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Committee Environmental Wellbeing Committee  
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## **General Managers' report to Environmental Wellbeing Committee meeting 30 May 2012**

### **1. Purpose**

To inform the Committee of Greater Wellington's activities relating to the Committee's areas of responsibility.

### **2. The decision-making process and significance**

No decision is being sought in this report.

### **3. Catchment Management**

#### **3.1 Land Management**

##### **3.1.1 Focus on Freshwater – Regional Council Best Practice**

Managing and improving the quality of New Zealand's freshwater has been an ongoing focus for the Regional Sector Group. The Group has recently established a Land and Water New Zealand website and launched a document entitled "Focus on Freshwater" which highlights the experiences of regional councils. By sharing their knowledge and experiences regional councils hope to improve their performance.

Following the launch of the document 40 senior regional council staff from across New Zealand gathered to share their experiences across a wide range of initiatives that have had a special focus on freshwater. The Lake Taupo Nitrogen Trading scheme and the Rotorua Lakes programme are well known as they are iconic water bodies with significant nutrient issues.

The Wairarapa Hill Country Erosion programme was selected as the best practice guide for hill country erosion as a result of the 60 year commitment.

This commitment has cultivated a culture of soil conservation across the region and 74% of the erosion prone land is covered by a Farm Plan.

Other regional programmes that received special mention were the Taranaki Riparian Management programme and the Canterbury Water Management strategy.

All the programmes and other news about land and water issues can be found on the following website: [www.landandwater.co.nz](http://www.landandwater.co.nz).

### 3.1.2 Ruamahanga Catchment – Farm Plan Coverage

Following on from an assessment of land use change and farm plan activities in the Pahaoa catchment some similar work has been undertaken for the Ruamahanga catchment. This work will be used to inform the integrated catchment management approach being considered for this catchment.

A search was made of Agribase of all properties over 40 hectares within the Ruamahanga catchment and the following table reflects present coverage of Farm Plans by number and by area.

Properties > 40 ha	Number		Area	
		%		%
Agribase	778		217,318	
Erosion Plans	183	23.5	87,120	40.0
Shelter Plans	100	12.9	23,578	10.8
Land Environmental Plans	4	0.5	1,230	0.6
<b>Total Number and Area of Plans</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>36.9%</b>	<b>111,928</b>	<b>51.4%</b>

In the Ruamahanga catchment there are 778 farms larger than 40 hectares. 36.9% of farms larger than 40 hectares have had a Farm Plan prepared over the last fifty years. On an area basis, the 287 farms with a Farm Plan cover 51.4% of the 217,318 hectares that are farmed.

These figures indicate that more than a third of the landowners in the catchment are well versed with processes around a Farm Plan and are likely to be very comfortable if this is how the future might look as regards natural resource management in this catchment. On an area basis the figures make better reading with half the farmed catchment covered by a Farm Plan.

In the Ruamahanga catchment two-thirds of the catchment is farmed. This figure excludes lifestyle blocks and small farms less than 40 hectares.

### **3.1.3 Catchment Scheme Advisory Committee Meetings**

Six Catchment Scheme meetings have been held over the last month. These meetings are an important date on the calendar as it's a chance to review progress over the last year and reach agreement on the works programme for 2012/13.

Scheme Advisory Committees are made up from elected landowners in each catchment. Their role is primarily to approve works programmes and Scheme rate increases, but also to be the point of contact for Greater Wellington on general resource management issues in the catchment. An example of this was the recent wind farm application in the Whareama catchment near Tinui.

All meetings have been very well attended and committee members remain very positive about the work and the contribution that Greater Wellington makes. It was also very pleasing to have Cr McPhee at each of the meetings and landowners value this opportunity for interaction and updates.

### **3.1.4 Akura Nursery Development**

No progress with the nursery development programme has been made since this last report. This is very frustrating as any new land needs to be cultivated, and preferably fallowed prior to planting. Local real estate agents have been alerted to look for suitable land elsewhere. The major drawback with this approach is that land purchase as opposed to land lease is likely to be all that is available.

On a more positive note 24,700 poles are available for planting programmes this year. This is on a par with previous years. To date the poles have been fully allocated to clients who have been buoyed by the very successful establishment of poles planted last winter. Ten properties were part of a recent survey and the average establishment rate was 96%. This is the best result since the monitoring survey was introduced ten years ago and reflects the difference a wet summer can make to the results.

