

SOUTH WAIRARAPA DISTRICT COUNCIL

3 APRIL 2019

AGENDA ITEM D1

PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE TO ESTABLISH A DARK SKY RESERVE IN SOUTH WAIRARAPA

Purpose of Report

To inform councillors of the process for a proposed plan change to establish a dark sky reserve in South Wairarapa, which requires changes to existing outdoor lighting rules of the Wairarapa Combined District Plan for those that would apply to the South Wairarapa district.

Recommendations

Officers recommend that the Council:

1. *Receive the Proposed Plan Change to Establish A Dark Sky Reserve in South Wairarapa Report.*

1. Executive Summary

During 2018 the representatives of the Martinborough Dark Sky Society met with the Mayor and the CE regarding the society's desire to seek and establish a future dark sky reserve status in South Wairarapa. Further meetings have been held with the society chairman Mr Lee Mauger, Murray Buchanan, and of late the Group Manager Planning and Environment.

The proposed dark sky reserve has the potential of being a significant tourism generator and enhancer, being a key identifier of the natural character of our district, in recognition of the quality of the almost light pollution-free skies of the district. A future dark sky reserve can facilitate business growth via companies offering personalised day and night sky tours, educational and public outreach programmes. Following establishment of a Dark Sky Reserve in South Wairarapa, the reserve is intended to be expanded across the wider Wairarapa district. Stage two and three are envisaged, so the reserve extends across Carterton and Masterton districts, and requiring similar amendments to outdoor lighting rules, and reducing outdoor light pollution within those two districts. The reserve in its fullest form has the potential to be not only the largest such reserve in the southern hemisphere, but the largest dark sky reserve in the world.

2. Background

The International Dark Sky Association (IDA) established the International Dark Sky Places conservation programme in 2001 to recognise excellent stewardship

of the night sky. Reserve designations are based on stringent outdoor lighting standards and innovative community outreach. Since the programme began, four reserves, four communities and 10 parks have also received international Dark Sky designations.

In terms of progress regarding this topic, officers are awaiting information from the local society regarding the full nature of the plan change and range of changes sought to the current District Plan. In addition, the South Wairarapa Dark Sky Society is currently compiling an economic benefit report outlining anticipated benefits to the district, to support gaining funding from the Provincial Growth Fund, and to support the proposed plan change.

Their economic report and findings will be utilised as part of the required section 32 analysis for the proposed plan change. The merit of council staff and South Wairarapa Dark Sky Society members working together as part of initial preparation work on the proposed plan change has been raised and is encouraged. This combined approach provides good opportunity for the supportive content, lighting control needs and community outcomes of the plan change to be captured in a pragmatic way.

The use of a mixed working group has been seen as a positive way to initially shape the plan change prior to any public notification. In New Zealand, Mackenzie District Council has supported and implemented new lighting controls for the establishment of the Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve. Similar lighting controls could be applied to the Wairarapa setting as part of provisioning for our future dark sky reserve.

3. Discussion

Below is an explanation of the plan change process and what it involves. The subject plan change is a significant and facilitative piece of work that needs to be pursued, despite the fact that the review of the Wairarapa Combined District Plan is being undertaken in the near future. The future dark sky reserve is also recognised as a distinct component within the recent South Wairarapa District Spatial Plan.

Although the RMA requires the provisions in the District Plan to be reviewed every 10 years, it is best practice for the District Plan to be subject to ongoing monitoring and review. As a responsive Council we need to actively monitor the effectiveness of the District Plan and initiate plan changes to respond to emerging issues, as well as strategic matters and opportunities.

A plan change is a change to a District Plan, which is a public process requiring research, evaluation and consultation. A plan change can be initiated by Council or by members of the public (private plan change). The subject plan change is not about rezoning, but involves amendments to the existing lighting rules within our district. The steps in the plan change process are as follows.

- Initial issue identification and pre-consultation process.
- Plan change and section 32 report assessing costs and benefits produced.
- Plan change and section 32 approved by the Council for public notification.
- Public notified for submissions (20 working days).

- Public notification of summary of submissions for further submissions (10 working days).
- Hearings.
- Public notification of decisions.
- Appeals (30 working days to lodge).
- Plan change is operative.

In general, the whole process can take up to two years. During this time there is ongoing monitoring and review. The intent for this plan change is that it is processed in an efficient and timely way.

The level of consultation required will depend on the nature and extent of the plan change. In going forward, Council will produce a plan change document that includes an explanation of the proposed changes and a section 32 report which considers the appropriateness of the plan change and assesses the costs and benefits of the environmental, economic, social and cultural effects anticipated from the plan change.

When a plan change is notified any member of the public may make a submission in writing on the prescribed form and explain why they support or oppose the plan change. Submissions are called for over a period of at least 20 working days.

Once all submissions are received they are summarised and notified. Certain people can make further submissions in writing on the prescribed form. Further submissions cannot identify new issues, but can support or oppose the contents of original submissions. Further submissions are called for over a period of at least 10 working days.

The Council will then hold a hearing, if required, so submitters may verbally present their submissions. After the hearing the Council then makes a decision to accept or reject each submission received in whole or in part. The Council will then publicly notify its decision. A submitter can appeal the Council decision to the Environment Court within 30 working days.

4. Conclusion

The local Martinborough Dark Sky Society will continue to work alongside council staff to initially shape and commence compiling the proposed plan change for amendments to existing outdoor lighting rules of the Wairarapa Combined District Plan to support establishment of a dark sky reserve in South Wairarapa. A combined approach toward a council initiated plan change will provide accuracy for plan change content along with meeting the pragmatic lighting needs for the community.

Contact Officer: Russell O'Leary, Group Manager Planning and Environment

Reviewed By: Paul Crimp, Chief Executive SWDC