



caring about you & your environment

Report 01.36

8 February 2001

File: ENV 12/7/3

[Report 2001.Env0136.TP:mm]

Report to Environment Committee
from Tim Porteous, Biodiversity Co-ordinator

Implementation of the Ecosystems and Biodiversity Programme

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of progress in implementing the ecosystem and biodiversity programme approved as part of the Council's Long Term Financial Strategy and provide an update on recent government initiatives and announcements.

2. Background

Additional funding intended to enhance the Region's ecosystems and biodiversity was approved by Council last year. The funds were intended to support a range of initiatives focusing on the following specific ecosystem types:

- lowland forest;
- dunelands;
- wetlands;
- estuaries;
- rivers and their margins; and
- the marine environment.

This year these budgets are modest, recognising that initially effort will be concentrated on finalising the scope and detailed objectives of the additional work and, in some cases, the way in which it should be undertaken.

3. One Programme

The ecosystems on this list were chosen so as to enable the Council to more completely meet the Ecosystem Objectives of the Regional Policy Statement (RPS) and to help reverse the tide of biodiversity decline. We have been developing our approach to managing these ecosystems on the basis that there will be one "ecosystems and biodiversity programme" but with a number of parts delivered by a number of

Departments. These initiatives constitute a programme of considerable importance, not only to the environment, but also to the Council's image and relationship with its customers. There is a need to ensure it is both devised and implemented in a co-ordinated and integrated manner.

To this end, we have pursued a process of including a wide range of staff in the development of the individual parts of the programme and overlaid this with a cross-divisional management structure to make collective decisions about its final shape and implementation. The Biodiversity Co-ordinating Committee comprises Ian Gunn, Wayne O'Donnell, Susan Edwards, Geoff Skene and Tim Porteous (Biodiversity Co-ordinator).

A two-day workshop was held in October for all relevant staff. This provided an opportunity to explore where the programme should go, consider the range of options, discuss service delivery issues and debate the most effective way of ensuring co-ordination. Staff expressed a considerable degree of enthusiasm for the positive nature of the new programmes and a desire to make progress in giving effect to the RPS's ecosystem objectives.

A staff group has been given the task of prioritising where the biodiversity funds should be spent, i.e., deciding which areas of bush, wetland, and so on, would be entitled to Council services. This applies particularly to the significant parcel of funding available for work in "key native ecosystems (KNE)". Current ecological theory and practice is being employed to devise a rationale for the allocation of this expenditure.

One of the more significant outcomes of this group's deliberations has been the recognition that the Council's own estate contains a significant proportion of the Region's valuable biodiversity. This has stimulated discussion about the merits of investigating the "mainland island" concept for some of our lands. Mainland islands are specific geographic areas in which intensive ecological management is undertaken to improve biodiversity. At the same time, there are other reasons, both ecological and policy based, for maintaining a wide distribution of healthy ecosystems across the Region. These concepts will be developed further and brought before Councillors for their consideration at a workshop in due course.

4. Update on Progress

Whilst the broad outline of the programme is being sorted out, good progress is being made with a number of its component parts, plus those aspects which can be implemented independently of any overall prioritisation and management issues.

4.1 Lowland Bush

Biodiversity and ecosystem support services for lowland bush fall into two categories, management and protection. Funding for the former constitutes by far the largest funding "parcel" set aside through the LTFS, principally for pest plant and animal management. It is how to allocate this expenditure, what level of service to offer, how to co-ordinate that service delivery so that landowners enjoy a "one stop shop", and how to market the Council's achievements, that is being worked through now.

Funding for the latter – the protection of indigenous forests - is much smaller. It supports landowners seeking to permanently protect areas of biodiversity on their land by way of a perpetual covenant with the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust (QEII). The programme has a budget of \$15,000 for this year. This sum was fully allocated to the following projects by November 2000:

Name	Location	Covenant Type	Area	Financial Allocation
Joblin/Paul	Bideford	Riparian Forest	30 ha	\$7,626.00
Hirschberg	Otaki Gorge	Lowland Forest Remnant	3 ha	\$902.00
Le Grove	South of Riversdale	Forest remnants	6 ha	\$1,907.00
Wellington Natural Heritage Trust	Long Gully, Wellington	Lowland/Semi-coastal hardwood forest	60.5 ha	\$4,355.50
Waipawa Farms Ltd	Tuturumuri, Martinborough	Lowland forest	3.5 ha	\$2,328.50
Petrie Holdings	Bideford	Lowland forest	2 ha	\$2,169.00

It is extremely pleasing to be able to report this level of up-take and that the Council has been able to assist the protection of over 100 hectares of valuable native vegetation so rapidly. In order to be in a position to respond positively to further landowner initiatives before 30 June 2001, a further \$15,000 is being sought by means of the six-month budget review process.