## **3.2 Biodiversity**

### **3.2.1 Biodiversity Department Operational Plan**

The Biodiversity Department Operational Plan for the period July 2012 to June 2015 has been finalised and will be the subject of a report to the Environment Wellbeing Committee on 20 May. The key elements of the plan were discussed with Councillors at a workshop on 17 April.

### **3.2.2 Direct Native Seeding Trial Project**

A direct seeding trial project has been set up with assistance from the Environmental Monitoring team and Community Projects Team members within Whitiriria Park. The trials are on the dry spurs on each side of the valley behind Onehunga Bay. The dry spurs are spread throughout the Park and are also common in many of our other Greater Wellington parks which are

high priority sites. The species being trialled are coastal flax, toetoe, kanuka and manuka.

### **3.2.3 Parks Biodiversity**

Contract culls on pigs in Wainuiomata Mainland Island resulted in 19 pigs killed and a goat operation on Mount Wainui in Akatarawa forest resulted in 25 goats destroyed. Organisation of the 1080 operation in Wainuiomata Water Collection area is progressing and possum monitoring in Cannon's Creek and Speedy's Reserve in Belmont Regional Park is currently being planned. Project Kaka rodent monitoring is being carried out this week. Various contracts have targeted specific weeds in various parks and the weed team has worked on a multiple problem species in Wainuiomata, QE Park, Belmont Regional Park and East Harbour Regional Park

### **3.2.4 Key Native Ecosystems**

Weed contracts for Waikanae dunes, estuary and river and Waimeha Lagoon have been written. Pest animal control has been completed in Trelissick, Khandallah and Huntleigh parks.

### **3.2.5 Community Projects Team**

The Community Projects Team has continued to deliver *Take Action for Water* and *Take Care* programmes while planning for our new direction.

New projects for 2012/13 have been identified and staff assigned roles. As most of the teams resources will be focused on Porirua Harbour and Wairarapa Moana we have begun a series of workshops learning about the issues and current work programmes operating in these areas. New job descriptions, staff roles, projects have all been aligned to take effect from 1 July 2013.

### **3.2.6 Biodiversity Monitoring**

The re-measurement of six permanent vegetation plots in the Hutt Water Collection Area has been completed. These plots provide information about the health of the forest, as changes in forest and seedling mortality (and hence population dynamics) can be tracked through time through these measurements. Quantifying rodent and possum damage to tawa fruit through the fruit-fall plots in Wainuiomata Mainland Island has also been completed. There was relatively little tawa fruit this year, which often occurs following a “mast” seeding year. Last year had the heaviest tawa fruit – fall year since 2001. The low number of fruit recorded this year however has meant that it is difficult to show any significant differences between sites. Fruit damage was low both within and outside the mainland island area.

A rodent monitor was carried out in the Wainuiomata Mainland Island and non-treatment areas earlier this week, with the assistance of the Hutt Valley Tramping Club volunteers. The results of the monitor were:

	Mainland Island	Non-treatment Area
Rats	11%	88%
Mice	49%	1%
Insects	58%	23%

Rat tracking in the mainland island is the highest it has been since August 2009 and is well above our target of 5% tracking. The impending 1080 operation should result in a major knockdown of rat numbers. Mouse tracking is once again relatively high, and similar to levels noted in February. Mouse tracking has increased in both the diphacinone and brodifacoum treatment areas in the mainland island over the past three weeks, suggesting that the reduction in mouse tracking achieved by the use of brodifacoum may have been short-lived.

### **3.3 Biosecurity**

#### **3.3.1 Lower North Island Collaborative Project**

The first phase of the 'Nature Central' Lower North Island Partnership project has been completed on schedule, with data collected from all three regional councils and the relevant DoC Conservancies. The Natural Resources and Recreation/Historic streams are particularly important to Greater Wellington, showcasing what we do in these areas and how cost effective many of our programmes are. The working groups are due to meet again in late May to begin the analysis of the data, before the writing the final report. This document will highlight areas with potential for better collaboration between the agencies, hopefully leading to increased cooperation and more efficient operations in the lower North Island.

#### **3.3.2 Biosecurity Generic Guidelines Group**

The Biosecurity Generic Guidelines Group has been re-formed to develop a guiding document to assist Regional Councils to review their Regional Pest Management Strategies following pending amendments to the Biosecurity Act 1993. The working group of staff from a number of Regional and Unitary Authorities has met twice, and has begun developing papers analysing and interpreting the various changes to the Act and the National Policy Direction which will now accompany it. The final document will give detailed explanation on how to incorporate the changes into Regional Pest Management Plans (formerly Regional Pest Management Strategies) ensuring regional compliance and consistency across New Zealand.

