



greater WELLINGTON
REGIONAL COUNCIL
Te Pane Matua Taiao

Biodiversity Department Operational Plan

2012-2015

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Executive Summary

The Greater Wellington Regional Council has responsibilities to manage biodiversity under the Resource Management Act 1991. Various council programmes that contribute to the management of biodiversity have recently been consolidated into the Biodiversity department. The department is largely operational and is guided by the 2011 Greater Wellington Biodiversity Strategy.

This Operational Plan explains the department's functions, structure, and also sets out the nature and scope of activities. With a total budget of nearly \$3.8 million, the Department's three complementary teams work on different aspects of biodiversity management:

- The Strategy & Systems team works on departmental planning and reporting as well as providing policy advice to a range of audiences and undertaking targeted research.
- The Biodiversity Implementation team coordinates management of areas with high biodiversity values and provides technical advice on biodiversity.
- The Community Projects team directly engages with communities to help protect priority areas. It also undertakes activities to foster an understanding of the importance of biodiversity and restoration in the region.

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1 Introduction

The term 'biodiversity' describes the variety of all living things on land, water and out at sea. Biodiversity is an important aspect of the environment. It is crucial for the functioning of ecosystems that provide us with products and services without which we could not live. Indigenous biodiversity continues to decline nationally, including within the Wellington region. This is because many native plants and animals are preyed on or outcompeted by introduced pests. In addition ecosystems and habitats are lost or degraded through human resource use and development.

Regional councils have the responsibility to maintain and enhance indigenous biodiversity, as well as to protect significant vegetation and habitats of threatened species, under the Resource Management Act 1991. The Greater Wellington Regional Council (Greater Wellington) has various programmes in place to manage biodiversity.

Since 2011, the Biodiversity department (the department) has consolidated efforts made across Greater Wellington aimed to achieve positive outcomes for biodiversity. However, many other departments also contribute to the work on regional biodiversity. Departments working towards protection and improved policy include Biosecurity, Land Management, Environmental Monitoring and Investigations, Parks, Environmental Regulation, and Environmental Policy.

This document is the Operational Plan for the Biodiversity department. It explains the department's structure, functions and activities. It describes the nature and scope of the programmes and projects the department intends to undertake over the next three financial years (2012/13 – 2015/16). The indicative budget associated with each team is also provided. Work programmes are designed to be in line with the wider responsibilities and mandate of Greater Wellington and the direction of the Greater Wellington Biodiversity Strategy 2011-2021 (see textbox below) and the Long Term Plan.

The three-year Operational Plan will be updated on an annual basis to include the budget and project information for each upcoming financial year.

The Greater Wellington Biodiversity Strategy 2011-2021

Activities to manage biodiversity across the organisation are guided by the Greater Wellington Biodiversity Strategy (the Strategy). It was adopted by Council in June 2011. The Strategy outlines the legislative, policy and scientific context, and mandates within which Greater Wellington operates.

The Strategy provides a framework to guide Greater Wellington's activities to manage indigenous biodiversity in the Wellington region for the 10-years ending 2021. It sets three goals for the organisation:

- Greater Wellington demonstrates leadership in biodiversity management
- High value biodiversity areas are protected
- Regional ecosystem functions are maintained and restored

Key actions are identified to achieve these goals. The Biodiversity department is responsible for implementing most of the key actions set out in the Strategy, but not all. The implementation of the Strategy across Greater Wellington's departments will be assessed by the Biodiversity Department and reported to the Executive Leadership Team annually.

2 The Biodiversity department

This section briefly describes the new Biodiversity department’s function and structure of three complementary teams and outlines each team’s core functions in relation to the Strategy goals. It presents the work programme and budget for the department. Sections four, five and six provide more detail on each team’s work programmes and their intended outcomes.

2.1 The department’s function and structure

The Biodiversity department was formed in 2010, a process that amalgamated programmes from across the Council. The new structure of the department aims to achieve positive biodiversity outcomes through increased focus on:

- Co-ordinating management of high value biodiversity areas
- Providing input into policy and planning processes
- Increasing community engagement in priority areas
- Strategic stakeholder engagement

The department is largely operational with the bulk of its allocated budget being spent on managing the threats to indigenous biodiversity in areas with high biodiversity value. These threats include introduced pest plants and animals, grazing stock, and pressures from land use.

