



Zoning

Description

Zoning is a useful mechanism that allows for separation of incompatible uses, and for grouping of compatible uses. The zone and accompanying rules then place restrictions on the scale and type of activities which can be undertaken on the site as of right. In New Zealand, zoning is typically associated with land use planning in District or City Plans under the [Resource Management Act framework](#), and the administration of land use by Territorial Authorities. It is also used for use allocation under the [Conservation Act framework](#) planning.

The concept originates from the 1920s in United States where it was introduced as a way of identifying land for suburban development, keeping out the incompatible land uses which had plagued central areas, and securing land values. Since then it has been widely used as a planning tool in many countries.

Regional approaches to planning are often based less on zoning approaches and more on standards-based (see [environmental standards and certification](#) responses to effects of activities, dealing with issues such as allocation and environmental quality. Regional planning generally uses spatial approaches ([spatially based planning and GIS](#)) to resource management, but generally maps resource, rather than activity types.

How and when the tool is used

Zoning is used particularly for land use planning, although it can delineate a zone of influence or of special character. Zones within New Zealand District Plans have a regulatory status. Zoning is compatible with a mapping approach - from local (site) to national scales.

For managing effects of tourism in natural areas, zoning can include:

- **Interfaces:** Zoning at natural area interfaces or at pockets within a natural area (for example camp sites or enclaves of private land for management of potential adverse effects and to manage the environmental quality of gateway areas).
- **Structure:** At a more specific level e.g. in [structure planning](#), zoning can be used to establish definition of the spatial arrangement of land uses to limit adverse effects of one use on another, to provide for efficiencies in service provision by minimising 'spread' of development, and to establish 'no-go' areas where there are natural values that need to be protected. This can be undertaken with community participation before proceeding to a statute-based zoning regulation. This approach was used for planning land use at Marahau on the edge of the Abel Tasman National Park. It identified the coast and interface areas within Abel Tasman NP as areas to be more strongly protected.
- **Provisions to attach:** Using the Marahau example, a structure plan was advanced to develop a set of zone provisions within the Tasman District Resource Management Plan to manage the implementation of the structure planning outcomes. Tasman District Council applied a 'tourism services zone' to this area. This zone requires a specialist set of rules and guidelines to be met and any more than minor levels of activity require resource consents to be sought to provide for scrutiny of each proposal.
- **Boundaries:** Zoning areas on the basis of their natural characteristics recognises their natural values and places boundaries to their extent. Areas with high natural values can be zoned for conservation purposes or for the values that are important. Within national parks or other conservation areas, zones can be established either on the basis of natural values or through application of the [Recreational Opportunity Spectrum](#) analysis of values.
- **Overlays:** Zoning layers may represent particular values - this allows for example a landscape features layer to be laid over a cultural heritage layer, and in turn over a forest type layer to see correlations (say sensitive archaeological sites on ridgelines), and then produce 'constraints maps' for example. These zoning overlays will often be combined with other information map layers (e.g. streams, roads, tracks).
- **Deferral:** Zoning can be used to determine in advance a potential change in land use. Deferred zoning is often used to signal a direction for growth which enables planning of infrastructure and adjoining areas to be aware of them. Often the deferral ties the release of land to strategic timing around market supply and satisfactory infrastructure provision.



In statutory application (both under the RMA and the Conservation Act) there is an inbuilt monitoring requirement for local authorities or the Department of Conservation - they are required to [monitor](#) the effects of activities on the environment. Therefore, consent processes will frequently see monitoring conditions applied. Issues with poor enforcing of conditions and insufficient resourcing of monitoring have frequently been encountered.

Application

Zoning, with associated standards, are effectively a growth manager or limiter. Other techniques can be used to supplement zoning approaches. For example establishing total [biophysical carrying capacity](#) of an area (or using a more participatory approach such as [Limits of Acceptable Change](#)) can be a way of establishing standards for zoning or the extent of a zone. Such an approach needs regular monitoring.

Zoning is a flexible approach that can be adapted at any scale to further a broad range of goals. It can be effectively combined with values-based planning to provide a spatial basis to recognise location-specific values and potential effects of activities on those values. Often zoning is combined with performance standards and can attach incentives to encourage particular land use outcomes (e.g. high density/low density, open space provision, retention of values). Sensitive Lands Ordinances protects various amenity qualities (views, open space etc). Bonuses (increases in allowed density) are allowed to landowners who provide greater than required open space requirements. Zoning may be accompanied by joint city-country agreement to protect areas outside city boundaries.

Zoning is defined by boundaries and those boundaries might be difficult to draw with any certainty. Boundaries do not respect gradual variation in values, and tend to be relatively broad in their application. There can be cross-boundary issues that are not possible to contain. For example a stream running through several zones of different land use may end up with water quality different from that intended for specific zones because of the effects of different permitted land uses on its water quality from different land.

Zoning tends to separate out activities from one another when in fact there may be some benefits to their coexistence (e.g. ending up with large residential zones with no shops, which means everyone has to drive to the shops in their separate zone). For natural areas the caution would be that zoning areas as “sensitive” or having particular natural values may mean loss of the mix of values which make it attractive (e.g. Tōtaranui’s cultural heritage values could be lost by requiring that exotic vegetation (e.g. the poplar trees) should not be maintained).

Zoning is a relatively blunt tool that works reasonably well on large areas and areas where values can be clearly defined. However, zoning approaches lack the ability to plan spatially for the successful layout of new development areas, or to provide for closer- in management of change in sensitive areas. The combination of a zoning plan and then a more detailed structure plan or [master plan](#) (if the subject land is in one ownership) are essential combinations in newly developing or changing sensitive areas.

Our evaluation

Zoning is a long established and entrenched method within the New Zealand planning context, and is commonly used within statutory documents such as District Plans. For tourism planning the benefits are the ability to identify areas where activities are permitted (e.g. tourism infrastructure) or not permitted (e.g. in one part of a highly valued conservation area) and the certainty that can be accorded these activities through a statutory regime. The primary disadvantage is the tendency to rely on zones as the only tool for managing development: in areas with high levels of change a more sophisticated level of planning may be required.