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Report to Environment Committee
from Kirsten Forsyth, Policy Advisor

Riparian Management Strategy

1. Purpose

To seek the Committee's approval for the Strategy for Achieving Riparian Management in the Wellington Region. The Strategy is enclosed as a separate document.

2. Background

In 2000, the Council increased its investment in halting the decline in regional biodiversity because it recognised the need to halt the continued loss of remnant areas, species, and ecosystem complexity, and to work towards restoring the Region's ecological balance. Riparian management is part of this larger programme because it can help to restore natural river ecosystems and re-establish ecological links.

Riparian management is the management of stream margins, generally by retirement and planting, to achieve specific outcomes for the stream, or the riparian zone itself. The riparian zone has been defined as "any land that adjoins or directly influences, or is influenced by, a body of water".

The careful management of riparian areas can help keep stream environments in a reasonably natural condition, even if the stream runs through rural or urban land. It can bring about long term improvements to river environments by improving water quality and aquatic habitat, and increase ecological links through the wider landscape.

This strategy has been prepared by the River Ecosystem Group, comprising officers from across the Council. It is supported by the Landcare, Environment, and Wairarapa divisions. Over the last two years, Council staff have been working with landowners and volunteers in three riparian management pilot programmes. The purpose of the pilot programmes has been to test the ideas proposed in the strategy, demonstrate the benefits of riparian management to aquatic ecosystems and the wider environment, and to build our knowledge and experience with riparian management.

The three streams in the programme are the Enaki Stream, a tributary of the Mangaterere Stream near Carterton; the Kakariki Stream, a tributary of the Ngarara Stream in Waikanae; and the Karori Stream in Wellington City. Work on the pilot programmes will continue for at least one more year, and a fourth stream, the Papawai Stream near Greytown will be added to the programme next year.

3. **What Does the Strategy Propose?**

The Strategy outlines why the Council needs to act to promote the appropriate management of riparian areas on private land. The Strategy proposes that the Council should do this by providing information and financial assistance to landowners. The level of assistance proposed is to —

- Provide information and advice to landowners about the appropriate management of streams, and
- Provide funding to assist landowners to re-vegetate the riparian areas of high value streams with appropriate species.

Council support for streamside management of public land, including urban streams, will continue through the Take Care Programme.

The reason for the Strategy's approach is that the Council cannot financially support the rehabilitation of all of the thousands of kilometres of streams that would benefit from riparian management. Our analysis shows that the greatest benefits will result from full streamside retirement and restoration directed at streams with high ecological value. Unsurprisingly, achieving this high level of benefit incurs the highest cost. For all other streams, the Council will establish an advisory service that can deliver information and advice to landowners about stream retirement and suitable streamside vegetation.

The highest priority will be given to stretches of streams where streamside conditions are threatening otherwise healthy aquatic ecosystems. Restoration of these streams with appropriate species will not only achieve significant benefit to the stream's aquatic habitat, it will bolster biodiversity in the stream catchment and surrounding area.

4. **What Will it Cost?**

We have costed various forms of implementing riparian protection and concluded that meaningful results could be achieved with an annual budget of \$220,000, an increase of \$120,000 on existing funding. Details are on pages 14-15 of the proposed strategy.

The Council will be able to make its decisions about these costs as part of the upcoming long-term financial planning process.

5. **What Happens Next?**

Over the next year we will;

- continue with the pilot programmes;
- identify priority areas to target, taking into account the surrounding land uses and the potential positive effects that riparian management could achieve;
- develop information packages for landowners; and
- run field days at pilot streams to inform landowners of the benefits of riparian management.

6. **Communication**

When the Strategy is adopted and funding approved, we will promote riparian management in line with the steps outlined in the Strategy, for example, through field days, information packs, media promotion, and taking the idea directly to landowners.

7. **Recommendation**

That the Environment Committee:

- 1) ***adopt the Strategy for Achieving Riparian Management in the Wellington Region***

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