







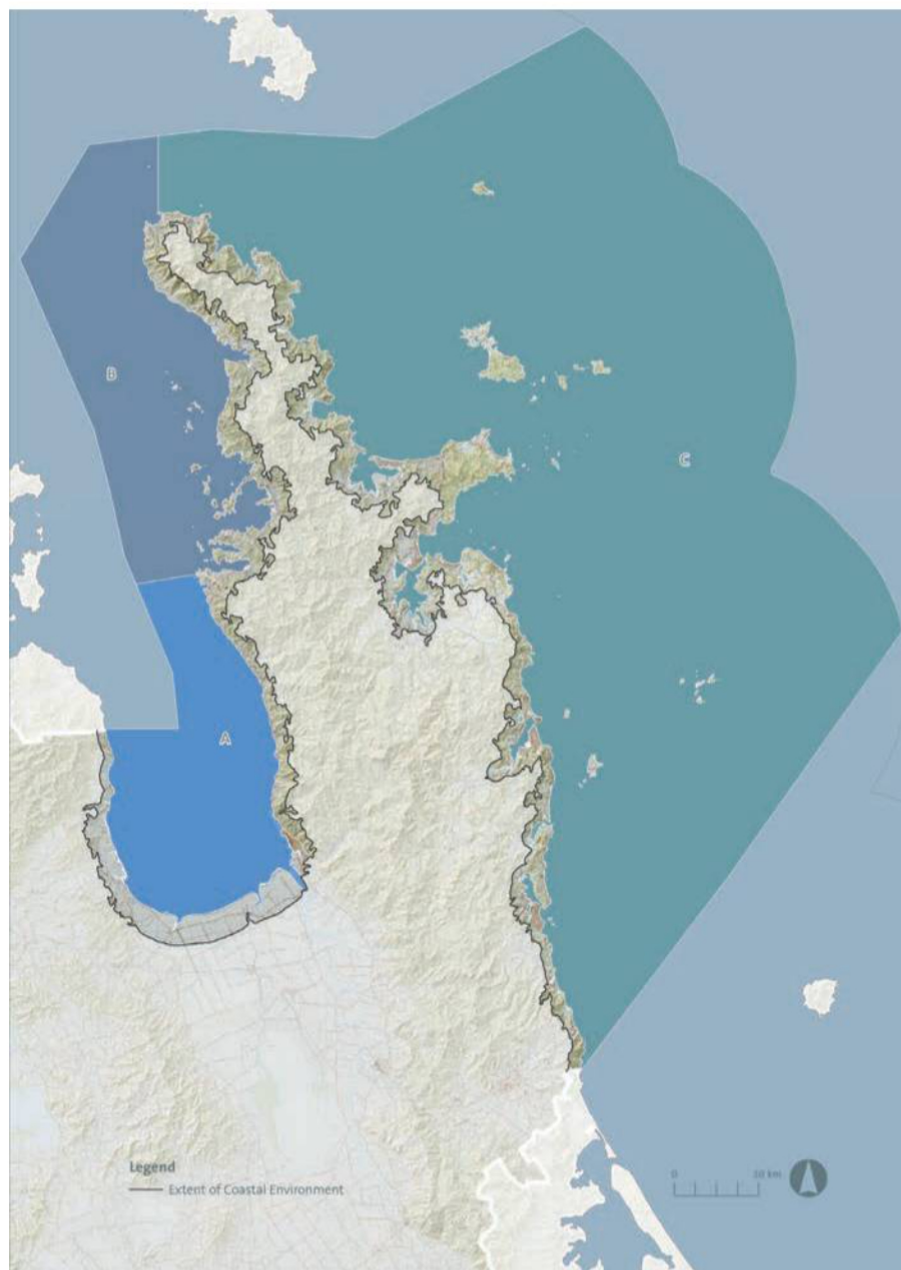
Left: The Boffa Miskell Waikato Regional Seascape Study was the winner of the 2023 Resource Management Law Association Award for Technical Documentation.

The award event was held in Queenstown (from left): Joao Paulo Silva, Senior Policy Advisor at the Waikato Regional Council; Julia Wick, Boffa Miskell senior principal, Auckland; Rebecca Ryder, Boffa Miskell partner, Tauranga; James Bentley, Boffa Miskell associate partner, Christchurch.

# AWARD-WINNING coastal mapping study

The Waikato Regional Seascape Study was the winner of the 2023 Resource Management Law Association (RMLA) Award for Technical Documentation. The Waikato Regional Council and Boffa Miskell were recognised for making a significant contribution to enhance the quality and understanding of seascape values. By **Rebecca Ryder, James Bentley** and **Julia Wick**, landscape planners from Boffa Miskell.

