

NATC – Natural Character

The Wairarapa has an extensive coastline and numerous freshwater bodies, including Lake Wairarapa and the Ruamāhanga, Waipoua, Waingawa, Waiohine, and Tauherenikau Rivers, that are important natural features. Under section 6 of the RMA, preserving the natural character of the *coastal environment, wetlands, lakes, rivers*, and their margins and protecting them from inappropriate use, subdivision, and development is a matter of national importance.

Importance must also include cognisance of Te Rohe o Rongokako Joint Redress Act 2022 between Rangitāne Tu Mai Ra Trust and Ngati Kahungūnu ki Wairarapa Tamaki Nui A Rua iwi over the management of Wairarapa Moana and Ruamahanga River catchment in this chapter.

Riparian margins have natural character values and provide access to *surface waterbodies* and contribute to amenity, recreation, hazard management, and ecological values.

Surface waterbodies that require additional special protection from inappropriate use, subdivision, and development are identified as *Significant Waterbodies*. These *surface waterbodies* have been identified due to a number of significant values within their riparian margins, including those associated with natural character, public access, cultural significance, indigenous biodiversity, and natural hazard values. *Significant waterbodies* are identified based on the following criteria:

1. the *surface waterbody* and/or its margins have high natural character and ecology values, including natural aquatic habitats that support the presence of threatened, at risk, or regionally distinctive indigenous species;
2. the *surface waterbody* is of a nature and magnitude that creates a risk for *natural hazards*;
3. use of the *surface waterbody* and/or its margins for recreational and public access purposes including walking, surface water activities, fishing, hunting, and tramping;
4. cultural, spiritual, or heritage associations of tangata whenua to the *surface waterbody*, including ability to undertake *customary activities*; and/or
5. importance of water quality, including for urban water supplies, and in relation to the above values.

This chapter addresses the natural character of freshwater environments, including *rivers, lakes, natural inland wetlands*, and their margins. Natural character of coastal areas is addressed in the *Coastal Environment* chapter, including provisions relating to *Outstanding Natural Character* and *Very High and High Natural Character Areas* in the coastal environment. Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) Regulations 2020 manage vegetation removal, *earthworks, natural hazards works, infrastructure*, and public access *structures* within 10m of *natural inland wetlands*. As such, the provisions outlined in this chapter do not duplicate any requirements for these activities and they are not managed through this chapter.

The Greater Wellington Regional Council Natural Resources Plan manages *earthworks* within 5m of *surface waterbodies*, as such, the provisions outlined in this chapter do not duplicate *earthworks* rules within these riparian margins.

Objectives

NATC-O1	Preserve and enhance natural character
The natural character of the Wairarapa's <i>rivers, lakes</i> , and <i>natural inland wetlands</i> and their margins is preserved, and enhanced where appropriate, and protected from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development.	

Policies

NATC-P1	Retain special qualities and natural character of <i>surface waterbodies</i>
Manage the design, location, and scale of subdivision, use, and development adjoining <i>surface waterbodies</i> so they preserve the special qualities and natural character of <i>surface waterbodies</i> .	
NATC-P2	Restoration and enhancement
Provide for and encourage the restoration and/or enhancement of the natural character of <i>surface waterbodies</i> and their margins.	
NATC-P3	Enabled earthworks in proximity to Significant Waterbodies
Allow <i>earthworks</i> within 25m of <i>Significant Waterbodies</i> where they are for the purpose of maintenance works on <i>infrastructure</i> .	
NATC-P4	Restrict earthworks in proximity to <i>Significant Waterbodies</i>
Only allow other earthworks within 25m of <i>Significant Waterbodies</i> where: a. natural character values of <i>Significant Waterbodies</i> are preserved or enhanced; and b. significant adverse effects on the values of <i>Significant Waterbodies</i> are avoided and all other adverse effects are avoided, minimised, or remedied.	
NATC-P5	Buildings and structures
Discourage <i>buildings</i> and <i>structures</i> within 10m of <i>surface waterbodies</i> within the General Rural Zone, 5m of any <i>surface waterbody</i> in any other zone, and 25m of <i>Significant Waterbodies</i> across all zones and only allow <i>buildings</i> and <i>structures</i> within these setbacks where:	

	a. there is a <i>functional need</i> or <i>operational need</i> for their location within the setback; b. the location, intensity, scale, design, and form of the <i>building</i> or <i>structure</i> preserves natural character values; and c. any potential cumulative effects on natural character values are minimised.
NATC-P6	Modification of vegetation in proximity to Significant Waterbodies
Allow <i>modification of vegetation</i> within 25m of <i>Significant Waterbodies</i> where it involves <i>pest plant species disposal</i> of infected material for biosecurity purposes, treatment of areas to manage incursions of unwanted organisms <i>or is associated with primary production</i>, and only allow other modification of vegetation when: a. natural character values of <i>Significant Waterbodies</i> are preserved or enhanced; and b. significant adverse effects on the values of <i>Significant Waterbodies</i> are avoided and all other adverse effects are avoided, minimised, or remedied.	

Rules

NATC-R1	Earthworks within 25m of a <i>Significant Waterbody</i>
All zones	1. Activity status: Permitted Where: a. The <i>earthworks</i> are for the purpose of: i. the maintenance of drains, man-made dams, access tracks, existing <i>infrastructure</i> or <i>roads</i>; ii. the maintenance of water supply <i>infrastructure</i>, including irrigation; iii. construction or maintenance of a bridge or culvert; or iv. <i>park management activities</i> in the Open Space and Recreation Zones.
All zones	2. Activity status: Restricted discretionary Where: a. Compliance is not achieved with NATC-R1(1). Matters of discretion: 1. The location, extent, timing, and duration of the activity. 2. Effects on the risks from <i>natural hazards</i>, including erosion and flooding. 3. Effects on natural character and landscape values. 4. Effects on ecological values, including the aquatic values of the <i>surface waterbody</i>. 5. Effects on recreational values and public access.

	6. Effects on areas of significance to tangata whenua and archaeological sites. 7. Methods to avoid, remedy, or mitigate the adverse effects. 8. Rehabilitation measures, including recontouring and revegetation.
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NATC-R2		<i>Modification of vegetation and associated earthworks within 25m of a Significant Waterbody</i>
	All zones	1. Activity status: Permitted Where: a. The <i>modification of vegetation</i> only involves <i>pest plant species identified in Appendix ECO-1; or</i> b. The <i>modification of vegetation associated with an existing primary production activity and there is no modification of indigenous vegetation.</i> c. The <i>modification of vegetation</i> is for the purpose of removing unwanted organisms in accordance with the Biosecurity Act 1993.
	All zones	2. Activity status: Restricted discretionary Where: a. Compliance is not achieved with NATC-R2(1). Matters of discretion: 1. The location, extent, timing, and duration of the activity. 2. Effects on the risks from natural hazards, including erosion and flooding. 3. Effects on natural character and landscape values. 4. Effects on ecological values, including indigenous biodiversity, and the aquatic values of the <i>surface waterbody</i>. 5. Effects on recreational values and public access. 6. Effects on areas of significance to tangata whenua and archaeological sites. 7. Methods to avoid, remedy, or mitigate the adverse effects. 8. Rehabilitation measures, including recontouring and revegetation.