



Report **04.319**
Date 9 June 2004
File ENV/05/06/02

Committee **Environment Committee**
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An update on the implementation of the Wetland Action Plan

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of the progress with the implementation of the Wetland Action Plan.

2. Implementation update

Eight key actions were identified in the Wetland Action Plan, which was approved by the Council in March 2003. Significant progress has been made on some actions, such as looking after wetlands on Parks and Forest land, and the development of the Wetland Incentives Programme. Less progress has been made on others, such as finalising the wetland database. Overall, a lot has been achieved after one year of implementation.

Day to day implementation of the Wetland Action Plan is undertaken by staff across a number of Council departments. Efforts are co-ordinated through the Wetland Biodiversity Group that includes staff from the following departments:

- Resource Policy, Environment
- Environment Co-ordination, Environment
- Parks and Forests, Landcare
- Flood Protection, Landcare
- Operations, Wairarapa
- Biosecurity, Wairarapa

2.1 Develop an inventory of wetlands in the Wellington Region

A good knowledge of the extent, distribution and condition of wetlands is necessary if we are to manage them effectively. Field surveys of all known wetlands in the Wairarapa have been completed. Work in the western part of the Region is slower. Information has been gathered for the Kapiti Coast, but still has to be collected for Porirua, Wellington, Hutt City and Upper Hutt. At

this stage, Upper and Lower Hutt landowners are withholding permission for survey work on their properties.

2.2 Increase our knowledge of wetlands and, in particular, wetland hydrology

Improving our understanding of wetlands and, in particular, wetland hydrology, is vital if we are going to reverse wetland decline. Hydrological studies have been completed for the Queen Elizabeth Park wetlands and Te Harakeke Wetland (Waikanae). A model of the Waikanae shallow groundwater aquifer has been developed.

These studies will allow us to assess the impact on wetlands of changes in the catchment, such as an increase in the use of groundwater.

2.3 Protect and restore wetlands on land owned or managed by Greater Wellington

Wetlands on land owned or managed by Greater Wellington include some of the most important in the Region. Looking after wetlands on land managed by Greater Wellington demonstrates leadership.

We now know a lot more about wetlands on Greater Wellington's land than when the Action Plan was adopted. There are four wetlands on land Greater Wellington holds for flood protection purposes, and sixteen wetlands on Parks and Forests land. Most of these wetlands are now being actively managed for their wetland values. Two small wetlands on flood protection land in the Wairarapa require further investigation to see what management they may need.

Other highlights of the wetland programme on Greater Wellington land are:

- the establishment of the East Harbour Regional Park, which has led to a greater focus on managing the nationally important Pencarrow lakes;
- the initiation of a care group that looks after the Otaki River mouth lagoon; and
- the restoration of the manuka fen wetland at the northern end of Queen Elizabeth Park.

2.4 Work in partnership with other agencies and iwi to improve Lake Wairarapa wetlands

The Lake Wairarapa wetlands form the largest wetland complex in the lower North Island. Greater Wellington owns some land around the Lake and is responsible for controlling water levels through the operation of the barrage gates.

There are gaps in our knowledge about how this wetland complex functions and what the long-term impact of the Lower Valley Scheme on its ecology has been. A draft report that gives an overview of the environmental effects of the

Lower Wairarapa Valley Development Scheme is being prepared and should be completed shortly.

Staff attended a Lake Wairarapa Co-ordinating Committee meeting, convened by the Department of Conservation in April. The Operations Department, Wairarapa, has since developed a proposal for a more co-operative working relationship between Greater Wellington, the Department of Conservation, local iwi, and the South Wairarapa District Council.

2.5 Protect the very best wetlands on private land under the Key Native Ecosystem (KNE) programme

It is easy to damage natural wetlands, but difficult to return them to their natural state. For this reason, our highest priority for protection is to avoid damage to wetlands that are in good condition. On private land, this is achieved through the Key Native Ecosystems (KNE) programme.

In 2001, the KNE programme was extended to include wetlands. At wetland KNE sites Greater Wellington has funded weed and pest control, fencing upgrades and research. The KNE wetlands include Te Harakeke (Waikanae), O te Pua (Otaki), Lake Pounui (South Wairarapa), Waingawa Swamp (Masterton), Taumata Oxbow (east of Carterton) and Waimeha Lagoon (Waikanae). Pykes Lagoon (Gladstone) will become a wetland KNE in 2004/2005.

2.6 Provide practical advice and assistance to encourage wetland restoration on private land

Providing incentives for wetland restoration signals Greater Wellington's commitment to wetlands and acknowledges the efforts of private landowners. The Wetland Incentives Programme was launched in November last year after being developed with input from wetland landowners. So far, 35 wetland landowners have received assistance under this programme. The most popular incentive is advice, followed by assistance with weed control.

Other community programmes that support wetland restoration include:

- Take Care - Community Environmental Care Programme (currently 12 out of 30 care groups focus on wetlands)
- Partnership with QEII National Trust. Three wetland covenants have been approved since 1 July 2003.

2.7 Provide an effective regulatory bottom line for wetlands

Plan Change 1 to the Regional Freshwater Plan has clarified that the diversion of water effecting a wetland needs a resource consent. The addition of Rule 9B to the Plan means that a diversion of groundwater is permitted provided it does not effect a wetland.

2.8 Monitor our progress towards achieving our vision

Finishing the wetland inventory will set the baseline for wetland monitoring. Work on the wetland database will be completed so that the information is available for the State of the Environment report in December 2005

3. Strategic context

The protection of wetlands is part of the *Biodiversity* element in Greater Wellington's 10-year strategic plan *Towards a sustainable region*. It includes a success measure that *remaining wetlands are protected* and a target of *30 wetlands legally protected by 2013*.

4. Communications

A range of education and communication resources have been developed, including:

- *A beginners guide to wetland restoration* - a booklet
- Web based information about the Wetland Incentives Programme and information on wetland restoration
- *Get a helping hand to manage your wetland* - a banner has been designed to be displayed alongside Biosecurity banners at field days

The main way people learn about the Wetland Incentives Programme is by word of mouth or through contact with Greater Wellington staff on other matters. There have also been meetings with wetland landowners, including groups of neighbours.

Targeted media releases and articles in *Elements* have been published and further communication will be undertaken as opportunities arise.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee

1. *receive the report; and*
2. *note the contents.*

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