

DRAFT

Golden Bay Outstanding Natural Landscapes & Features

Prepared for

Tasman District Council

By

Boffa Miskell Ltd
Wellington

February 1, 2011

Golden Bay Outstanding Natural Landscapes

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In August 2005 Boffa Miskell prepared a Landscape Character Assessment of the Tasman District coast. While the primary purpose of this coastal assessment was to provide a landscape framework and basis for policy initiatives to guide the sensitive and sustainable management of the District's coastal landscapes, the study also identified (for discussion and consultation purposes), possible Outstanding Natural Landscapes and Features (ONLFs) within the Tasman coastal area. While some initial public consultation on these possible ONLFs took place in 2005, to date no formal classification of these areas as ONLFs has been confirmed.
- 1.2 As part of a Council led wider strategic planning review of the Golden Bay area, Boffa Miskell were engaged by the Tasman District Council in September 2010 to assist with a review of ONLFs for the Golden Bay area including the inland area which was not part of the original 2005 coastal assessment.
- 1.3 This report briefly reviews the 2005 coastal ONLF classification (albeit indicative) and also considers the appropriateness of the inland areas of the Golden Bay catchment in terms of their potential ONLF classification.

2. COASTAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT 2005

- 2.1 Relative to the Northwest Coast and Golden Bay, the location and extent of the ONLFs identified in the 2005 Coastal Landscape Character Assessment are shown in Figure 1. The ONLFs identified in this assessment include the entire Northwest Coast from Kahurangi Point up to and including Farewell Spit and extending to the south on the eastern side of Golden Bay to the Ruataniwha Inlet. On the western side of Golden Bay, Wainui Bay was also identified as a potential ONL. Both of these ONLF areas are adjacent to, and include part of the Kahurangi and Abel Tasman National Parks, as well as other public estate lands. The immediately adjacent Rural 2 zoned land was also included in the identified ONLFs. In addition to the two areas identified as outstanding natural landscapes, the major estuaries, namely the Whanganui, Ruataniwha, Parapara, Rangihaeata and Motupipi inlets, were also identified as being outstanding natural features. In addition, Figure 1

shows the boundaries of the character areas which also define the inland extent of the 2005 study.

- 2.2 Figure 1 also shows the inland study area which is currently the subject of this ONLF review. Essentially the inland Golden Bay encompasses two quite separate and distinctive landscape areas comprising the Aorere Valley and the Takaka Valley, both of which can be divided into their respective upper and lower valley character areas.

3. ONLF REVIEW – 2005

- 3.1 As part of the 2010 assessment, a review of the potential ONLFs identified in the 2005 assessment was carried out. The Northwest Coast including Farewell Spit and the northwestern Golden Bay coastal strip north of the Ruataniwha Inlet display significant and particularly distinctive natural characteristics which incorporate a range of conservation, scientific, amenity, rural and historic values. In the context of the Tasman District and indeed the wider Nelson-Tasman area this landscape and its associated natural features are considered to be outstanding in terms of the provisions of Section 6 (b) of the RMA.

- 3.2 On the eastern side of the Golden Bay, the Wainui Bay landscape character area was also identified as being a potential ONLF area. The Wainui Bay area displays high levels of natural character and landscape amenity and is a particularly distinctive landscape feature of Golden Bay. The area also has an integral relationship with the adjacent Abel Tasman National Park. Notwithstanding this, the Wainui Bay landscape has a low visual absorption capability and would be particularly sensitive to change and/or landscape modification. The classification of this area as an ONLF would acknowledge the sensitivity and significance of this coastal landscape and assist in maintaining the areas high landscape and natural character values.

- 3.3 While the 2005 assessment did not specifically identify the Wainui Inlet as an outstanding natural feature (ONF), it is worthy of this classification and should be included along with the other ONFs identified in the 2005 study. Figure 1 now shows the Wainui Inlet as an ONF.

- 3.4 With respect to Outstanding Natural Landscapes, the 2005 recommendations were as follows –

- *The Northwest Coast of the District including Farewell Spit and the northern Golden Bay area (north of the Collingwood settlement) is worthy of consideration for classification as an outstanding natural landscape.*

- *In addition to the coastal areas of Abel Tasman National Park, the Wainui area (east of Abel Tasman Point) and the Otuwhero/Marahau areas are also considered worthy of classification as an outstanding natural landscape.*

3.5 In the context of the wider North-West Coast and the Golden Bay coastal area, the potential ONLF identified in the 2005 assessment are confirmed as being of outstanding quality and appropriate for ONLF status in terms of the provision of the RMA. The addition of the Wainui Inlet as an outstanding natural feature is also acknowledged. As previously noted, these landscapes are within the coastal marine area with their inland boundaries being defined accordingly. The assessment that follows builds on the 2005 ONLF assessment.

