# SELLING THE WATERFRONT: PLAYGROUND OR PRESTIGE?

**Ask most people what makes waterfront property valuable and the answer seems obvious: the water. But when we looked at how waterfront homes are marketed, a regional divide emerged, with the story behind that value changing around the country.**

To understand these differences, we analysed advertising language in more than 2,500 “for sale” listings for waterfront residential property around New Zealand over the past 12 months. Our text analysis showed the language falls into a set of key marketing frames, which we summarize as 5P’s: privacy, prestige, posterity, playground and potential.

Nationally, privacy is the near-universal selling point, appearing in 76% of listings. Regardless of region, listings emphasize peace, quiet and a sense of having space to yourself, suggesting privacy is effectively a baseline expectation for waterfront property. Prestige (42%) and posterity (41%) follow, ahead of playground (29%) and potential (26%). Posterity - the idea that a family might pass the property down through the generations - likely reflects the long-standing ties many New Zealand families have with their waterfront property.

The playground frame follows classic bach territory. In established holiday home areas such as Northland, the Coromandel and Marlborough, listings focus on the beach, water activities and boating. Here the water is for using rather than admiring. Heading into the lower South Island, holiday homes tend to have a greater focus towards the snow and mountains, and the cooler water means the framing for waterfront property shifts more into the property’s potential as an investment. The result is a loose north–south divide, with warmer regions more likely to sell the water as a playground, and the south more likely to lean on other angles.

In the major cities, prestige takes over. Listings in the Auckland and Wellington regions lean on architecture, design and outlook, presenting the waterfront location as a backdrop rather than an activity.

Overall, the findings suggest waterfront properties are not all selling the same thing. For vendors, effective marketing starts with understanding the likely buyers and positioning the property in a way that will best capture their attention. The wider campaign can then reinforce those themes and draw on any other frames to reach the full pool of potential buyers.

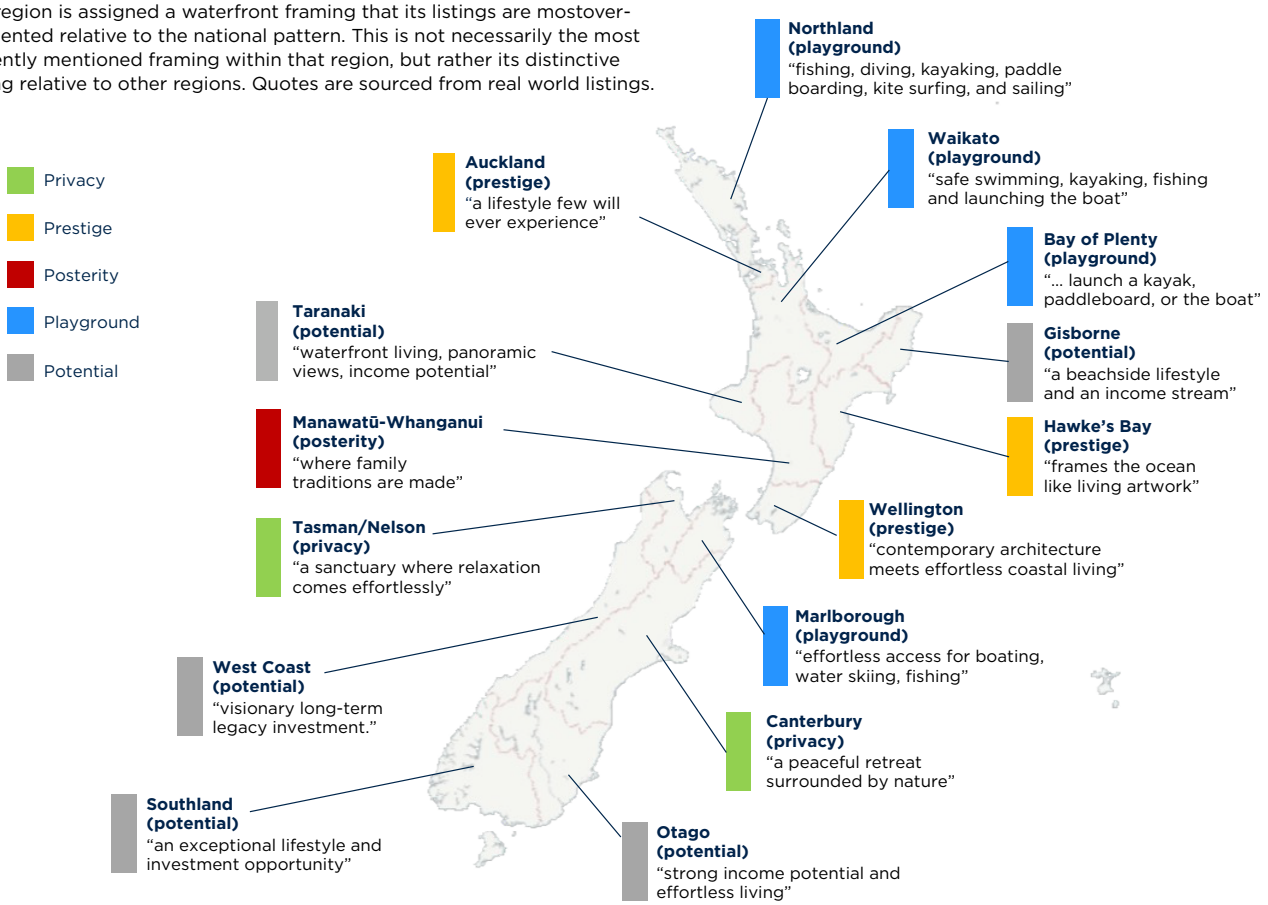
## What agents are focusing on

| Waterfront framing | % of listings mentioning this framing | What it means in marketing | Example of actual listing text showing this framing |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Privacy** | **76%** | Peace, seclusion and retreat. | “Beyond the gates lies a world of remarkable peace and privacy” |
| **Prestige** | **42%** | Quality, design and status. | “Created for those seeking a lifestyle few will ever experience”. |
| **Posterity** | **41%** | Family use across generations. | “Where family traditions are made”. |
| **Playground** | **29%** | Water access and recreation. | “Kids can enjoy jumping off the pontoon.” |
| **Potential** | **26%** | Income, development and future value. | “Landbank for the future, or create something special over time.” |

**Data:** Results based on text analysis of listing descriptions from residential properties advertised across NZ during Sept 2025 – Aug 2026 (n = 2,500+).

# Most distinctive waterfront framing by region

Each region is assigned a waterfront framing that its listings are mostover-represented relative to the national pattern. This is not necessarily the most frequently mentioned framing within that region, but rather its distinctive framing relative to other regions. Quotes are sourced from real world listings.




## What our experts are saying

"It's easy to assume waterfront property sells itself on the water alone. Our analysis shows the story behind that value changes depending on where you are in the country."

**Eos Li CFA**
Senior Analyst - Insights, Data & Consulting
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"When the agency team is crafting the marketing, it's critical they're tuned into the buyers and the value they'll be seeing in the property. Is the home a playground or is it about prestige?"

**Chris Farhi MRICS**
Head of Insights, Data & Consulting
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"A big part of marketing waterfront property is getting it in front of both active and passive buyers. In a lot of sales, the successful buyer wasn't actively searching when they first saw the listing."

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