## **Pest Plants**

### **3.3.3 Pest plant control**

The Pest Plant team and contractors are working on final inspections and control programmes for the year. Only three contract operations in Key Native Ecosystems await final audit and signoff.

Staff have discussed and established work programmes for next year with the Biodiversity Implementation team and the Environmental Monitoring and Investigation Monitoring team.

### **3.3.4 Lake Wairarapa Aquatic Weed Working Group**

The inaugural meeting of the Aquatic Weeds Working Group was held 14 May. The participants adopted a terms of reference and discussed the issues relating to the various stakeholder land uses. The aim is to develop a future control strategy for the most significant aquatic pest plant species around Lake Wairarapa. Hornwort control is a key focus of the group. The group agreed that eradication of hornwort and other invasive weeds is not possible. Consideration of the biodiversity impacts resulting from control options was seen as high priority. Additional funding and staff resources are needed to undertake in-depth site assessments and develop best practice guidelines for landowners. Initial work will involve developing a questionnaire for landowners to help us identify the significance of the issue.

The group includes iwi, landowners, Department of Conservation (DoC), South Wairarapa District Council, Fish and Game and Greater Wellington department representatives.

### **3.3.5 Biological Control**

Staff have provided a good number of gorse thrips to Horizon's Regional Council staff, enough for up to six releases in the Tararua District.

### **3.3.6 Dung Beetles**

Landcare Research (LCR) has authorised the release of two species of dung beetles into Rodney District, north of Auckland.

Greater Wellington Biosecurity has indicated to LCR a commitment to purchase releases for spring 2014. Pest Plants staff met with Environmental Monitoring and Investigation staff to outline their requirements for monitoring soil biota health, site productivity and nutrient resources ahead of the planned dung beetle releases next year. The LCR is willing to help design monitoring requirements to set a benchmark of current soil status and ground water quality. This information would be used to track changes and any improvements as we introduce dung beetles. Greater Wellington and LCR are exploring a joint application to the Ministry for the Environment for funding to progress this study.

Staff attended a presentation on Worm Farm and Phosphorus stripping systems to process solid and liquid waste from farm and human sewage point source sites. This system will complement dung beetles that will target dispersed solid waste on paddocks.

## **Pest Animals**

### **3.3.7 Staff changes**

Several staff changes have occurred within Pest Animals. Ray Clarey retired after 51 years of service in pest animal management, including 23 years with Greater Wellington. Glen Falconer has commenced as the Team Leader (Pest Animals) replacing Ray Clarey, and Gary Sue has been appointed as the Senior Biosecurity Officer in his place. Gareth Cooper (from Greater Wellington Parks) has commenced as Biosecurity Officer, Pest Animals and an advert has been placed to fill Gary Sue's former position.

### **3.3.8 Rabbits**

Annual inspections have been completed for the Wairarapa on rabbit prone properties and due to a very wet summer, the grass growth is the best it's been for many years. This may have contributed to the low population of rabbits over the wider landscape that we are now seeing. Western Zone monitoring started in May.

### **3.3.9 Rooks**

An attempt was made to control rooks on walnut trees at Mauriceville. Staff tried to lay feed walnuts as a possible bait for poisoning rooks in the future. Unfortunately, this didn't work and no birds were feeding on the walnuts on the ground. Rooks mostly take walnuts direct from the tree then fly to a prominent location where the shells are broken open and then consumed. However, it is important to keep trying new ideas and we are fortunate to have very skilled staff with the knowledge and initiative to trial new initiatives.

### **3.3.10 Key Native Ecosystems programme**

Key Native Ecosystems servicing is still a little behind schedule with the change in staff numbers. Overall the programme is achieving the desired results.

Staff have worked with Biodiversity department colleagues on the Key Native Ecosystems prioritisation and control programme budgets for next year. Biodiversity and Biosecurity staff are in the process of meeting with the territorial authorities about MOU reserves programmes and the likely changes as a result of the prioritisation process.

### **3.3.11 Goat eradication project**

Wellington City Council has commenced the Wellington South coast goat eradication operation with aerial and ground control work. This has affected some of our possum and rat control operations as we have temporarily stopped poison baiting in the areas that contractors are intensively hunting with dogs. It

is not likely that there will be any significant negative effect on our long term control programme, while the eventual goat eradication will greatly improve the biodiversity of the area.