This money provides “bottom up” support for biodiversity protection, in that it assists initiatives that come from landowners themselves. Council initiated actions, such as those that might fall within an expanded KNE programme, have a more “top down” character through their being *directed* by the Council at prioritised areas. Whether we have achieved an appropriate funding balance between these two types of funding is being looked at as part of the development of the overall programme.

4.2 **Dunelands**

The LTFS did not allocate a separate parcel of funds for dune management and restoration. Rather it said that pest management for dunes should be considered by the Biosecurity Department as part of its increased funding, community works should be supported through the care group programme, and the dunes we own should be managed more actively.

How we might allocate some of the ‘KNE’ funding to dunes and where to do so, is being explored as part of the prioritisation exercise. The Region’s high quality dunes and the species they support have been identified by the Department of Conservation but we are also looking at opportunities for managing them holistically with adjacent ecosystem types. In the meantime we are also supporting three communities to look after their dunes in Castlepoint, Riversdale, and Otaki (Waitohu river mouth) (see Report 01.40 in this Order Paper). The Landcare Division is working on the dunes at Queen Elizabeth Park.

4.3 **Wetlands**

Consultation with internal and external stakeholders on the content of a wetland recovery programme is almost complete. A report detailing the programme will be presented to the Environment Committee in May. The consultation indicates widespread support for providing management and restoration advice to wetland owners. To achieve this an advisory service for landowners is already being offered and has been taken up by a number of landowners and community groups. The advisory service has highlighted a real need to provide practical educational material on how to restore the types of wetlands that exist in the Wellington Region. It is intended to complete this educational material by June.

The LTFS determined that from 2002 the Regional Council would provide a \$50,000 fund for wetland restoration. Some debate exists on the best way to allocate these resources to achieve the Council's biodiversity goal. This is being worked through as part of the prioritisation work and will be considered by the Councillors at the workshop outlined in section 3 of this report.

4.4 **Rivers and Streams**

A large part of our management of rivers and streams as ecosystems can proceed relatively independently of the overall prioritisation exercise, and has been doing so. This programme is underway in line with the broad outline presented to Councillors in the LTFS.

A discussion paper is being prepared on how waterways should be managed on an ecological basis, what the ecological processes in rivers are, and how agencies and individuals can support those processes in their management. The paper's findings will be acted on over the next two years. We are reviewing our freshwater fishery information and will carry out fishery surveys this year in places identified as priorities for further work. Fish spawning habitat in the Region will be identified, with a survey of the western side of the Region this year and the Wairarapa next year. Some potential spawning sites will be restored in 2002-03.

Structures with adverse effects on the migration of freshwater fish in rivers will be identified and the opportunities for mitigation considered. Work has begun on this for the Wairarapa; the western side of the Region will be done next year. In 2002-03, mitigation actions will be carried out on selected structures. A study of the ecological condition of the water races in the Wairarapa will be carried out this year. We have very little information on these water courses and applications for resource consents must be made for many of them soon. Finally, the information generated by the projects in the programme will be used to inform the community about river ecosystems in interesting and relevant ways. We expect the information will be very useful for some of the environmental trails in the Learnwell programme.

4.5 **River Margins**

Many river margins are over used and poorly provided for. The LTFS determined that riparian areas would be dealt with through a riparian management programme, involving three or four trial areas and assistance to willing land owners. Whilst the rationale for the riparian programme is largely to improve water quality and in-stream

ecological conditions, there are also significant biodiversity implications and potential gains by using the right kind of vegetation when riparian buffers are created.

Three trial areas have been selected (on the Enaki Stream, the Karori Stream, and the Ngarara Stream) and work commenced. The latter two involve community groups. Of course, the care group programme is also supporting a number of community groups restoring riparian areas.

4.6 **The Marine Environment**

The LTFS was unspecific about how the Council should be involved in the management of the marine environment. Instead, it set aside an allocation of funds (\$50,000) for the purpose, in the first instance, of determining an appropriate role. This is being done in two ways. The first is to identify what the community wants in the way of marine management and/or protection. We believe it is essential to know how the public feels about the sea and its life before the Council adopts its role. The second is to increase the level of information we have about marine ecosystems which, at present, is scanty. We propose updating and adding to the Coastal Resources Inventory which will assist us to identify areas of pressure along the coast and priority areas for future work.

