BEFORe THE Hearing Commissioner appointed by the Te Tai Poutini Plan Committee

**IN THE MATTER** of the Resource Management Act 1991 (**the Act**)

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER** of hearing of submissions on Te Tai o Poutini (West Coast Combined District) Plan,

Hearing Topic: Strategic Directions

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| Industry Statement to be tabled by Emily Levenson for horticulture new zealand**29 September 2023** |

# INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Emily Levenson. I am an Environmental Policy Advisor at Horticulture New Zealand (HortNZ). I work within the Environmental Policy Team on national, regional, and district planning processes across New Zealand. I have been in this role since January 16, 2023.
2. I hold a Bachelor of Science in Urban Studies and Planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).
3. I worked in urban planning and environmental policy research for two years at MIT, Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research, and as an independent contractor assisting researchers at the Victoria University of Wellington and Scion.
4. I am an associate member of the Environmental Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ).
5. Since beginning my role at HortNZ, I have met with growers across New Zealand to better understand their horticultural operations and how resource management issues impact them.

*Involvement in the proceedings*

1. When I joined HortNZ in January 2023, I took on the role of supporting Te Tai o Poutini Plan proceedings.
2. I have had meetings and conversations with planners and other advisors since April 2023 seeking information to support the HortNZ submission and evidence produced for this process.
3. In preparing my evidence, I have read:
	1. The Proposed Te Tai o Poutini Plan
	2. HortNZ submission
	3. The Section 42a report and appendices
	4. The New Zealand National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land (NPS-HPL)
	5. The New Zealand National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (NPS-IB)
	6. Relevant provisions of the Resource Management Act 1991

# Purpose and scope of evidence

1. This statement responds to the Section 42A report recommendations regarding Horticulture NZ’s submission and further submissions on Te Tai o Poutini Plan, specifically on the Hearing Topic of Strategic Directions.

# Overview of HorticultUre NZ

1. HortNZ is the industry body for the horticulture sector, representing growers who pay levies on fruit and vegetables sold either directly or through a post-harvest operator, as set out in the Commodity Levies (Vegetables and Fruit) Order 2013.
2. On behalf of growers, HortNZ takes a detailed involvement in resource management planning processes as part of its national and regional environmental policy response.

**Response to Section 42A Report – Topic: Strategic Directions**

***Summary of HortNZ’s submission and further submissions***

1. Table 1 below summarises the provisions on which HortNZ made submissions (and further submissions).

*Table 1: Summary of HortNZ submission and further submission interests*

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Provision** | **Summary of HortNZ interests** | **HortNZ Response to S42a** | **Amendments still sought** |
| AG – O1 | HortNZ requested use of the phrase “highly productive land” rather than “versatile soils”. | **HortNZ seeks alignment with the NPS-HPL.** | T~~o maintain t~~he productive value of **highly productive land**~~versatile soils~~ and agricultural land **is maintained** for current and future agricultural and horticultural uses. |
| NENV – O1 | HortNZ sought to align the objective with language in the RMA and the NPS-IB, “preserving natural character, and protecting outstanding natural features and landscapes and significant indigenous biodiversity from inappropriate subdivision use and development”.  | **HortNZ seeks alignment with the RMA and the NPS-IB.**  | To recognise and protect ~~and enhance~~ the outstanding natural character, landscapes and features, significant ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity that contribute to the West Coast's character and identity and to Poutini Ngāi Tahu's cultural and spiritual values. |
| Strategic Direction: New Climate Change Objectives | HortNZ supported Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand Inc. (Forest & Bird) in their submission to amend the plan to include a strategic objective for climate change mitigation and adaptation. | HortNZ supports the S42a author’s addition of climate change objectives. | Retain as recommended by the S42a author |

***Horticulture in the West Coast***

1. There are a small number of horticultural growers located on the West Coast, including both traditional outdoor growing and indoor covered cropping. Much of horticulture on the West Coast is located near Karamea.
2. Crops include tamarillos, berries, citrus, leafy greens, eggplants and some brassica crops. There are over 29 ha in outdoor horticulture and 16,000 m2 in covered cropping on the West Coast.[[1]](#footnote-2)
3. There is potential for future growth, especially in the form of covered cropping which is more protected from adverse weather conditions.

***Key issues and outcomes sought***

1. HortNZ’s key interest is that the National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land (NPS-HPL) is incorporated in the combined district plan.
2. Highly productive land is especially limited in the West Coast, where there are no LUC 1 or 2 soils and only a small amount of LUC 3 and 4, located mostly near Westport, Karamea, Little Wanganui, and in the Grey Valley.[[2]](#footnote-3)
3. There is a requirement in the RMA for the Council to give effect to the NPS-HPL as soon as practicable.[[3]](#footnote-4) HortNZ’s submissions, given their focus on highly productive land, provide scope to include matters that will give effect to the NPS-HPL.
4. We also seek general alignment with existing national policy direction, including the RMA, the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (NPS-IB) and the recently passed Natural and Built Environment Act 2023 (NBEA).
5. The NBEA includes an outcome that seeks to protect highly productive land for use in land-based primary production and from inappropriate subdivision use and development.[[4]](#footnote-5)
6. The NBEA also includes enabling the supply of fresh fruit and vegetables as a matter on which the National Planning Framework must provide direction.[[5]](#footnote-6) Fruit and vegetable production most often occurs on highly productive land. The West Coast Region is highly dependent on other regions for the supply of fresh fruit and vegetables. Future horticultural production to serve the West Coast population will rely on available highly productive land.
7. This is an explicit recognition of the importance of food security for New Zealanders, which will ensure that the growing of fruit and vegetables is a key focus in planning decisions across New Zealand for the future.
8. The recognition of the protection of highly productive land and the supply of fresh fruit and vegetables in the Natural and Built Environment Act highlights the importance of the management of highly productive as a strategic natural asset for the wellbeing of future generations.