4. STAKEHOLDER AND COMMUNITY CONSULTATION – 2008

4.1 Subsequent to the 2005 Coastal Landscape Character Assessment, the Tasman District Council carried out a landscape review of the Northwest/Golden Bay area based on the 'Amended Pigeon Bay Criteria'. In addition to this, Council has worked with stakeholders, interest groups and the community to identify special landscapes in order to assist and inform the ONLF identification process. The information obtained during this consultation phase has been mapped in summary form and is illustrated in Figure 2.

4.2 In addition to those areas identified by stakeholders and interest groups, Figure 2 also shows the 2005 coastal character boundaries (depicted as a white line) and the extent of the land administered by the Department of Conservation. Within the study area the land administered by the Department of Conservation covers some 184,000ha or 76% of the total land area. Beyond the conservation estate, most of the land within the ONLF areas identified in the 2005 assessment has also been identified wholly or in part by many of the stakeholders and interest groups as being of particular significance. While all the individual areas identified in the consultation phase may not in themselves warrant ONLF status, the combination and distribution of some of the more significant identified areas further reinforces the 2005 ONLF identification.

4.3 While the results of the Council led stakeholder/interest group/community review will inform the identification and confirmation of ONLFs, they will also assist in the development of specific and targeted strategies and policies that will ensure the respective areas identified are sensitively managed whether they are within or external to any ONLF classification.

5. OUTSTANDING NATURAL LANDSCAPES – 2010

5.1 As previously noted, the inland areas of Golden Bay were not assessed in the 2005 study. The inland areas, identified in Figure 1, include the Aorere Valley to the west and the Takaka Valley to the east. While both valleys comprise a distinctive upper and lower section, the difference is more one of scale and openness rather than a significant change of character. Notwithstanding this, a difference in appearance between land zoned Rural 1 and Rural 2 is apparent in terms of land use patterns with the upper valley being somewhat less developed. This is more apparent in the Aorere Valley compared to the Takaka Valley where Rural 1 zoned land extends into the upper valley.

Aorere Valley

5.2 The Aorere Valley is a relatively remote valley which is unlikely to be frequented by many people other than residents and users of the Heaphy Track. While there are tourist attractions in the valley these tend to be in the lower valley north east of Bainham.

5.3 The key landscape characteristics of the Aorere Valley are –

- The area's apparent remoteness and wilderness like character, particularly in the upper valley area.
- The visual prominence and dominance of Kahurangi National Park in the valley landscape setting and more particularly in the upper valley area.
- The perceived absence of development and man made elements such as buildings and infrastructure.
- The definition and contrast between the Rural 1 and Rural 2 zoned land based on landforms and their combined relationship with the steeper and more vegetated slopes of the adjacent Kahurangi National Park.
- The distinctive pattern and character of rural activity within the valley in the context of its wider valley setting.
- The scale and context of rural activities in what is largely seen and perceived as a remote, wilderness landscape with high conservation values.
- Evidence of natural features and geological process that have shaped the valley.
- The presence of cultural and historic associations of past activity.

Takaka Valley

5.4 Unlike the Aorere Valley, the Takaka Valley is more accessible and visible to all who travel by road to Golden Bay. Views from the Takaka Hill are expansive, as are views from State Highway 60 within the valley itself, albeit less expansive and more focussed than those generally obtained from within the Aorere Valley. The Takaka Valley is an attractive landscape displaying distinctive characteristics and contrasts between the visually prominent formative and defining landforms and natural features, and the more intensive and diverse rural land uses within the valley floor.