Opposite: Waikato Regional Council's vast coastal area covers two coasts. Seascape Character Areas (SCAs) were used to distinguish major seascapes in the Waikato. In the Northern Waikato: The Firth of Thames; Western Coromandel; and Eastern Coromandel. In the Western Waikato region: Waikato North; Raglan, Aotea and Kawhia harbours; and the North Taranaki Bight.



Left: East Coast.

Below: The Aldermen Islands, a small group of rocky islets to the southeast of Mercury Bay located off the coast of the Coromandel Peninsula.

to the advancement of a methodology to improve landscape assessment in resource management processes in New Zealand.”

*The NZ Landscape Assessment Guidelines* were published by the NZ Institute of Landscape Architects in 2022 in response to a long-recognised need for agreed, consistent landscape assessment guidelines. It is now the authoritative reference for those carrying out landscape assessment in the statutory planning context.

The Waikato Regional Seascape Study is the first report of its kind, and a leap forward in terms of its subject matter and methodology, and the robust nature of its findings.

## Study objective

The primary objective was to generate evidence for coastal and marine spatial planning and policy development for the Waikato Regional Coastal Plan review.

A significant portion of our country has already undergone comprehensive assessments to determine landscape character and identify Outstanding Natural Features (ONF) and Landscapes

**T**he *Waikato Regional Seascape Study (2023)*, is a first-of-its-kind assessment, in the sense that it solely relates to the seascape of the marine environment.

Seascapes are the result of the interactions between various components of the coastal and marine environment with natural and cultural elements. While seascape studies have been undertaken internationally, the concept has been little-used or understood in a New Zealand context.

The Waikato Regional Seascape Study also is the first assessment that incorporates the principles outlined in *Te Tangi a Te Manu* [The New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines], which also won the 2023 RMLA Publication Award for its “significant contribution







Left: Tauratahi Point  
at Kawhia Harbour.

Below: Waikato's  
West Coast.

(ONL). However, most of these assessments have predominately focussed on terrestrial areas, leaving coastal and marine environments relatively unexplored.

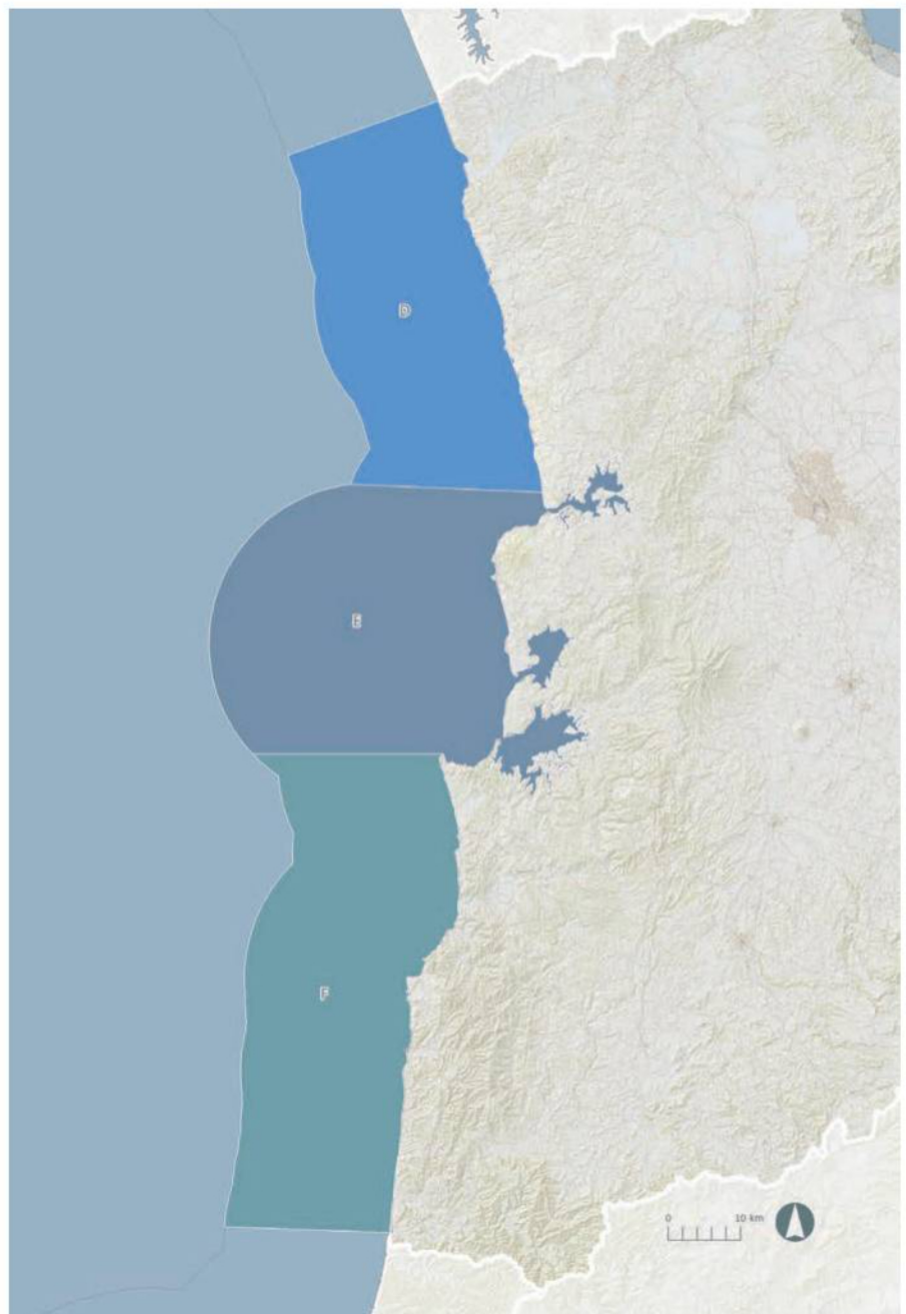
With increasing pressure on the Coastal Marine Area (CMA), it became apparent that while Policy 13 of the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS) addressed natural character, there was no equivalent assessment specifically addressing landscape matters as outlined in Policy 15.

