



## **Environmental Defence Society, 2011 Conference Report – *Coastlines: Spatial Planning for Land and Sea***

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In its 40<sup>th</sup> year of operation, the Environmental Defence Society held its annual conference in Auckland, June 1-2, 2011. The event attracted a broad range of people from high level politicians and legal professionals, through to scientists, planners and policy-makers, plus a mix of students and academics all engaging with what is a subject of critical importance to our small island nation – coastlines.

Some strong themes emerged from presentations that focused in on the latest version of *spatial planning* to hit resource management policy and governance in New Zealand. Remembering the “activities-based” and “best use” approaches of the Town and Country Planning Act days, it appears the new Auckland Council is the 2.0 test dummy. It’s remarkable to think that 70% of the areas within their jurisdiction are marine environments, and sobering to hear from Dr Roger Blakely, Chief Planning Officer for the Auckland Council, that resources for managing the coastal environment are stretched.

A second prominent theme was accessing, developing and integrating the *information* required to give effect to coastal and oceans policy. Spatial mapping necessitates the identification of natural systems, along with social and cultural values associated with a diverse range of environments. This is difficult due to their dynamic and complex nature. In the context of politically-allocated funding, there are sure to be winners and losers. A number of presenters expressed confidence in the effects-based approach of the Resource Management Act 1991 for coping with coastal and oceans management.

Dr. Daniel Breen from the Marine Conservation Team at the Department of Conservation gave an overview of the Australian experience of marine spatial planning approaches to Marine Protected Areas which extend beyond zoning to include land-use provisions, as well as education, awareness and research programmes. Amidst a number of strong calls for greater sharing of information and expertise across traditional cross-sector boundaries, there is a notable absence for a methodology to enable this integration. A number of interesting tools were presented, such as GIS-based systems for connecting data sets, but little that demonstrated comprehensive and meaningful outcomes at the community level.

The third of the more prominent themes, *collaborative governance*, was trumpeted as an efficient and effective approach to coastal and oceans management by many, including the

Honourable Nick Smith (Minister for the Environment) who emphasised the need for such an approach to originate from grass-roots initiatives led by stakeholders. Whether he believes that or not is arguable and academic literature points clearly to outcomes that favour development interests over conservation values in land and aquatic environments<sup>1</sup>.

This point was shared by Ian Tuck, the Principal Scientist of Aquatic Biodiversity from NIWA (National Institute of Water and Atmosphere), in his presentation on marine habitats. He questioned the focus on activities that have an *impact* on marine ecosystems and how those inflicting the damage are the ones with easiest access to the governance of a resource. This positions those who want to alter or have a significant effect on such environment as the 'stakeholders' who shape the decisions made, as opposed to those with intrinsic or low impact interests.

There was a noticeable absence of debate around the topics of recreation and Maori or indigenous perspectives on coastal environments. Dr. Mike McGinnis, speaking on lessons from California's experiment in coastal marine ecosystem-based planning, urged us to consider our deep maritime culture and how it is represented in any given process – calling for the development of an 'Oceans Constituency'. Dr. Hamish Rennie (Lincoln University) and Robert Makgill (North South Environmental Law) were two of the few presenters to address recreational interests, specifically provisions in the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010 (NZCPS) for surf break preservation. They emphasised that what we want marine spatial planning to do is ultimately determined by the principles guiding the NZCPS framework.

The strongest take-home message for this student was the lack of clarity or discussion on how local communities and their knowledge of resource and natural environments are involved in coastal and oceans governance. The prevailing view was that local knowledge is a vast resource to be *extracted*. In the search for robust information to guide coastal and oceans governance, little focus is given to embracing the sea of knowledge that is embodied in the culture of our coastal communities.

Conference presentations and some papers are available from the following link:  
[http://www.edskonference.com/2011\\_conference.cfm](http://www.edskonference.com/2011_conference.cfm)

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<sup>1</sup> See Nichols, K. (1999). Coming to Terms with "Integrated Coastal Management": Problems of meaning and method in a new arena of resource regulation. *Professional Geographer*, **51**: 3: 388-399.