5.5 The key landscape characteristics of the Takaka Valley are –

- The valley's high landscape values and in particular the visual qualities of coherence, memorability and scenic beauty.
- The spatial qualities and scale of the valley landscape relative to the area's strongly defined topographic edges.
- The significance and importance of the 'gateway' effect of the Takaka Hill road access into Golden Bay and the associated variety and diversity of views into and within/throughout the valley.
- The dominance and visual prominence of Kahurangi National Park to the west and the steep Takaka Hill country to the east as a backdrop to the valley.
- The remote and wilderness characteristics of the 'Cobb' area of the upper Takaka Valley.
- The valley's high level of natural character incorporating both conservation and rural values.
- Evidence of the natural features and geological processes that have shaped the valley landscape.
- The diversity, pattern and relationship between landscape features and rural activities .
- The diverse and contrasting landscape patterns and rural character of the valley.
- The presence of cultural and historic associations of past activity.

5.6 While both the Aorere Valley and the Takaka Valley are broadly similar in their general landscape context, their spatial and visual characteristics are somewhat different. Notwithstanding these differences, both valleys display particularly distinctive biophysical characteristics and patterns that illustrate the formative geological processes that have shaped them and the cultural activities that have

subsequently taken place. Accordingly, the sensory qualities and the associative values within the inland valley landscapes are distinctive and a particular feature and characteristic of the wider Golden Bay landscape. While the Golden Bay landscape is well defined and visually contained by the surrounding topography, the individual character areas, while different, collectively contribute to the overall diversity, appearance and character of Golden Bay as a contained, remote and special landscape.

6. GOLDEN BAY ONLF OPTIONS

6.1 Based on the 2005 ONLF recommendations, four options have been proposed for consideration and consultation purposes. All four options build upon the 2005 recommendations which are unchanged from those proposed in the 2005 Coastal Tasman Landscape Character Assessment.

6.2 In all four options an indicative outstanding natural seascape area has been included given the importance and relationship between the coastal margin, the intertidal areas and the near offshore waters. The basis for the definition of the outstanding natural seascape has in part been based on the natural ecosystem areas identified in the Tasman Resource Management Plan. At this stage the definition of the edge of the inlet ONLFs has been assumed to be the 200 metre coastal environment area as noted in TRMP. Following confirmation of the ONLF options and the subsequent review of settlements, a clearer definition of the inland natural outstanding seascape boundary will be required. In the interim, the 200 metre 'coastal environment area' provides a useful working buffer for estuarine protection and the inland outstanding seascape boundary definition.

6.3 The Environment Court (First Interim Decision of the Environment Court Enquiry into Aquaculture, April 2001) noted that "Golden Bay had natural character values which are of national importance" and that "Golden Bay is an outstanding natural landscape/landscape feature which is of national importance and is to be noted as such". While the Court decision also noted that marine farms located beyond 3 nautical miles (5.5kms) offshore will have no adverse visual effects, the entire Golden Bay area encompassing the sea from the eastern end of Farewell Spit to a point some 25kms north east of Separation Point has been defined as the Golden Bay outstanding seascape area and referred to in Figure 3 as an outstanding natural seascape. The area to the north of Farewell Spit and along the Northwest Coast to Kahurangi Point extends some 3 nautical miles (5.5kms) offshore. This boundary

could be extended to include the coastal marine area administered by the TDC which extends some 12 nautical miles offshore.

Option One (Figure 3)

- 6.4 In addition to the inclusion of the outstanding natural seascape noted above and the coastal areas included in the 2005 assessment, this option includes all of the Department of Conservation (DoC) Estate land within the northwest Golden Bay area. Figure 3 shows the extent and definition of Option One. While this tract of land is well defined and contiguous throughout most of the area on the western side of Golden Bay, the eastern Golden Bay hill country is more fragmented as a result of private land holdings.
- 6.5 While Option One does not impinge on additional private land (beyond that identified in the 2005 assessment), the inland boundaries of the ONLF tend to be somewhat arbitrary and defined by DoC land tenure rather than landscape patterns.

Option Two (Figure 4)

- 6.6 This option, illustrated on Figure 4, is a variation of Option One and includes all land above 300 metres in elevation irrespective of ownership. Based on field investigations, a contour line in the order of 200-300 metres in elevation appears to best represent the change in contour, land use and vegetation patterns from where a more logical boundary for the ONLF could be established.
- 6.7 Also shown on Figure 4 is a line indicating the alignment of the 200 metre contour. As can be seen, the difference between the two contours is not significant. Also apparent are localised areas of conservation estate land which extend lower than the 200 metre line and would therefore be included within the ONLF classification. Given the nature of the land use patterns, vegetation and topography, consideration should be given to perhaps adopting the 200 metre, rather than the 300 metre contour line.
- 6.8 Notwithstanding which line is adopted, the expansion of the ONLF area to the steep hill country to the east is strongly recommended. While a large area of this land is in private ownership and zoned Rural 2, its inclusion within the ONLF is of particular importance. From a landscape point of view, this steep rugged hill country, which defines the eastern side of Golden Bay, exhibits significant landscape attributes and in visual terms is an integral component of Golden Bay, particularly in the context of its ONLF classification. Previous landscape assessments by Works Consultancy

(1995) and Liz Kidson (July 2007) also identified all or part of this area as being of outstanding status.

