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Report 02.129

6 March 2002

File: ENV/5/1/13

[Report 2002.02.129.MD.sw]

Report to Environment Committee
from Melanie Dixon, Policy Advisor

The Wetland Recovery Programme: Progress and Future Direction

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of recent projects undertaken on wetlands in the Region.

2. Background

At the last Environment Committee meeting there was some discussion about wetlands in the Region. This report has been prepared to update the Committee about two current wetland projects:

- the wetland database project; and
- the wetland KNE programme.

These projects are part of a wider action plan that the Council is developing for wetlands in the Region. Approval will be sought for the Wetland Action Plan at the next Environment Committee meeting. The Action Plan will address:

- the actions Council intends to take over the next four years; and
- how the Council will support wider community involvement in wetland restoration.

The projects described in this update are part of the work that the Council has been doing while the Action Plan is being prepared. Staff from the Environment Division, Wairarapa Division, and Landcare Division (the Wetland Ecosystems Group) have identified these projects as priorities. The budget for these projects come from the additional funding that was allocated in 2000 to enhance the Region's biodiversity.

The call for a Wetland Action Plan comes from the Regional Policy Statement and the Regional Freshwater Plan. The level of wetland loss in the Region means that a pro-active approach is needed to reverse wetland decline.

3. **A New Database for Wetlands In The Region**

Measuring up: The State of the Environment for the Wellington Region, 1999 states that our information on wetlands in the Region is very poor. Without accurate information on the extent and condition of our wetlands it is hard to identify which wetlands should be given priority for restoration, and impossible to assess whether our policies to reverse wetland decline are working. Developing a database of all known wetlands is the first step in wetland prioritising and monitoring to find out if wetlands are getting better or worse with time, and why.

We are currently bringing together all available information on wetlands in the Region in order to create a concise database. At the moment the information on wetlands is scattered amongst several databases in different organisations. Much of the information is now out of date.

When all the information has been gathered in one place, it will be put in a single database. The database will record all known information on each wetland. Each wetland will also be mapped using GIS.

Next year (2002-03), we plan to visit wetlands to verify the information recorded in the database, and to check the accuracy of the maps. Wetlands on private land will not be visited without permission from the landowner. Contacting wetland owners will be used as an opportunity to promote the advice and assistance Council can provide wetland landowners.

4. **Looking After Regionally Important Wetlands Through The Key Native Ecosystem (KNE) Programme**

Key Native Ecosystems (KNE) are areas of native bush, dune vegetation, or wetlands that are vital to the long-term viability of the Region's unique plant and animal life. Under the KNE programme, the Council can help landowners with the management of these areas. The KNE programme is voluntary, and landowners must have a conservation covenant in place to receive Council assistance.

When the programme began in 1996, all KNE sites were native bush, and the chief management activity was possum control. This year (2001/2002) is the first year that other ecosystems have been included.

In October 2001, Council staff visited a number of potential wetland KNE sites. The following wetlands were identified as the most important wetlands on private land in the Region:

- Te Harakeke Swamp (Waikanae); and
- Lake Pounui (South Wairarapa)

4.1 **Te Harakeke, Waikanae**

Prior to clearance and drainage, the Kapiti Coast was a mosaic of swamp-forest, lakes and wetlands. Te Harakeke Wetland is a 120 hectare wetland behind the sand dunes just north of Waikanae. It is highly diverse and the largest wetland remnant on the Kapiti Coast.

Te Harakeke wetland has been altered. There are drains around its perimeter and in the early 1980's the northern part of the swamp was cut off from the rest of the wetland by the construction of a causeway and the Waikanae Sewerage Ponds (these are now being decommissioned). A hydrological study has been commissioned to understand the impact that these changes have had on the wetland's hydrology. This study will include recommendations on the long-term management of the wetland.

Once the hydrological study is finished, we plan to look further at the plants and animals in the wetlands, and map any weed infestations found.

In the long term, the KNE may be extended to include wetlands to the north of the current Waikanae sewerage ponds. This will depend on how the ponds are decommissioned. At this stage, Kapiti Coast District Council is planning to restore the sewerage ponds to wetland.

Budget (2001/2002): \$19,500

4.2 **Lake Pounui, South Wairarapa**

Lake Pounui is located to the south-west of Lake Wairarapa. The Lake and the adjacent swamps that reach up into forested valleys cover about 60 hectares. This area is important as few wetlands are in areas where the whole catchment is in native forest. The whole area is a 'biodiversity hot-spot' that supports an unusually high number of rare species.

Funding has been set aside to stock-proof the fencing and to survey the fish in the Lake. In lakes some exotic fish can adversely effect water quality by damaging aquatic plants that maintain good water quality.

Budget (2001/2002): \$10,000

5. **Communications**

Extensive publicity is planned for the Council Wetland Programme when the Action Plan is completed. There is no publicity planned prior to this time.

6. **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (1) *receives the report; and*
- (2) *notes the contents.*

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