Armed with this information, we propose a “visioning workshop” for the Council before the end of the financial year. Councillors can then discuss where they want to go and the options available for future work (e.g., education, marine reserves, long term monitoring etc).

5. **Final Report of Ministerial Advisory Committee: *Biodiversity and Private Land***

While we have been working on these issues, there have also been things happening at a national level which will have a bearing on our programme. The final report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Biodiversity and Private land was released late last year. This is the follow-up report to *Bio-What?* on which the Council made a submission. In summary, the recommendations of relevance to the Council are as follows:

That the Government should:

- consider facilitating the establishment of a National Biodiversity Forum;
- **not** proceed with a national policy statement at this time;
- facilitate the establishment of a rural (including peri-urban) extension service aimed at the sustainable use and protection of natural resources (including biodiversity);
- establish a new fund aimed at encouraging and supporting regional councils to co-ordinate and fund contributions to on-going management of natural areas and the sustainability of ecosystems;
- support the wider use of farm planning to encourage more environmentally sympathetic land management;
- support the continued use of covenants as a protection mechanism;

- clarify the powers of regional councils to be actively involved in the maintenance of indigenous biodiversity on private land (through changes to the Resource Management Act 1991, Biosecurity Act 1993, and Local Government Act 1974.;
- continue to support an independent QEII Trust and resource it to a level that enables it to respond credibly to public demand;
- increase support to the Landcare Trust and consider using the Trust to provide an extension service in partnership with regional councils.

The report was strongly in favour of regional councils adopting a leadership role in “nature conservation” on private land and being a key deliverer of biodiversity “services”.

6. The Government’s Response

In late December 2000 the Government issued its response to the Ministerial Advisory Committee’s report by announcing a series of initiatives to address “biodiversity outside public conservation lands”. Funding for most of these programmes had already been announced at the time of the Budget. The announcement stressed the following:

- There will be a national policy statement under the Resource Management Act 1991 on biodiversity.
- Clarification of regional council powers to undertake biodiversity management.
- An increase in funding for the QEII Trust and other nature conservation funds.
- Funding for local authorities to assist landowners manage important areas (e.g., fencing, pest management, fencing).
- Funding for local authority pilot projects which provide local leadership in biodiversity management.
- Funding for the provision of advisory services for landowners.

This has significant implications for the Council. As one of the Councils which has acted quickly to build biodiversity into its *raison d’etre*, we are well placed to access each of the funds listed in the last three bullet points above. These funds will be available in the next financial year. Details about them are still being worked out. We will investigate this further and report back to the Committee on it.

The Council submitted against a national policy statement, saying that it thought it unnecessary and that the funds needed to make it happen would be better used getting on with the job. Now that there is to be one, some of our planning resources will need to be directed to participating in this process. It will be interesting to see whether this will eventually require changes to our regional plans and RPS, or whether the provisions we have already are “not inconsistent with” the national policy statement. The latter would seem the most likely scenario.

A copy of a statement issued by the Ministry for the Environment outlining the government’s initiatives is provided as an attachment.

7. **Conclusion**

Piece by piece we are changing the way we manage the environment in the Wellington Region so that the ecological processes that underpin the environment are supported and the special and valuable ecosystems that remain are protected. We are translating the RPS's generic ecosystem policies and broadly expressed methods into a set of projects and activities benefiting specific areas or habitats, and working to enhance rather than destroy biodiversity. This is not an easy adjustment – it will take time, but good progress is being made.

As we do this, there are issues that arise on which we believe Councillors should give us direction. It is intended to discuss these issues in a workshop in April or early May. It is then our intention to bring back to the Council for consideration an Ecosystems and Biodiversity Implementation Document which will describe exactly how the Council will give effect to the programme. This will give Councillors the opportunity to make decisions about its final 'shape'.

8. **Communication**

The potential to publicise the Council's biodiversity initiatives is considerable as the programmes proceed and "on the ground" activities start. Every opportunity will be taken to highlight the role the Council is playing in addressing the Region's biodiversity. At this point we consider there is scope to highlight the successes of the indigenous forest protection programme.

9. **Recommendation**

That the report be received and its contents noted.

Report prepared by:

Approved for submission:

TIM PORTEOUS
Biodiversity Co-ordinator

GEOFF SKENE
Manager, Environment Co-ordination

JANE BRADBURY
Divisional Manager, Environment

Attachments: 1