Recognising the need to map and describe the CMA in the Waikato region, the Waikato Regional Council wanted a baseline understanding of the seascape to better understand the characteristics and values of its marine landscape when considering proposed coastal developments.

#### New methodology

The assessment was conducted in alignment with the NZCPS and the Waikato Regional Policy Statement. It also considered relevant case law and incorporated the principles outlined in *The New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines*, and compliance with relevant planning policies and regulations.

The Waikato Coast was divided into six areas. Eastern areas were made up of the Firth of Thames, eastern Hauraki Gulf, and western Coromandel waters. Those on the west coast incorporated Waikato North, Raglan, Aotea and Kawhia Harbours, and the North Taranaki Bight. A three-step process determined the physical, perceptual





Whaingaroa Harbour, Raglan.

and associative/cultural values of the discrete seascapes within each area.

Step One involved mapping and identifying the characteristics of the seascape from mean high water springs mark (MHWS) and river mouths, or the landward extent to the 12 nautical mile limit.

The term Seascape Character Area only applies to the coastal marine area (CMA) and that part that relates to the Regional Council's jurisdiction. Landscape Character Areas were not part of this study, however reference to the land was included where appropriate.

Step two identified Outstanding Natural Landscapes (within the sea) under section 6b of the RMA and Policy 15 of the NZCPS. This stage used existing ONF and ONL work to understand where valued landscapes and features extend to the shore and, potentially, into the CMA. This is similar to the method used in terrestrial studies; acknowledging that the CMA has different characteristics and values.

Step three involved previous assessments that focussed solely on physical, perceptual, and associative values. While this provided a reasonable understanding of the natural and landscape character, it largely overlooked the cultural values held by local Maori interests.

Waikato Regional Council undertook engagement with local iwi and hapu for this study and that input was incorporated into the final report.

This methodology has also undergone rigorous peer-review, confirming its robustness and ability to yield accurate and credible results.

### Study findings

The final 142-page *Waikato Regional Seascape Study* explains the process and summarises the results in detail. It itemises the location and character of each of the Waikato Region seascapes and identifies candidates for Outstanding Natural Features and Outstanding Natural Landscapes in the Coastal Marine Area.

It also describes, at a high level, likely pressures and threats to values in the CMA that will lead onto regulatory or non-regulatory mechanisms to appropriately manage the Waikato Region seascape. It also examines whether certain areas merit specific protection from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development under the Resource Management Act (RMA) and the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS).

The findings of this study are, of course, unique to the Waikato region. But, the methodology used to assess

these seascapes, the way the findings have been presented, and the role of seascape assessments for Regional and Local Councils to inform appropriate management of our coastal and marine environments, is something that is applicable throughout the country.

The Waikato Regional Council now has a detailed understanding of the seascape component of its Coastal Marine Area that will be used to inform spatial planning and policy development.

For other councils this study and the methodology represents a significant leap forward in identifying and assessing the nation's most crucial and meaningful environments, and empowering district and regional councils to make informed decisions regarding the appropriate management of these sites.

Regional Councils have undertaken similar assessments for the same reasons. These studies are currently at varying stages of completion, and a number will be made public in 2024.

As landscape planners, it's an exciting time to be at the forefront of assessing some of our country's most important environments, finding the best way to explain why these natural spaces are so valuable to us on so many different levels, and helping to protect these sensitive places for future generations. **LG**