

DISTRICT PLANNING AND LAND USE

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May I invite you to join me in having a look at planning and land use of the three Counties that are commercially serviced by the Gisborne City, they are the Counties of Cook, Waikohu and Waiapu.

Generally land in these Counties, apart from the 20,000 hectares of the Gisborne plains and other smaller areas of river flat like Tolaga Bay, consists of moderate to steep hill country, with a very patchwork-like mix of soil and rock types. The mix being to such an extent that most average farms of eight or nine hundred hectares can have samples of all classes of land from one to seven in the Ministry of Works land use inventories of land classes.

A hundred years ago these hills were generally well covered in scrubby to very heavy native bush. The early settlers made an extremely good job of demolishing this natural cover and found this hill country, compared with many parts of New Zealand, had a natural ability to grow grass and produce healthy store stock and wool. From this developed a breed of hardworking, reasonably prosperous, very independant hill country farmers and to service these farmers grew the City of Gisborne in the naturally most isolated part of the North Island.

It was not very long after the clearing of the bush cover of these hills, that in many parts a major problem started to show its presence even though most farmers were far too busy to take much notice. In so many parts the underlying rock types were crushed argillite and mudstone and this combined with high annual rainfalls in the higher country and the depletion of bush cover, started in the headwaters of many of the rivers what was to be some of the most extensive erosions in the southern hemisphere. It was not only the eroding high country that would show a disastrous loss in production, but the extra debris run-off was rapidly building up the stream beds and accelerating flooding at an alarming rate in the lower catchments as well as causing the complete loss of water quality for most of the year, for the full length of the rivers.

In the early 1940's the East Cape Catchment Board was formed and immediately turned its attention to the Waipaoa River. In the upper reaches of the Waipaoa catchment were some of the most extensive erosions in the region. The debris was being carried down the river, threatening the very existence of the Gisborne plain, some 20,000 ha of some of the richest land in New Zealand. Both sides of the river were banked for the full length of its meander across the plain, leaving it flood free and starting that big change from grazing and dairying to firstly vegetables for processing and then to extensive vineyards and horticulture.

Of course at the same time something had to be done in the upper watershed which was really the root of the problem. It was decided that the purchasing of whole stations and their blanket afforestation was the only way the huge earth-flows could be checked or slowed down. With the very valued assistance of the Forest Service, many thousands of acres were planted in *Pinus Radiata*. Even though the end of the problems of the Waipaoa River and its catchment were nowhere near in sight it was not many years before the blanket afforestation of the upper Waipaoa catchment with *Pinus radiata* was showing a much greater degree of success in slowing the erosion than even the most optimistic expected.

The forest became known as the Mangatu Forest and its success as a stabiliser of erosion in the hills of the East Cape was to be the catalyst of many years of controversy and debate on land use planning in the East Cape Region.

In the eyes of the Soil Conservators, the whole situation was becoming critical. Many different means of erosion control had been tried with very mixed results, such as debris dams and pole planting of different species, many of which were destroyed by disease or noxious animals. It was rapidly becoming the opinion of conservators that more and more blanket afforestation was the only answer.

In the eyes of the pastoral farmer, who had spent his life on this land and having become accustomed to areas moving and others grassing over and not really noticing the whole situation getting worse, or in fact realising the seriousness of the whole situation, the planting in pine trees of this land that had served them, and probably generations before them so well as grazing land, was absolute sacrilege. There were odd small plantations of these trees about the farms that were apparently valueless, in fact you almost had to pay someone to take them away.

In the early '60's, Dr Taylor was commissioned to investigate the situation in the region. From Dr Taylor's investigations came the Taylor Report and the birth of the East Coast Project. Almost overnight a government announcement proclaimed the East Coast Project was to be acted upon. The main object of the project was produced on a map of the area. A rather thick blue line was drawn from just north of Gisborne running north just about through the centre of the hill country pastoral farming area, and meeting the sea in the very north of the region near Cape Runaway. All land west of the line, which included the headwaters of all of the rivers of the area, was to be purchased and planted by forest service in radiata pine. The forest to have the dual purpose of protection and production, it would also generate employment and generally would be a tremendous boost to a very depressed region. All that land east of the line would be known as the pastoral foreland and was recommended to have an injection of capital to render it capable of increased pastoral production to the extent of replacing that pastoral production lost by the afforestation of the other side of the line.

Looking at the picture from outside the region, it was probably quite easy to see this as an ideal scheme for all concerned. A forest in one complete block, protecting the most critical erosion the headwaters of all of the rivers. A forest, the major part of which could become productive. The lower hills to the east in many parts at this stage poorly farmed, being given the opportunity to dramatically increase its pastoral production. On paper a perfect regional development and a very much improved mode of land use; good planning.