## **BioWorks**

### **3.3.12 Rimutaka Range and Pukeatua aerial projects**

The Rimutaka Range Aerial Project (RRAP) is in the final stages of preparation for aerial application of the non toxic pre-feed followed by the toxic bait. The pre-feed and toxic bait have been delivered and are held in safe storage. All approvals and notifications have been completed. The project has been publically notified in four newspapers. Information boards are currently being prepared in readiness for the operation which will commence once favourable weather patterns are present.

Resource Consent and Department of Conservation applications have been submitted for the Pukeatua aerial project. Additional consultation with Kapiti Coast District Council (KCDC) has been required because public water supplies have been identified in the area. Following further KCDC consultation, an application will be prepared for the Medical Officer of Health to consider.

Project variations have been submitted to AHB on both operations because method changes have been made from the original operational plan.

## **3.4 Wairarapa Moana**

The development plan for Lake Domain has been publically notified and adopted by South Wairarapa District Council. In addition, South Wairarapa District Council has provided some additional funding this year to initiate the development.

A decision is awaited on an application to the Enhanced Access Fund to build a walkway to the eastern lakeshore south of the Oporua Floodway. If successful, this will be the first public access way to the lakeshore on the eastern side of Lake Wairarapa.

Research has commenced to create a policy for the use of Māori names within the Wairarapa Moana Wetlands project. It is hoped to include place names and the use of Māori flora and fauna names.

The Wairarapa Co-ordinating Committee has now met twice. The most recent meeting focussed on resource consents and the requirements of the new Regional Plan. The Committee completed four case studies on farms adjacent to the lake. The Committee now has a better understanding of the issues facing the farmers, e.g. resource consenting and compliance costs, the burgeoning problem of aquatic weeds, gaining certainty over what is a drain and what is a waterway for consenting purposes.



A working party has been established from the Co-ordinating Committee to consider options available to control aquatic weeds. There are a variety of weed problems within Wairarapa Moana and there are some challenges such as low hydraulic gradients within the drainage schemes.

A draft Ramsar application document has been forwarded to DoC's Christchurch office for their comment. The Ramsar convention on wetlands is an intergovernmental treaty adopted in 1971 to recognise wetlands as ecosystems that are extremely important for biodiversity and for the well-being of human communities. Approximately 900 wetlands covering more than 65 million hectares are included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance. There are five sites within New Zealand that have achieved Ramsar status. In New Zealand, DoC administers the Convention, deciding whether sites meet the detailed acceptance criteria.

Negotiations continue regarding the MfE administered Fresh Start for Freshwater Cleanup Fund. MfE have agreed that our joint application term can be extended to three years. A final deed for signing is imminent. Two workshops have been held to share knowledge on the edge wetlands. A ranking process has been concluded which identifies Boggy Pond, Matthews Lagoon, Wairio, JK Donald Reserve and Barton's Lagoon as the projects priority wetlands. In these wetlands the priority will be restoration of the biodiversity followed by water quality improvements. The Land and Environment Plans on surrounding farmland will focus on water quality as the prime objective followed by biodiversity restoration.

## **4. Environment Management**

### **4.1 Biodiversity**

On 23 April 2012 the Biodiversity Monitoring team became part of the Environmental Monitoring and Investigations department.

Existing monitoring programmes will continue to be supported with effectively "business as usual" occurring for the remainder of this financial year. Work is currently being done on revising the State of the Environment programme with this becoming an increasing focus in the next financial year.

## **5. Development**

### **5.1 Forestry**

The Council has now been successful in obtaining all carbon credits due to it. It has received 98,003 carbon units as the first tranche of allocations for the pre 1990 forests. Although a further 157,657 units are due next year, these are now in doubt as Government is at present reviewing the Emissions Trading Scheme. To allow substitution it is considering withdrawing or reducing the credits awarded. Greater Wellington has made a submission against any reduction where there is no substitution.

Greater Wellington has also received 213,029 units representing the carbon sequestered in our post 1989 forests. While Greater Wellington is free to sell the pre 1990 credits these later ones will need to be surrendered when the post 1989 forests are harvested. With current carbon unit sales around the mid \$6-\$7 per unit it is unlikely that Greater Wellington could later buy back, at this or lesser values, so for the time being we are holding all credits.

## 6. Recommendations

*That the Committee*

1. **Receives** the report.
2. **Notes** the content of the report.

Report prepared by:



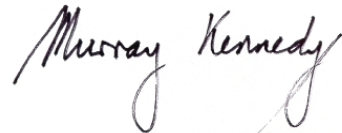
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