- 6.9 From a landscape perspective, the area identified as Option Two with either the 300 or 200 metre boundary should be considered as the minimum extent of the area identified for ONLF classification. Small pockets of land that are held in the conservation estate and are separate from the bulk of the area as isolated small holdings within the valley floors, need not be included as their size and status can be managed by way of other notations and or management strategies.

Option Three (Figure 5)

- 6.10 In addition to the Option Two ONLF, Option Three also includes the land zoned Rural 2 within the Golden Bay area. The land outside the suggested ONLF area comprises Rural 1 zoned land, urban settlement areas, and industrial/commercial areas. Rural residential areas where these are contiguous with Rural 2 land are included, while Rural Residential land that is adjacent to settlements is not included with the Option 3 ONLF. The areas excluded from the ONLF area in Option Three comprise approximately 7% of the entire Northwest/Golden Bay land area. The reason for including the Rural 2 land in is due to its more rugged and broken terrain and visual relationship with the conservation estate land. The inclusion of Rural 2 zoned land is also consistent with the inclusion of rural land on the Northwest Coast and the north-western side of Golden Bay which were included in the 2005 ONLF proposal.
- 6.11 In landscape terms, much of the land zoned Rural 2 is similar to the character and appearance of the conservation estate land. Consequently, establishing a clear definition between Rural 2 zoned land and the adjacent Conservation Estate is not readily apparent in terms of the landscape patterns and landuse. In terms of the overall perception of naturalness, the Rural 2 land and indeed the Rural 1 zoned land are integral to their rugged and more defining landscape settings. Accordingly, it is difficult to clearly separate the valley floors from their strongly defined topographic edges. These areas are generally perceived and appreciated as a single integrated landscape, albeit with distinctive contrasts relative to their form giving natural elements, patterns and process.

Option Four (Figure 6)

- 6.12 While the Rural 1 zoned land is generally flatter than the Rural 2 zoned land, there is a strong visual and spatial relationship between the two rural zones. On the basis that the Rural 1 zoned land and the rural residential areas adjacent to settlements are visually integral to the land area identified in Option Three as an ONLF, Option

Four includes all rural land as part of this ONLF option. In the event this option is selected, the definition of the boundary between the ONLF and the settlements needs to be resolved. This could in part be integrated with the strategic review work proposed for the Golden Bay settlements.

- 6.13 As the Tasman District Council also has responsibility for regional council functions, from a 'regional' perspective, the inclusion of all rural land as part of Option Four does acknowledge the special and unique character of Golden Bay. Inherent in this option, and indeed all of the options that include private land, is the intent that the ONLF classification does not introduce additional and/or an unnecessary layer of new rules. Given the private land has to be managed and the owners of this rural land are the best custodians of the rural landscape, the intent is to make farming less rule driven and more responsive to facilitating better and more efficient land use and land management practices.
- 6.14 While the definition of the Rural zones would be maintained under this Option Four ONLF classification, the rule provisions should be reviewed in terms of their application to the Golden Bay area specifically. Currently the TRMP rules tend to be generic and are not specific to particular character areas. While there may be some generic zone provisions, the TRMP should acknowledge the special characteristics of particular landscape character areas within the wider Golden Bay area.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 That Option Two, either to the 300 metre or the 200 metre contour line be adopted as the minimum extent of the Northwest Coast/Golden Bay ONLF, including the seascape and its inland buffer.
- 7.2 That from a regional perspective, consideration be given to expanding the ONLF to include all rural land within the Northwest Coast/Golden Bay area as part of the ONLF.
- 7.3 That zone rules specific to the landscape character areas be reviewed with the objective of facilitating more sensitive, responsive and more effective land management practices in order to ensure the integrated management of the entire Northwest Coast/Golden Bay area as a sub-district wide ONLF.