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**Report 01.523**

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Report to Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee  
from Melanie Dixon, Policy Advisor  
and Dave Sim, Field Supervisor

## **Wetland Demonstration Project, Oporua Floodway**

### **1. Purpose**

To inform the Committee of the wetland restoration demonstration project that is underway at the Oporua Floodway, Lake Wairarapa, and of the potential for further wetland restoration initiatives in this area.

### **2. Background**

The call for a Wetland Recovery Programme comes from the Regional Policy Statement and the Regional Freshwater Plan.

Like much of New Zealand, the Wellington Region has lost up to 90% of the wetlands that existed in the early 1800s. The Lake Wairarapa wetland complex forms the biggest area of wetland left in the Region. Wetlands continue to be threatened by a range of activities including urban encroachment, drainage, grazing, and weed invasion. A pro-active approach is needed to reverse this trend.

### **3. The Wetland Recovery Programme**

Preliminary work has been done on developing a Wetland Recovery Programme and resources have been allocated in the Long Term Financial Strategy.

The Oporua Floodway demonstration project is an initiative of the Wairarapa Operations Department and is co-funded by the Wetland Recovery Programme, which is co-ordinated by the Resource Policy department of Council.

The Council has indicated its desire to undertake wetland restoration on public land and to work with landowners to encourage wetland restoration and protection on private land. This report details a wetland restoration demonstration project on public

land that will be used to show landowners the ease of restoring wetlands on private land.

#### 4. **Wetland Restoration as Part of the Lower Wairarapa Flood Scheme**

##### **(a) Potential for Wetland Restoration**

Lake Wairarapa supports a large and varied bird population and is a popular recreational area for the people of the Wellington Region. The Lake margins and associated wetlands are also home to a number of rare and unusual wetland plants.

The Council owns 413 hectares of land around the Lake as part of the Lower Wairarapa Flood Scheme. In times of flood, the overflow from the Ruamahanga River is diverted to Lake Wairarapa along the constructed Floodway. The piece of Floodway closest to the Lake is known as the Oporua Floodway (see Attachment 1). The water level in the Lake is maintained as per the target levels in the Barrage Gate Resource Consent. The Floodway has operated a total of six times in the past five years.

Most of Oporua Floodway is leased for grazing, with the lessees expected to move stock during flood events averaging about once a year. There are pockets of lower lying land along the Floodway that are suitable for wetland restoration. Much of this lower lying area is currently in wet pasture with established cabbage trees.

Wetland restoration at the Oporua Floodway will complement Lake Wairarapa by providing additional wetland and wildlife habitat adjacent to the Lake. In the future wetland restoration could improve the quality of water entering Lake Wairarapa, as wetlands can remove excess nutrients and sediment.

##### **(b) Work done to date**

The bird life in the area has been monitored for a number of years. In more recent years pest and weed control has been undertaken and over 200 cabbage trees and flax planted.

Council staff have worked closely with the lessees of the land to arrange the retirement of land unsuitable for grazing. In 1998 about five hectares of land was fenced and retired from grazing. Although there has been some limited planting in the area, it is impressive to see the recovery of the cabbage trees from stock damage and the natural regeneration of native plants.

The Operations Department, Wairarapa Division, has undertaken this work.

##### **(c) Wetland Demonstration Project**

In June 2001 an additional two hectares of land was retired from grazing and fenced from stock. It is highly likely that with the grazing pressure removed from the fenced area wetland plants will regenerate naturally. Therefore, no planting or changes to drainage are planned. A base line survey of the plant and animal life will be undertaken shortly, and monitored on a regular basis.

This demonstration project will be used to show landowners how wetlands can be restored at minimal cost. It also provides an opportunity to learn about the natural regeneration process.

## 5. **Communication**

Discussion is ongoing with the lessees of the Oporua Floodway regarding management of leased land.

Community groups and landowners will be involved in the development of the Wetland Strategy and community involvement will increase with the implementation of the Wetland Recovery Programme. It will take at least two years to see the results of the Oporua Floodway demonstration project. Further publicity will be undertaken at this stage.

## 6. **Summary**

Although it is still in its infancy, the restoration of wetlands on land held for flood control purposes in the Wairarapa has many potential benefits. It provides an opportunity to reverse the trend of wetland decline in the Region and will publicly demonstrate Council commitment to restoring wetlands and taking an ecosystems approach to flood mitigation.

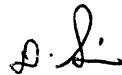
## 7. **Recommendation**

*That the information be received and noted.*

Report prepared by:

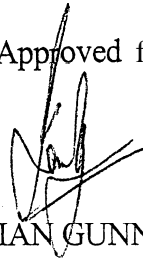


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