas, which can contribute to the achievement of the AERs. Overarching documents such as the Regional Policy Statement also guides what we include in our District Plan and in turn what AERs we are seeking to achieve. The majority of the area is managed by DoC and therefore has a management plan, this will influence how the areas are managed but does not directly link to any activities or rules of Council

Other significant drivers of natural environmental protection in the District include:

- Community initiatives for environmental enhancement protection at the Kopuatai Peat Dome, Mt Te Aroha and in other locations within the district;
- Regional Council river catchment management initiatives aimed at reducing flood risk by retiring upper Waihou catchment (Kaimai ranges) land; and
- The Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act (2000), which has been enacted to provide among other matters a vehicle to integrate the management of natural and physical resources within the Hauraki Gulf catchment (extended throughout the Waihou River catchment).

It is acknowledged that we have limited measures to be able to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the objectives and policies as they apply to the natural environment, given the substantial resources required to monitor this aspect of the environment.

Summary:

Anticipated Environmental Results Natural Environment	Achieved? ☺ - Achieving → - Progress towards achievement ☹ - Not achieving ? - Not monitored
Protection in perpetuity of outstanding natural features and resources	→
Greater public awareness and support for protection of the natural environment	→
To permanently protect significant examples of specimen trees and stands of native bush or trees	→ - ☺
Reduction in the risk of serious or irreparable damage being done to trees through lack of knowledge or undue haste	?
To achieve permanent protection and sustainability of the Kopuatai Peat Dome and other important wetland areas	Protection ☺ Sustainability ? Other important wetlands ?