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**Sink or Swim: The implementation of flood
hazard reduction in the Lower North Island,
New Zealand.**

**A Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Philosophy
in Resource and Environmental Planning
at Massey University**

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1996

Now the thick'n'd Sky Like a dark Ceiling stood;
down rush'd the Rain, Impetuous, and continu'd till the Earth
No more was seen.

Milton, 1663.

Abstract

This thesis examines how flood hazard reduction is currently being implemented by local government in the Lower North Island of New Zealand. Recent reforms of environmental and local government legislation have placed responsibility for flood hazard management firmly onto local government.

Under the previous regime flood hazard management was primarily the responsibility of government bodies such as the National Water and Soil Conservation Organisation and implemented at the local level through catchment and water boards and territorial local authorities. Flood hazard management under this regime was incremental, and resulted in a bias towards the use of structural protection for flood hazard control. Territorial local authorities were variable in their attempts to use land use planning as a means of controlling development on floodplains.

This research aimed to determine how local councils were implementing their flood hazard responsibilities under the Resource Management Act 1991. A case study of six district councils, and two regional councils in the Lower North Island was undertaken. Several methods were used in conducting this research. District plans and regional policy statements were analysed by a plan coding method, which enabled the assessment of the ways in which councils were implementing flood hazard reduction. Interviews with the relevant staff were also carried out to ascertain the institutional and organisational environment within which planning staff were implementing flood hazard reduction.

The research findings suggest that Territorial Local Authorities continue to be variable in their approaches in implementing flood hazard reduction. District and city councils are continuing to rely on the use of structural protection as the main method of flood hazard reduction. This was often at the expense of investigating the use of other methods of flood hazard control. The councils in this study cited a lack of information as the main reason for their inaction in relation to proactive flood hazard reduction. Despite this, the two regional councils were both taking an active role in assisting Territorial Local Authorities in flood hazard reduction. Although the regional councils appeared to be fulfilling their responsibilities satisfactorily, it became evident that there were communication difficulties between regional councils and the district and city councils. The plans also revealed that some basic Resource Management Act requirements, for example monitoring were not being fulfilled. Overall, it was found that the district and city councils were continuing to rely on structural protection for flood hazard reduction and, in some instances, are struggling to fulfil the basic requirements of the Resource Management Act.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Jenny Dixon for the support and guidance offered by her during the past year. For this I am extremely grateful. It was inspirational and encouraging to work with someone as committed as she is, to the planning profession.

I would also like to acknowledge Peter Horsley who, through his dedication to his work was responsible for my conversion to planning. Thanks are also due to Murray Patterson and Johanna Rosier who offered advice and encouragement when it was required. I am extremely grateful to all those who participated so willingly in this research. Without their input this research would not have been possible. All the participants were generous with both time and more than happy to clarify points I was unsure of.

I would also like to thank my family for their support and encouragement, and their patience when everyone else's children were out in the workforce.

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