



Report **05.203**
Date 6 June 2005
File ENV/12/07/03

Committee **Policy, Finance and Strategy Committee**
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Draft Indigenous Forests Action Plan

1. Purpose

To seek Council's approval for the Draft Indigenous Forests Action Plan. The plan is enclosed (Attachment I).

2. Significance of Decision

The matters in this report do not trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3. Context

Greater Wellington's biodiversity programmes are guided by a series of action plans. Plans for the riparian and wetland programmes have been approved by the Council while a plan covering coastal and marine biodiversity activities is in preparation.

The purpose of the action plans is to represent in one document the overall vision and objectives for the particular biodiversity programme, describe the component projects and indicate future possible directions. The plans allow the public, councillors and staff to understand what we are trying to achieve and can be used to assess the worth of new projects by referencing the overall vision and goals. The biodiversity programmes are delivered cross-divisionally with budgetary responsibility and overall accountability for component projects remaining with the relevant divisions.

It is important to note that these plans are subservient to any statutory documents such as management plans for specific areas.

It is also important to note that in keeping with the other biodiversity action plans, the Indigenous Forests Action Plan does not address Crown-owned land. Such land is subject to management programmes delivered by the Department of Conservation. As the plan notes in the Introduction, Greater Wellington can have an influence over indigenous forest owned by territorial authorities (through cost-sharing arrangements addressing pest control), private land through our QEII National Trust and Key Native Ecosystem programmes and, of course, our own estate.

4. Background

Indigenous forests have many values including supporting biodiversity, assisting soil conservation, regulating the hydrological cycle, mitigating the effects of “greenhouse gases” and cultural significance.

In keeping with most of the developed parts of New Zealand, the Wellington region has lost a considerable portion of its original indigenous forest cover as a result of conversion to farmland and urban areas. Today only 28% remains.

In 2000, partly in response to the NZ Biodiversity Strategy, the Council increased its investment in halting the decline in regional biodiversity because it recognised the need to halt the continued loss of remnant areas, species, and ecosystem complexity, and to work towards restoring the region’s ecological balance. One of the ecosystem types identified as needing action was indigenous forest, particularly lowland forest. The programmes that have been developed in response to this need are described in the Indigenous Forests Action Plan.

The plan has been prepared by the Land Ecosystem Group, comprising officers from across the Council. It is supported by the Environment, Wairarapa and Environment divisions.

5. What does the plan cover?

The plan traverses the following:

- It discusses why the Council needs to act to ensure the legal protection and adequate management of indigenous forest in the region. The fact that much of the higher value forest is either owned by Greater Wellington or private landowners emphasises this point.
- It demonstrates that Greater Wellington is taking a strategic and integrated approach to protecting and better managing the highest value indigenous forests in the region. For instance, the private land service delivery flow-chart (Appendix II of the action plan) ensures that an appropriate level of support is offered in relation to the biodiversity value of the forest in question. This approach, developed jointly by the Biosecurity, Land Management and Resource Policy departments, ensures that landowners receive the same advice irrespective of which part of Council they are dealing with.
- The plan provides a strategic context against which expansions to existing programmes, or the formulation of new programmes, can be assessed.
- It is noted that the success or otherwise of the plan can only be determined by a monitoring framework. Work is underway as part of preparing the next State of the Environment report to develop robust criteria to assess changes in a range of regional ecosystem types, including indigenous forest.

6. Budgetary Implications

All programmes covered by the Indigenous Forests Action Plan are currently funded and no “new money” is required. Where justified, increases in funding levels for some component projects of the programme may be sought through the LTCCP process.

7. What happens next?

The plan will now be discussed with the following:

Iwi

Landowners

Territorial Authorities

Interest Groups

Department of Conservation

A final Indigenous Forests Action Plan will be presented to the Council within 12 months.

8. Communications

Copies of the completed Indigenous Forests Action Plan will be distributed to interested parties and access provided to it from the Council’s website.

9. Recommendations

That the Committee recommends that Council:

- i) *Receives the report;*
- ii) *Notes the contents of the report*
- iii) *Adopts the draft Indigenous Forests Action Plan*

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