

# Restoring rural landscapes: 20 years of enhancement planting in Auckland

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The Auckland region has lost over 75% of the native land cover following historic forest clearance and conversion of land. Remaining vegetated areas are often patchily distributed across the landscape with many smaller areas becoming isolated. In an attempt to halt further decline the Auckland Council District Plan: Rodney included provisions that allowed the subdivision of rural land based on permanently protecting through statutory covenants (including fencing, weed and pest management requirements) areas of significant enhancement planting.

A minimum of 6 hectares of native planting is required, where a valuable ecological benefit can be demonstrated, to restore an area to enhance biodiversity, restore buffers and ecological corridors between existing natural areas, decrease soil erosion and improve water quality. These provisions have been used across the Rodney District but no long term monitoring beyond the standard requirements of the consent have been undertaken.

In order to determine whether the objectives of the district plan were being met and to build an understanding of the on-going needs and challenges of meeting statutory covenant requirements; we undertook PCQ vegetation surveys across a range of planted sites up to 20 years old that have utilised these provisions. We will discuss the initial results from the survey and data analysis and how this information will assist with refining methodologies and guidance around best practice restoration techniques, particularly in rural environments. We also look at the proposed enhancement planting provisions under the Auckland Unitary Plan and what opportunities are provided for with a new planning framework for Auckland.