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Report to the Utility Services Committee
from the Landcare and Utility Services Divisions

Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area Access Plan Review

1. Purpose

To report back, as required (refer Report 00.665), on Phase 1 of the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area Access Plan ("the Access Plan"), and to seek approval to progress Phase 2 of the Access Plan, with variations, from 1 July 2001 through to 30 June 2002.

2. Background

In September 2000, the Council approved a programme for implementing managed public access to the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area.

The Access Plan implements managed access in three phases, through to July 2003. Progress on access is to be reviewed annually by the Landcare and Utility Services Divisions and reported to the Utility Services Committee.

Although the first review is not required until 30 June 2001, officers feel it is appropriate to do this now so that arrangements for Phase 2 (scheduled to commence in July) can be made as soon as possible. Many groups interested in the guided walks plan their event calendars six months in advance and are keen to know the Council's plans for access. Furthermore, by undertaking the review now, it will allow Council staff more time to prepare for Phase 2, particularly in organising rosters for staff guiding groups in the Catchment.

3. Review of Phase 1

Seven groups have been booked (in accordance with the Access Plan), to take guided walks in the Wainuiomata Catchment during Phase 1. Feedback has been very positive. They were particularly impressed with the rangers' interpretation and commented on how they appreciated the opportunity to experience the unique environment in the Catchment and to learn more about Wellington's water supply.

A second Roar Hunt (involving a public ballot) was held. The 2001 Roar Hunt finished on 29 April, with a tally of 10 deer, 10 pigs and 11 goats, (a total of 31 animals). This is similar to the initial operation in 2000 (12 deer, 11 pigs, 11 goats – total 34). Earlier this year, Prohunt killed 214 goats. The four-week long Roar Hunt has once again been very successful as a public relations exercise, with many recreational hunters commenting on how they enjoyed the experience and appreciated the opportunity to enter the Area. The impressive podocarp bush appears to have been as much of a drawcard as the hunting itself.

One study programme was approved in accordance with the Access Plan. Mary MacIntyre, a lecturer from Victoria University has recently surveyed vegetation in the Orongorongo wetland, with a group of university students. This research is valuable as a baseline study against which changes over time can be determined. Mary has also been given approval to assess snail and insect species later in the year.

4. **The Current Access Plan**

The Access Plan as drafted, provides for the following programme during Phase 2:

- The possible introduction of “tripleaders”¹;
- An increase in visitor numbers from 20 to 40 per trip-day;
- Access into the Orongorongo Catchment as well as the Wainuiomata Catchment;
- No change to the number of trip-days (i.e. an average of one trip-day per month);
- Groups continuing to be from *bona fide* clubs/organisations;
- No change to the guide-to-visitor ratio of 1:10;
- Possible additions to scientific, heritage and cultural research on application; and
- Another “Roar Hunt”.

5. **Recommendations for Phase 2**

Experience from Phase 1 suggests that Phase 2 can be implemented, subject to certain variations. Phase 1 was a useful trial and the knowledge gained during that phase will benefit and enhance future phases of the Plan. As a result, officers recommend that the following aspects of Phase 2 occur as planned:

- An increase in visitor numbers from 20 to 40 per trip-day;
- No change to the number of trip-days (i.e. an average of one trip-day per month);
- No change to the guide-to-visitor ratio of 1:10;
- Possible additions to scientific, heritage and cultural research on application; and
- Another “Roar Hunt”.

¹ “Tripleaders” is the term used to describe members of the public trained to be guides in the Water Collection Area (similar to those currently at Otari and the Karori Sanctuary).

However, officers would like access to be progressed at a slightly slower rate than originally anticipated, in some areas. While the implementation of Phase 1 was a success overall, the operation of the walking tours is still evolving. Ranger staff are continuing to assess and familiarise themselves with the visitors' needs and issues arising with groups visiting the Catchment.

Furthermore, given the dry weather during the summer months, the operation of the Access Plan has not yet been tested during bad weather. To date no water quality problems have arisen from the managed public visits. However, it would be preferable from an operational point of view, to assess results of water quality tests, following visits in a range of weather conditions, before access to the Water Collection Area is increased significantly, particularly into another Catchment.

Currently access is permitted into the Wainuiomata Catchment but not into the Orongorongo Catchment. The Orongorongo Catchment therefore, currently provides a control to assess if any impacts on water quality can be related to public access. It is intended to maintain the monitoring programme on the Wainuiomata and Orongorongo catchments. It will be possible to maintain the Orongorongo as the control to measure any effects in the Wainuiomata catchment against.