The department consists of three teams. Each team is responsible for delivering projects as part of wider work programmes. The table below describes each team’s core functions and relates these to the 2011 Greater Wellington Biodiversity Strategy goals (Table 1).

Table 1. Biodiversity department’s teams and their core functions

Biodiversity department: Teams and core functions			
Biodiversity Strategy Goals	Strategy and Systems	Biodiversity Implementation	Community Projects
Greater Wellington demonstrates leadership in biodiversity management	Develop and improve department systems and collaborative relationships	Demonstrate best practice biodiversity management and provide site-specific technical advice	Engage and inform target audiences about key biodiversity messages
High value biodiversity areas are protected	Advocate for recognition of biodiversity in statutory processes and documents	Coordinate management of areas with high biodiversity value	Engage communities in the protection of priority sites
Regional ecosystem functions are maintained and restored	Provide statutory planning and policy advice	Work towards restoring ecological connections across the landscape	Provide the community with advice and support on ecological restoration

2.2 Biodiversity department's work programme and budget

The department's teams direct their efforts through work programmes. The objectives of each work programme are delivered through discrete projects defined by approved project plans. The number of individual projects within each work programme is expected to vary depending on the nature of the work and the priorities set each year.

The total budget for the Biodiversity department is \$3,788,000. This figure is assumed to stay the same for the next three years. Indicative budget figures, relationship with the Strategy and expected project outcomes are provided for each work programme in the following sections. The table below summaries the teams' work programmes and budget figures (see Table 2.).

Several programmes work across ecosystem types and habitats (land-based, freshwater, estuarine, coastal and marine), while others focus on priority areas based on their high biodiversity values.

The department is new and not all intended work programmes sufficiently developed to present in this Operational Plan. For example, Greater Wellington has not previously had programmes specifically aimed at biodiversity found in freshwater and marine ecosystems and associated projects are still in the planning stages. The department also aims to integrate the perspectives and concerns of local iwi across work programmes. New programmes and projects will be incorporated into future Operational Plans as part of the ongoing annual review process.

Table 2. Summary of the Biodiversity department's work programmes and budget for financial years 2012/13-2014/15.

Team	Work programmes	2012/13 Operating budget	2013/14 Operating budget	2014/15 Operating budget
Strategy and Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Department planning and reporting ▪ Policy advice and research 	\$ 264,000	\$ 264,000	\$ 264,000
Biodiversity Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High value biodiversity areas ▪ Site specific biodiversity advice 	\$ 2,700,000	\$ 2,700,000	\$ 2,700,000
Community Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Priority areas for community engagement ▪ Region-wide ecological restoration support ▪ Key biodiversity messages 	\$ 824,000	\$ 824,000	\$ 824,000
Total		\$3,788,000	\$3,788,000	\$3,788,000

3 Work programme: Strategy & Systems team

The Strategy and Systems team carries out department planning and reporting. It also provides policy and planning advice to other departments and external stakeholders on biodiversity matters. In addition, the team researches wider biodiversity issues with the aim to continually improve biodiversity management and protection.

These activities are carried out under the umbrella of two work programmes:

- Department planning and reporting
- Policy advice and research

3.1 Department planning and reporting

Part of this programme is to develop and maintain reporting systems for the department. The team prepare reports to inform the organisation on the department's progress on implementing this Operational Plan and the Greater Wellington Biodiversity Strategy. The reporting systems will be consistent with Greater Wellington's Long Term Plan and corporate planning documents, as well as operational requirements.

Developing systems that demonstrate progress towards achieving the goals of the Greater Wellington Biodiversity Strategy will be a priority for the team in the 2012/13 financial year.

The department wants to be informed and connected with external partners. The team will actively seek to build relationships with iwi, other councils, central government, the research sector, and non-governmental organisations.

