



Darren Edwards
Chief Executive
Kapiti Coast District Council

Wednesday 8th November 2023

Tēnā koe Darren

Thank you for your letter dated 10 October 2023, seeking direction around the use of the Ministry for the Environment (the Ministry) guidance documents relating to coastal hazards and climate change.

I note you have asked for advice on the:

- Ministry for the Environment guidance: 2017 Coastal Hazards and Climate Change: Guidance for Local Government (2017 Guidance) and 2022 Interim guidance on the use of new sea-level rise projections (2022 Interim Guidance); and
- Its relation to the Department of Conservation New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS) 2010

The NZCPS is a National Policy Statement under the Resource Management Act 1991. It is a statutory document which binds decision makers.

The Ministry has developed technical guidance for local government, which includes both the 2017 Guidance and 2022 Interim Guidance. The Department of Conservation (DOC) has also developed policy guidance to sit alongside the NZCPS. None of these national guidance documents are statutory; the guidance is not legally binding, nor does it constitute legal advice. There is no legal hierarchy between the Ministry and DOC guidance documents, as they are both non-statutory.

NZCPS policy 24(1) requires coastal hazards identification to take account of national guidance and the best available information on the likely effects of climate change on the region or district. As such, the Ministry and DOC guidance both need to be considered in making planning decisions on coastal hazards, noting the needs of a particular district or region.

We refer to the Jacobs Addendum (Annex 1) and critique by the Coastal Ratepayers United (CRU) (Annex 2). It is not appropriate for the Ministry to review or advise on the Jacobs Addendum, and we note that independent peer review has already been undertaken by BECA. However, we have considered the critique, to the extent that it raises issues relevant to the Ministry's guidance and its implementation and offer advice below - in particular, in response to the critique regarding over reliance on the use of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) emissions scenarios, the use of SSP5-8.5, and NZSeaRise model.

The IPCC is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change. The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) is internationally agreed and provides the most comprehensive summary of the state of scientific, technical, and socio-economic knowledge on climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation. It is a key source of scientific information and technical guidance to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement. As a member country of the IPCC and the UNFCCC and a signatory of the Paris Agreement, New Zealand is *'encouraged'* to use the scientific and technical outputs of the IPCC.

For further reference, please refer to:

- Conference of the Parties decisions [25/CP.7](#) (2001), [5/CP.13](#) (2007), [12/CP.20](#) (2014)
- draft decisions for the Conference of the Parties ([CP.28](#))
- Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement ([CMA.5](#)).

The critique of the Jacobs Addendum incorrectly quotes IPCC AR6 as referring to SSP5-8.5 as “*implausible*”. Instead, the AR6 report describes high-end scenarios like SSP5-8.5 as having become ‘*considerably less likely since AR5 but cannot be ruled out*’. They caution their use to being for exploring ‘*high-end risks of climate change*’ (See Box 3.3 and FAQ 3.3, Chapter 3, WGIII of the IPCC (2022)).

The Ministry's Interim guidance recommends the use of SSP5-8.5 for stress testing the upper bound of hazard assessments, to be used alongside a range of medium confidence scenarios. When adapting to future climate change, decision makers should be planning for climate impacts, not emissions. This approach is consistent with council planning decisions needing to implement other RMA requirements and policies such as the precautionary approach (NZCPS Policy 3) and the requirement to have regard to the National Adaptation Plan (which also directs consideration of the same scenarios).

The Ministry considers the NZSeaRise model represents the best current available information for New Zealand in terms of Relative Sea Level Rise (RSLR), but we are aware it is still in the scientific peer review process. Therefore, the Ministry's 2022 Interim Guidance describes three approaches for assessing coastal hazards, two RSLR approaches which use the NZSeaRise model and one approach that doesn't. These are:

- a) Sea Level Rise (SLR) increments; or
- b) RSLR projections with modelled Vertical Land Movement (VLM); or
- c) RSLR projections with locally measured VLM.

Where local VLM is more accurately known or monitored, the Ministry's advice is to use approach c), or alternatively if not wanting VLM use approach a) SLR increments.

The Ministry worked closely with DOC on the 2017 Guidance and is continuing to work closely with them to ensure the upcoming update to that guidance is consistent with the NZCPS and DOC Coastal Policy Guidance. Consistent with this approach of working closely, we have been in contact with DOC regarding the issues raised by your letter.

If your staff would like to discuss the contents of this letter, Sophie Heighway (Manager, Climate Impacts) is the best contact at the Ministry and can be contacted at sophie.heighway@mfe.govt.nz.

Nāku noa, nā,



James Palmer
Secretary for the Environment