The aspects of Phase 2 that officers consider should be slowed are:

- The possible introduction of “tripleaders”; and
- Accessing the Orongorongo Catchment.

Officers would also like to see the opportunity given to individuals (as opposed to groups from *bona fide* clubs/organisations) to ballot for a place on a tour, on one trip-day (reserved for that purpose) during Phase 2. The Access Plan, as drafted, provides for consideration of this matter during Phase 3.

These matters are addressed in more detail below.

5.1 Access to the Orongorongo Catchment

Given that the Catchment tours are still in their infancy and are still evolving, along with the water testing issues outlined above, officers would prefer to continue with the walking tours in the Wainuiomata Catchment until July 2002. Postponing entry into the Orongorongo Catchment until Phase 3 would also give staff time to plan for and address security issues associated with visitors entering and exiting that Catchment. The Orongorongo Catchment has a high number of potential entry and exit points. Its size, coupled with limited road access, means careful planning is required to avoid and mitigate security breaches.

As noted, we do not recommend increasing the number of trip-days (i.e. there would still be an average of one trip-day per month) or changing the guide-to-visitor ratio of 1:10. Given that the tours in the Wainuiomata Catchment are on average 3 hours long – either two tours could be run in one day (particularly in the summer months), or Parks and Forests would ensure that additional Parks and Forests rangers or other Council staff are on hand to deal with the extra groups. (This approach would enable us to raise the number of visitors while continuing to minimise the risk to the water supply and the environment.)

5.2 “Tripleaders”

Before “tripleaders” can be introduced a sound training programme needs to be developed. Although some preparatory work and investigation has been undertaken based on the Otari and the Karori Sanctuary models, Parks and Forests does not yet have a programme advanced enough to implement. Developing a robust training programme is complex. We propose continuing work on the programme through the winter months and commencing training for “tripleaders” in January 2002. The full introduction of “tripleaders” could be considered as part of the review for Phase 3. Although the Access Plan (as drafted) provides for rangers to be substituted by “tripleaders”, it may be more appropriate, at least in the initial stages, to have one ranger continue to accompany each group.

5.3 Groups From *bona fide* Clubs/Organisations and Individuals

Officers have received a number of enquiries since the Access Plan was approved from individuals who are not affiliated to a club but would like the opportunity to visit the Catchment. The Access Plan as drafted states that it may be possible to allow individual members of the public to ballot for places on tours reserved for that purpose, during Phase 3. Officers propose that this be considered earlier than Phase 3. In order to provide opportunities for people who don’t belong to clubs to experience the unique environment found in the Catchment, officers propose that one trip-day during Phase 2 be reserved for individuals rather than clubs. We envisage that as with “club-days”, the maximum number of people visiting the Catchment on that day would be 40. The walkers would still be limited to the Wainuiomata Catchment and guided by rangers. However, Parks and Forests would undertake to provide additional ranger staff on that day so that a variety of walks (slow, medium, fast pace; focus on botany, history, etc) could be run to cater for the different needs (i.e. fitness levels) and interests of the individuals. Individuals could apply to enter a ballot for places on this tour (similar to that run for the clubs).

5.4 Other Access Issues

The Council has been approached by a group interested in the possibility of securing access for anglers wishing to fish for trout in the headwaters of the Wainuiomata River within the Water Collection Area. The people involved were interested to know whether the Access Plan addresses the issue of access for fishing opportunities in the upper part of the Wainuiomata Catchment. The Access Plan does not specifically mention fishing. However, it is implicit through the document that by entering and/or placing anything in the water, people would be acting in a way contrary to the intent of and requirements in the Access Plan. Access for fishing purposes is not supported. We do not recommend altering the Plan to accommodate access for fishing.

The Access Plan as drafted provides for Phase 2 to be reviewed on 30 June 2002. Officers consider that reviewing “by” 30 June 2002 would be more practical. We do not envisage any other variations to Phase 2 of the Access Plan as drafted.

6. Medical Officer of Health

The Regional Council has a policy of achieving an “A” grading for water treatment plants, where it is practical to do so (refer Report 00.412). Officers do not consider that progressing access in Phase 2 as proposed, will impact on this objective. The

definition of a ‘protected catchment’ is outlined in the *Guidelines for Drinking Water Management in New Zealand*:

‘A catchment which has major points of access fenced and is controlled so that there is only strictly controlled human access and limited feral animals.’