Table 3. Work programme 4.1: Department planning and reporting

Projects	Outputs 2012-2015	Long-term Outcome
Develop and maintain department reporting framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information needs determined and reporting framework developed ▪ Key Performance Indicators developed and reported on 	The Biodiversity department demonstrates efficient processes' systems, and collaboration
Prepare accountability reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ annually updates of Operational Plan ▪ Department's annual reports prepared ▪ Preparation of the department's contribution to GW-wide reports 	
Work with other agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased inter-agency engagements ▪ Formalised partnership programmes that have biodiversity benefits 	
Develop and maintain GW-wide systems and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased efficiency and interaction between GW teams for procedural issues relating to biodiversity by developing Standard Operating Procedures 	

3.2 Policy advice and research

The team acts as the primary point of contact for biodiversity policy advice and biodiversity issues beyond specific high value sites or areas. The team will provide input into statutory and non-statutory processes relating to biodiversity. “Position papers” on key biodiversity issues (e.g. cumulative impacts and ecosystem services) to inform the department and the wider organisation will be prepared.

To demonstrate Greater Wellington’s leadership role in biodiversity management, efforts will be made to achieve best practice for biodiversity management across our activities. In consultation with other departments, the team will develop methods as required to improve Biodiversity outcomes as part of council-wide programmes.

Table 4. Work programme 4.2: Policy advice and research

Projects	Outputs 2012-2015	Long-term Outcome
Provide statutory planning and policy advice	Timely advice of high quality provided for processes including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Long Term Plans ▪ Regional Policy Statement ▪ Regional Plan ▪ District Plans 	Statutory planning and policy documents recognise and protect biodiversity values
Provide advice on resource consent applications and processes	Timely advice of high quality provided for consent processes including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Department reviews of individual consents ▪ Preparation and delivery of hearing evidence 	Statutory processes recognise and protect biodiversity values
Undertake research into key regional biodiversity issues	“Position Papers” are prepared on key issues (e.g. ecosystem services, cumulative effects, offsetting) that have implications for GW management processes and programmes	GW is recognised as a leader in Biodiversity management
Develop best-practice procedures	Improvements have been made to GW procedures that impact on biodiversity by working with other departments	GW is recognised as a leader in Biodiversity management
Integration of iwi perspectives and concerns across work programmes	In regards to biodiversity sites of cultural significance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessment of sites undertaken ▪ Process to incorporate priority sites into GW activities identified ▪ Management strategies for these sites developed 	Biodiversity issues of significance to Iwi are recognised and addressed in GW projects and plans

4 Work Programme: Biodiversity Implementation team

The purpose of the Implementation team is to coordinate the management of high value biodiversity areas across the region. Management activities will focus on maintaining and restoring the biodiversity values on sites within such areas. Plant and animal pest control, legal protection, and the exclusion of stock are key management tools that require ongoing investment of Council resources.

The Implementation team's other key role is to provide high quality technical site-specific biodiversity advice.

The team's projects are carried out under the umbrella of two work programmes:

- Managing areas with high biodiversity value
- Site-specific biodiversity advice

4.1 High value biodiversity areas

Within this programme the team will assess and review high value biodiversity areas to identify coherent management approaches. This will be undertaken in collaboration with landowners and other organisations to optimise biodiversity outcomes for the region. The team will then coordinate the management of these areas.

Biodiversity Area Management Plans (BAMP's) will be prepared for high value areas, where Greater Wellington operational resources are to be committed. Land based, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems and habitats are included within the scope of the programme.

Four projects are planned within this programme. The project that has the largest amount of resources allocated is "Key Native Ecosystems". This project focuses on managing areas of highest biodiversity value, predominately through coordinating ongoing pest control for sites that are already fenced and legally protected.

The project "Threatened Species Habitat" focuses specifically on preventing further species decline or extinction from the region. "Ecological Connections" will address the challenge of linking forest and freshwater ecosystems across the region. The project will initially focus on restoring freshwater fish passage and movement of the keystone forest birds (pollinators and seed dispersers).

The project on the "Identification of high biodiversity value areas in marine and freshwater ecosystems" will be set up within the timeframe of this Operational Plan, which will be described in more detail in the next Operational Plan (2013-16).

