

**Otago Regional Council Submission**

**to the**

**NZ Productivity Commission**

**on the**

**Better Urban Planning Issues Paper**

This is a submission to the NZ Productivity Commission on the Better Urban Planning – Issues Paper (December 2015)

The Otago Regional Council wishes to be heard in support of this submission if the opportunity arises.

Signature of submitter (or person authorised to sign on behalf of submitter):



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## **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The Better Urban Planning discussion paper (the Paper) raises a wide range of matters around urban planning, and the extent to which the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) is suited to managing these matters.
- 1.2 Otago Regional Council (ORC) has chosen to limit its submission to four matters that are of particular interest for urban development within the Otago region:
- The relationship between the natural environment and urban areas;
  - Managing natural hazard risk;
  - Integrated planning for infrastructure and services;
  - Planning for design or aesthetic reasons.
- 1.3 These elements are all important for better urban environments in Otago, and ORC considers that there is opportunity to improve the RMA accordingly.

## **2. The relationship between the natural environment and urban areas**

- 2.1 The Paper discusses the RMA focus on natural and physical resources (pages 34-35).
- 2.2 ORC concurs that the RMA does not provide for urban planning especially well, and that there is opportunity to improve how urban planning matters are addressed. However, provisions for urban planning should not replace the regard that is given to the natural and physical environment in the framework set out in Part 2 of the RMA.
- 2.3 A high quality urban environment is paramount for international tourist destinations like Queenstown, Wanaka and Dunedin.
- 2.4 The Proposed Regional Policy Statement for Otago (RPS), notified in August 2015, proposes a number of provisions of interest, notably:
- Objective 3.1: Protection, use and development of natural and physical resources recognises environmental constraints;
  - Objective 3.7: Urban areas are well designed, sustainable and reflect local character
  - Objective 3.8: Urban growth is well designed and integrates effectively with adjoining urban and rural environments;

- Objective 4.3: Sufficient land is provided for economic production.
- 2.5 In particular, Objective 3.7 above includes policies relating to:
- Using the principles of good urban design
  - Encouraging the use of low impact design techniques
  - Designing for warmer buildings
  - Designing for good access in public spaces.
- 2.6 These provisions were developed in dialogue with the city and district councils within Otago, and once the RPS becomes operative, will be given effect through district and regional plans.
- 2.7 ORC considers that future reform could provide stronger directions for urban development planning issues, to ensure that urban development is appropriate to the local environment, while continuing to have regard to matters of national importance and other matters specified in RMA sections 7 and 8.

### **3. Managing for natural hazard risk**

- 3.1 Question 34 (Page 70) asks who should bear the risk of building in areas where natural hazards may occur.
- 3.2 There are a range of natural hazard risks facing Otago urban communities, including earthquake, flood, tsunami, sea surge and landslip. ORC has prepared a number of documents describing these risks, and has provided input recently to the district plan reviews being undertaken by the Dunedin City Council and Queenstown Lakes District Council.
- 3.3 The proposed RPS gives a very strong direction on managing the management and reduction of natural hazard risk. Any development should avoid increasing natural hazard risk, particularly where it intolerable to the community (Policy 3.2.6) and should reduce existing natural hazard risk elsewhere (Policy 3.2.7).
- 3.3 Though a developer may be willing to accept an increase of risk from developing an area subject to a natural hazard(s), and land titles limited accordingly, a moral obligation remains for the wider community to assist should the worst happen. ORC must consider the residual risk for the wider community.
- 3.4 A future landowner of such a property may not be aware of the degree of risk the original developer accepted, which may lead to false expectations that the property is suitably safe, as approval to develop was granted.



3.4 Further, should there be a natural hazard event, the community bears the cost of response to that risk (such as emergency service response, community support).

3.5 ORC considers that development that is intolerable to the wider community should not proceed simply because the developer is prepared to accept the risk. The community should not have to accept liability for such development.

#### **4. Integrated planning for infrastructure and services**

4.1 Question 28 of the Paper asks should infrastructure planning and funding be integrated in to planning statute (page 63).

4.2 The proposed RPS recognises the importance of good quality infrastructure, and that infrastructure development should be co-ordinated with urban growth and extensions so that it is provides in an efficient and effective manner. Unplanned expansion creates new demands for urban services and risks additional costs to the wider community.

4.3 ORC considers that there is better opportunity to improve direction for urban development. There should be better alignment between the RMA and the Land Transport Act, Local Government Act and the Reserves Act.

#### **5. Planning for design or aesthetic reasons**

5.1 Question 2 queries the role for planning for design or aesthetic reasons (page 8).

5.2 ORC has already noted that a high quality urban environment is paramount for international tourist destinations like Queenstown, Wanaka and Dunedin. It is equally important that rural service centres around the region function well and are cost effective.

5.3 Urban design can contribute significantly to economic, social, and cultural wellbeing. Good urban design facilitates:

- Good accessibility: efficient and effective movement of people and goods;
- A sense of community, cohesion and belonging;
- Community safety;

These matters become even more important where there is higher demand for land.

5.4 ORC considers that the quality of the built environment is important, and that there is opportunity to better improve how this addressed in the RMA.

END