But alas, at the same time a perfect example of forgetting the importance of the human element in planning, and you know the most important thing we plan for is people. The importance of open discussion and sector participation and the seeking of local knowledge that is so necessary during that stage of early development of planning schemes. The fact that farmers for generations had owned and made their living from this land that was to be planted in trees, the fact that large areas of this same land was multiple-owned Maori land with all the traditions and problems of tenure that go with it had been completely ignored.

The first two sheep stations in the headwaters behind Ruatoria were purchased and planting started in 1969. At that time among a community of hill country farmers, combined with a community of Maori people, steeped in Maori land

tradition; I think I put it mildly when I say all hell broke loose. I believe it was at this stage that rural land use planning was conceived and accepted by all sectors including the Waipapu County Council as a necessary part of district schemes within this region. Prior to this I would have, as County Chairman simply shuddered at the idea of imposing land use restrictions in a rural area, and I am quite sure the rural people would have shuddered with me.

The battle started. The Catchment Board adopted the blue line theme, no subsidies for erosion control, other than afforestation, would be granted behind the blue line unless a better way of defining the areas most critically needing afforestation for erosion control could be found.

A committee led by the Soil Conservator from the Catchment Board and the Regional Director of Agriculture assisted by reps from the Forest Service, Lands Department and Planning Department of the Ministry of Works, set out to do a survey of that land north of Gisborne and east of the Raukumara ranges, consult the people of that area and see if there was a feasible alternative to the blue line, that would be a more acceptable means of planning land use in the region. This committee in close consultation with the Waipapu County worked extremely strenuously on this task for several months. Dozens of meetings were held from one end of the area to the other starting with small groups perhaps a dozen in a woolshed, sometimes three meetings a day. Listening, coaching, educating, arguing, trying to gain a consensus of opinion.

After finishing one round of the area another would be started, this round less meetings but bigger ones. And eventually even though everyone was by no means completely satisfied, a document that was later to be known as the Red Book was compiled. It set out the problems and in fact the whole situation of land use in that area, and in very simple language made recommendations that could be used in the land use planning of that area;

The main recommendations for land use between farming and forestry, hinged on forestry being confined to that land with no long term future in pastoral farming, and to achieve this, that land use planning be based on the findings of the East Cape Catchment Board's farm scale land use capability studies in conjunction with a land use committee. It was now over to those responsible for land use planning to put this together in a workable planning scheme.

All forestry organisations claimed as of right not to be restricted. Pastoral farmers were generally concerned especially in the Waipapu, that afforestation would gain such a momentum it would leave the farming industry so fragmented they would rapidly lose their already fragile farming services.

There was no signs of a means of developing a land bank where by farms as they became available could be sorted into land categories of use. It became obvious that any planning scheme would have to deal with whole farms, generally in blocks as they now existed, and because generally each and every farm consisted of a fragmented mix of most land classes. Both the Cook and Waipapu Counties settled on a system of percentage of certain land classes within an individual farm as to whether that farm could be afforested as of right. Neither of these scheme reviews have got past the stage of appeal at the time of writing.

After years of study, consultation, frustration and argument, we have produced within a planning scheme a policy concerning land use as effects forestry, erosion, and pastoral farming that is as we see it, in the best interest of the people of the region and the greater interest of the nation. A policy that will need continued monitoring and adjustment.

Has the tremendous amount of work, time and cost been worthwhile? Would the Waiapu County say, be any different by the year 2000 had we completely ignored rural land use planning? I am inclined to think that probably it would not be, but at the same time believe that no one will ever be able to answer that question satisfactorily. I am satisfied the whole exercise has had full value, as an education to all who have been concerned it has produced an understanding among most people from the different sectors; it has produced an atmosphere whereby farmers and foresters can live side by side, in fact maybe even work in joint venture. It has pointed to many options of regional development within the region.

There is no doubt the peculiar patchwork-mix of land classes and the severe potential for erosion of the hill country of the East Cape region has made it different from most parts as far as defining its land use in a workable plan. It will always be easy at any time in the future to say that the concept of Dr Taylor's blue line had it been left to work, could well have worked out the best form of planning, given the right form of consultation, locally, and a guarantee of the suggested Wellington based input of finance to the pastoral foreland side of the line as was on the headwaters side.

Planning is for people, but it is people in their different sector interest that make land use planning very difficult. I would not go as far as saying that in all sectors they are narrow minded, but each sector very definitely rarely view the whole scene outside of the boundaries of a corridor of vision that is their interest alone. And in this I do not exclude some planners who view the scene from departmental offices in Wellington and can see no reason for variations in planning from region to region.

There are parts of New Zealand that economics and the effect that demand for certain uses has on land values, automatically governs the use of land, but there are many other parts that it is necessary to put restriction on certain uses to get the most desired result both economically and socially.