Table 5. Work programme 4.1: High value biodiversity sites

Projects	Outputs 2012-2015	Long-term Outcome
Key Native Ecosystems (KNEs)	<p>Management plans for high priority areas implemented</p> <p>Ongoing facilitation of legal protection for high priority sites</p> <p>Collaboration with other agencies to allocate resources and funding</p>	High biodiversity value sites are protected and restored
Threatened Species Habitat	Identify and prioritise threatened species habitats and integrate these into annual work plans	No further decline or extinction of threatened native species in the region
Ecological Connections	<p>Identify and implement priority critical source sites and ecological linkage areas</p> <p>Identify and remove priority barriers for fish passage</p>	Ecological connections are re-established
Identification of high biodiversity value areas in marine and freshwater ecosystems	<p>Identify high value areas within freshwater and marine ecosystems</p> <p>Prioritise the areas and include methods to manage the threats</p>	Marine and freshwater areas of high biodiversity value are actively managed

4.2 Site specific biodiversity advice

This programme’s purpose is to provide technical advice of high quality to land owners and managers that is site-specific and practical.

Table 6. Work programme 4.2: Site specific biodiversity advice and support

Projects	Outputs 2012-2015	Long-term Outcome
Provide site specific biodiversity advice	Practical site-specific advice is provided on topics including: Pests management, legal protection, fencing, restoration, and monitoring	Landowners and land managers are informed about how they can protect biodiversity on their land
Provide technical advice on GW’s non-statutory plans	Site-specific biodiversity advice is provided to the Land Management, Flood Protection, and Parks Departments to inform non-statutory plans (E.g. Farm Plans, Sustainable Land Use Plans, and Flood Management Plans)	Biodiversity values are recognised within plans prepared by GW

5 Work Programme: Community Projects team

The purpose of the Community Projects team is to actively engage the local community in priority biodiversity areas, support ecological restoration across the region, and deliver key biodiversity messages to target audiences.

Activities are directed through three separate work programmes:

- Priority areas for community engagement
- Region-wide ecological restoration support
- Key biodiversity messages to the regional community

5.1 Community engagement around priority sites

Projects under this programme aim to actively engage the local community to improve understanding of biodiversity issues and opportunities for priority areas. Projects will be designed and implemented that encourage community support for better site management, and provide opportunities for community members to assist with the ecological restoration of high value biodiversity areas.

Table 7. Work programme 5.1: Priority areas for community engagement

Projects	Outputs 2012-15	Long-term Outcome
Wairarapa Moana	Implementation of projects associated with the programme plan Annual updates of the programme plan Projects identified in the programme plan have commenced	Communities are aware of the biodiversity values of priority areas and are actively engaged in the protection and restoration of these
Porirua Harbour and Catchment	Implementation of projects associated with the programme plan Annual updates of the programme plan Projects identified in the programme plan have commenced	

5.2 Region-wide ecological restoration support

The team will support community groups undertaking ecological restoration across the region by providing best practise information, training opportunities, advice, and recognising outstanding efforts.

Table 8. Work programme 5.2: Region-wide ecological restoration support

Projects	Outputs 2012-15	Long-term Outcome
Ecological restoration training	Ecological restoration training made available to the community Restoration focused community events delivered.	The community receives advice and support for ecological restoration projects
Web based ecological restoration information	Best practise ecological restoration advice is accessible to community groups Nature Space portal updated and relevant	
Support community effort	The success of community restoration efforts is celebrated, e.g. Encore awards Restoration groups acknowledged in the Encore awards	

5.3 Key biodiversity messages to the regional community

Ensuring that the public has access to relevant and accurate regional biodiversity information is a critical and ongoing task for the department. This programme lead by the Community Projects team will focus on ensuring that this occurs.

Table 9. Work programme 5.3: Key biodiversity messages to the regional community

Projects	Outputs 2012-15	Long-term Outcome
Develop and deliver key messages	Key messages are developed and used consistently across the organisation Biodiversity information on the GW website is easily accessible and current	People in the Greater Wellington region are informed about the value of biodiversity and the steps they can take to conserve and use it sustainably
Responding to biodiversity enquiries	A system to respond to and monitor biodiversity enquiries is developed and in use Biodiversity enquires are monitored and reported	
Biodiversity training for key audiences	A system of biodiversity training that is relevant to the needs of key audiences is created A GW staff biodiversity training programme is implemented	