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**LANDSCAPE BOUNDARIES: AN EXAMINATION OF THE INFLUENCE  
OF ENVIRONMENT COURT DECISIONS ON THE PRACTICE OF  
LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT IN AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND**

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## Abstract

This project sought to answer the question, **what influence have Environment Court decisions had on the practice of landscape assessment?** A case study was undertaken of the practice of a number of leading landscape architects particularly relating to Section 6(b) of the RMA91. This case study used qualitative research methods involving both interviews and the interpretation of documentary evidence.

The study has shown that Environment Court decisions have had both a clear and extensive influence on the practice of landscape assessment. In a positive sense the level of critique to which assessments are subject to within the legal system has resulted in an increased level of thoroughness. Aspects of the legal system, particularly the adversarial nature of the Court system, were seen as having a negative influence resulting in heightened levels of disagreement. The concepts of 'outstandingness' and 'naturalness' in relation to landscape are contentious concepts within the profession and appear to have arisen from the Act, rather than from within landscape architectural theory or practice. Practitioners showed a strong reliance on previous Environment Court decisions to support their conclusions.

The dominant paradigm of landscape was found to be objectivist. This locates landscape qualities and values as inherent within the landscape. An alternative paradigm is the subjectivist or cultural paradigm. This locates landscape qualities and values within the human observer. It is considered that the application of the subjectivist paradigm would allow for truly objective analyses of landscape value.

The slippery nature of the concept of landscape contributes to the tensions identified within the study. The focus on outstanding natural landscapes within the RMA91 promotes a focus on landscape, landscape as space and scenery. The wider structure of the RMA91 and its requirements for consultation promote a focus on landscape, landscape as place and polity. In addition the dominance of the objectivist paradigm of landscape within the profession results in a focus on landscape. This results in the predominance of the expert approach to landscape assessment and in tensions between experts and communities in the management of landscapes.

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