The Medical Officer of Health² has specified a preference for the catchment to meet the definition of “protected” and for the area to be managed and controlled in such a way as to protect the native forest against adverse effects, which would impact on the overall water quality from the catchment.

7. **Resourcing**

Funding for the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area ranger service is currently split between the Water Levy (70 percent) and General Rates (30 percent).

Although additional ranger staff will be required if the number of visitors is increased, it is proposed to fund the proposed access during Phase 2, within the existing rates budget. (This budget is for the ranger hours spent on access issues in addition to administration and functions associated with the Wainuiomata Waterworks Recreation Area. The Recreation Area continues to be popular, particularly for swimming and picnics during the summer months.) However, if demands on ranger time to deal with access issues increase significantly during *Phase 3*, it may become necessary to review the level of funding.

8. **Charging**

This issue is more appropriate for consideration at the Policy and Finance Committee meeting. However, it has been included for the sake of completeness. To date the guided walking tours have been provided free of charge by the Council. Officers recommend that the tours continue to be free of charge. We note that the requirement on members of the public to have a guide accompany them in the Catchment is to protect water quality, rather than adding benefit to visitor experience. Members of the public are not required to have a guide accompany them when they are walking on other Council land.

Furthermore, interpretation is part of the Landcare rangers’ jobs. The recently approved *Policy for Recreation and Tourism in Wellington Regional Council Parks and Forests* provides for the first 2 hours of ranger time (for interpretation) to be free for educational and special interest groups visiting the parks and forests. Many of those who have visited the Wainuiomata Catchment during Phase 1 (e.g. two branches of Forest and Bird, the Wellington Botanical Society, the Wellington Branch of the New Zealand Farm Forestry Association) and continue to show interest in visiting the Catchment, are educational or special interest groups. In addition, visitors are often able to offer something to the Council in return for their access. For example, the botanical group from the Tararua Tramping Club was able to provide the Council with botanical information including two new plants discovered in the Catchment on their visit and it may not be appropriate to charge in such cases. Charging would change the nature of the relationship between these groups and the Council.

² Letter of 13 June 2000 from Dr Stephen Palmer, Medical Officer of Health to Murray Kennedy, WRC Water Group

There would be administrative costs associated with introducing a fee structure, in a situation where the amount of revenue generated is not likely to be high. As noted above, the cost of allowing the additional visitors proposed will be covered by the existing rates funding.

On balance, we consider that the walking tours in the Water Collection Area should remain free of charge at this stage.

9. **The Next Step**

Should the Council approve the proposal for Phase 2, Landcare officers will begin implementation immediately. This will involve planning the “trip-days” (in conjunction with the Water Group to ensure there are no conflicts with water supply activities) and advertising for visitors. Officers intend to advertise widely for visitors during Phase 2. A ballot will be held to allocate the tours to groups.

Attachment 1 outlines the initiatives for Phases 2 and 3 in more detail.

Following recent publicity in *Elements*, a number of people have already shown interest in visiting the Area. These people (representing a variety of clubs/organisations) will be sent application forms once arrangements for Phase 2 have been approved.

10. **Communication**

Subject to the Council’s agreement, Parks and Forests officers, in conjunction with the Water Group and Corporate Communications, will prepare an advertisement to publicise the scheduled tours from 1 July 2001 through to 30 June 2002 and how to apply to take a tour. We will utilise newspapers and the Council’s web site to advertise the visits.

11. **Recommendations**

That the Utility Services Committee recommends to the Policy and Finance Committee that the Council:

- (1) *Note the success of Phase 1 of the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area Access Plan.*
- (2) *Agree to Phase 2 of the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area Access Plan progressing as drafted with the following variations:*
 - (i) *Access is to be limited to the Wainuiomata Catchment during Phase 2;*
 - (ii) *Access to the Orongorongo Catchment is to be considered for introduction during Phase 3;*

- (ii) *Training of “tripleaders” on site will commence in January 2002 (following the completion by staff of the “tripleader” training programme) and the “tripleader” programme will be considered for full implementation during Phase 3;*
- (iv) *One trip-day will be reserved specifically for individual members of the public to tour the Wainuiomata Catchment. Individuals will be able to apply to enter a ballot for places on this tour. All conditions applying to groups from clubs and other bona fide organisations visiting the Catchment will apply.*
- (3) *Endorse that the policy to provide the guided walking tours free of charge remain unchanged.*
- (4) *Agree that Phase 2 of the Access Plan will be reviewed by 30 June 2002.*
- (5) *Note that implementation of Phase 2 will commence immediately following approval by Council.*

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