***Aligning AG-O1 with the NPS-HPL***

1. In our original submission, HortNZ sought that “The reference should be to ‘highly productive land’ rather than ‘versatile soils’” in AG-O1.[[6]](#footnote-7) We suggested the following amendments:
	1. T~~o maintain t~~he productive value of **highly productive land**~~versatile soils~~ and agricultural land **is maintained** for current and future **rural production activities**~~agricultural and horticultural uses~~.
2. We continue to seek recognition of “highly productive land” rather than “versatile soils”, though we agree with the Section 42a author that “agricultural and horticultural uses” is more appropriate than “rural production activities” to specifically enable horticulture. As such, our preferred amendment is as follows:
	1. The productive value of highly productive land and agricultural land is maintained for current and future agricultural and horticultural uses.

***Aligning NENV-O1 with the RMA and the NPS-IB***

1. The Section 42a author recommended the following amendment to NENV-O1.
	1. To recognise and protect and enhance the outstanding natural character, landscapes and features, significant ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity that contribute to the West Coast's character and identity and to Poutini Ngāi Tahu's cultural and spiritual values.
2. The Department of Conservation’s submission point S602.029 on which this amendment was based was opposed by four further submitters and supported by none.[[7]](#footnote-8)
3. We are concerned that the use of the word “enhance” goes beyond natural policy direction for outstanding natural features, landscapes and indigenous biodiversity.
4. The reworded objective does not align with the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (NPS-IB), which was considered in Section 32 Report 5 Natural Environment Values related to this topic.
	1. Policy 7 of the gazetted NPS-IB states “SNAs [Significant Natural Areas] are protected by avoiding or managing adverse effects from new subdivision, use and development”.
	2. Policy 8 of the NPS-IB states, “The importance of maintaining indigenous biodiversity outside SNAs is recognised and provided for.”[[8]](#footnote-9)
	3. Together, these two policies call for maintaining and protecting, but not enhancing.
	4. The NPS-IB says maintaining indigenous biodiversity may involve restoration and enhancement of ecosystems and habitats where necessary. (Emphasis added)
5. We are concerned that the addition of the word “enhance” to NENV-O1 is too prescriptive. We also think that it is unlikely planning decisions can enhance outstanding natural landscapes and features which were shaped by nature. “Restore” would be a more appropriate word to capture the intended direction.
6. An alternative approach, taken in Objective 3.2 of the Proposed Otago Regional Policy Statement is to identify and protect, or “enhance where degraded”, significant and highly-valued natural resources.[[9]](#footnote-10)
7. HortNZ seeks an amendment to NENV-O1 to either remove the word “enhance” or include the phrase “restore where degraded” instead which captures the Otago Regional Council approach.

***Supporting climate action through CC-O1, CC-O2 and CC-O3***

1. HortNZ supports the decision by the S42a author to introduce new objectives for climate change mitigation and adaptation. In particular, we support CC–O3, “To support technologies and activities that enable greenhouse gas emissions reductions and the transition to a low carbon emissions economy, while ensuring their adverse effects are well managed”. Horticulture is a low emissions activity that can contribute to regional decarbonisation efforts.
2. In addition, climate adaptation may include introducing new crops that were not suited to this region before but will be under changing conditions. The West Coast can expect warmer temperatures, a longer growing season and significantly fewer frosts under climate projections which would support horticultural expansion.[[10]](#footnote-11)

***Conclusion***

1. HortNZ seeks amendments to align objectives with the language of the NPS-HPL, NPS-IB and the RMA. We support objectives for climate action, particularly those that support low emissions activities for the transition to a low carbon emissions economy. Thank you for your consideration.

Emily Levenson

**29 September 2023**

1. Fresh Facts: New Zealand Horticultural Exports 2021. https://unitedfresh.co.nz/assets/site/Fresh-Facts-2021.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. “Te Tai o Poutini Plan – Section 32 Evaluation: Report Twelve Rural Zones/Ngā Takiwā Tuawhenua” (p. 11) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Section 55(2D) Resource Management Act 1991 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Natural and Built Environment Act 2023 Clause 6(11) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Natural and Built Environment Act 2023 Clause 129(g) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Horticulture New Zealand. “Submission on Proposed West Coast Combined District Plan”. 11 November 2022. (p. 14) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Appendix 2: Submissions and Further Submissions on the Strategic Directions Topic with Recommendations [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Otago Regional Council. Partially Operative Otago Regional Policy Statement, 15 March 2021. (p. 32) https://www.orc.govt.nz/media/9658/rps\_partially-operative\_2019\_2021.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Ministry for the Environment. “Climate change projections for the West Coast region”. 31 May 2018. https://environment.govt.nz/facts-and-science/climate-change/impacts-of-climate-change-per-region/projections-west-coast-region/ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)