

Preliminary comments on the Otago Regional Council's Regional Policy Statement

To: Regional Policy Statement Review Team,
Otago Regional Council.

From: Wise Response Society

Contact: Sir Alan Mark,
205 Wakari Rd.,
Helensburgh,
Dunedin. 9010.
Ph: 3-476-3229; fax: 3-479-7583; email: alan.mark@otago.ac.nz

What in Otago is important to you?

Wise Response Society encourages all levels of government as well as all New Zealand citizens to ensure that our way of life and priorities are not leading us, either wittingly or unwittingly, to deny our children the opportunity of a viable and fulfilling future.

Specifically the Society seeks to have addressed systematically this key question: "As demand for growth exceeds earth's physical limits causing unprecedented risks, what knowledge and changes do we need to secure New Zealand's future wellbeing?"

Evidence-based science on several fronts, shows that, due in large part to encountering limits, New Zealand in general and Otago in particular are environmentally, socially and economically vulnerable. Therefore, until we address the implications of limits, planning is unlikely to be realistic; it may even undermine critical needs over the next decade or two.

Following the Precautionary Principle, Wise Response asks the Otago Regional Council to base its revised Regional Policy Statement (RPS) on an objective, uncompromising assessment of the relevant science and associated risks. The risks identified need to be prioritised and logical principles and policies developed dispassionately from the consequent outcomes.

From these analyses, we anticipate that the RPS will need to place greater weight on genuinely securing the longer term future and accordingly, given our current situation, a level of near-term inconvenience will be unavoidable for us all if this is to be achieved. Plan wording will need to be tough, explicit and unambiguous to make a real difference and minimise legal challenge.

Relying on the free market and handing the management of our key resources over to local management groups that may not be truly representative of the public at large or have the necessary breadth of understanding, are policies that appear unlikely to achieve sustainable management of the available natural and physical resources.

What do you think the major issues facing Otago are?

Wise Response Society considers the following issues to be the most urgent:

1. Lack of willingness by most of our leaders and citizens to accept credible scientific evidence about the adverse impacts of our current living arrangements and practices on the environment, and therefore our failure to recognise the urgent need for transformational (mitigation) rather than incremental (adaptive) change.
2. Vulnerability, due to the high level of dependence of our communities and businesses, including farming, on carbon-based fuels and financial shock, as well as the loss of diversity, loss of local control, and loss of skill base in production and manufacturing.
3. Our failure to genuinely arrest and reverse a steady deterioration in the quality of our land-based and marine ecosystems and their natural processes and ecosystem services. In this respect we note that much better outcomes could be expected if many of the policies in the current RPS were just properly implemented.
4. Our collective preoccupation with the accumulation of material wealth above other measures of progress and quality of life.

A range of other issues flow from our failure to address these primary issues.

How do you think these issues should be addressed?

Wise Response suggests Council address these issues primarily in these ways:

1. demonstrates in the RMA Act S32 analysis that it has systematically assessed the scientific evidence relevant to the above issues and risks, then sets down clearly what constraints and assumptions it will adopt as a basis for each of the Policy Statement's objectives and policies. The rationale for omitting or altering any existing policies should also be clear.
2. acts consistently in accord with the Precautionary Principle as expressed in the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010 (Policy 3), as an underlying tenet of the Regional Policy Statement and makes building both urban and rural resilience its first priority in the face of growing uncertainty.
3. formally accepts the duty of each Otago resident, business and organization to mitigate as well as adapt to serious threats to a living planet which appears inherent in the Precautionary Principle.
4. accepts the implications of rigorous research and statistics, and the established principles of physics, ecology and environmental management as a basis for adopting principles and policies that will significantly reduce risk exposure,

including strongly sustainable approaches to infrastructure and economic enterprise.

5. shifts the focus of its activity away from promoting economic development throughout the RPS, and returns to sustainably managing the natural and physical resources, as required under S5, RMA.
6. takes into account the global as well as the national context to give "sustainable management" a fully integrated and defensible bio-physical foundation.
7. actively informs the general public of the need for any transformational policy, and explains how citizens can best aid the process of sustainable management of our natural and physical resources, at the same time as improving their personal security and contentment.

Other matters

Wise Response Society would like to submit further on the ORCs draft plan, and produce further relevant evidence in support of our submission, once the draft plan is prepared, and wish to be involved in the formal planning process, post-notification. Meanwhile, the Society would be happy to liaise further on this preliminary submission if that would assist the Council.