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Committee Rural Services and Wairarapa
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Didymo Long Term Management Programme

1. Purpose

To seek the Council's approval for Greater Wellington to contribute to the long term management of the aquatic pest Didymo in the Wellington region.

2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report do not trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3. Background

The aquatic pest *Didymosphenia geminata* (Didymo) was first detected blooming in New Zealand in October 2004 throughout the length of the Mararoa and lower Waiau Rivers in Southland. Despite intensive use of our national waterways by national and international users over the past 18 months, Didymo is presently limited to eight South Island catchments and has not yet been detected in the North Island.

Biosecurity New Zealand (BNZ) is the lead agency in the Didymo incursion response and is co-ordinating resources from all stakeholder agencies and partners. Activities to date include: enforcement of controlled areas (implemented under the Biosecurity Act 1993), field operations, research and surveys, and a social marketing programme focused around the slogan "Check, clean, dry". BNZ estimates that by the end of June 2007, over \$10M will have been expended by central government on this response.

4. Short term management – GW involvement

To date, GW has worked with BNZ and other affected agencies on

- Undertaking water sampling for Didymo in candidate rivers selected by scientists from the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research;
- Erecting signage around the region promoting the "Check, clean, dry" message;

- Distributing Didymo information to selected outlets for dissemination to waterway users, e.g. hunting and fishing stores, marinas.

BNZ offered \$20K to GW late in 2006 for assistance in their social marketing campaign. Unfortunately, the offer came at a time when our resources were limited to assist.

5. Long term management – GW involvement

BNZ are currently in the process of moving from an incursion response mode to a joint long term management partnership mode. They have identified a number of regional partners including regional councils, DOC, Fish & Game NZ, Iwi and affected industry (e.g. power generators, tourism operators, irrigators and aquaculturalists).

In June 2006 Cabinet directed BNZ to develop a partnership approach for the long term management of Didymo. The desired outcome of this approach would be to minimise the spread of Didymo across New Zealand, maintaining the North Island free of Didymo for as long as possible, and protecting high value ecosystem sites and at-risk species.

Central government have clearly indicated that future funding contributions depends on the ability of BNZ to develop regional partnerships throughout New Zealand.

BNZ have indicated that the \$20K contribution to regions to assist with social marketing will be available for the summer of 2007/08. There will also be ‘seeding’ money available for other activities to allow partners time to seek additional funds for the 2008/09 year, via their annual planning processes. Future central government funding will be considered in mid 2007 following a review of a BNZ paper to Cabinet summarising the status of regional partnerships.

BNZ are seeking agreement from regional councils to participate as lead partners in regional programmes. This reflects councils’ resources, local knowledge and proven ability to co-ordinate regional programmes. DOC will also be a key partner in these programmes as they have considerable responsibility for high value ecosystems throughout New Zealand.

GW’s roles in the partnership will be –

- Assist in the development of a lower North Island Incursion Response Plan (note that BNZ will still be the lead agency should Didymo arrive in the North Island);
- Continue with the social marketing campaign, focusing on the “Clean, check, dry” slogan;
- Undertake surveillance and monitoring as part of existing water quality programmes (where possible), and in high value ecosystems;
- Participate in specific research to improve management decisions;

- Co-ordinate and review regional initiatives.

There is currently no budget available within the Biosecurity Department or the Environment Division to undertake these extra activities within the 2007/08 year and beyond. BNZ were verbally advised, at a lower North Island agency meeting on the 23 April that GW was already committed to a number of new regional projects in 2007/08 and, therefore, funding for Didymo activities was limited.

It is possible that some of the activities listed above could be undertaken, either as in-kind contributions, or as part of existing programmes without incurring significant cost. For example, staff could assist in the development of an Incursion Response Plan, continue contributions to the social marketing campaign, and undertake some water quality analysis. It is preferable, however, that our proposed future contributions be fully costed and reported back to the Council for discussion in the near future.

At this point in time, BNZ are seeking a written commitment from GW to be a regional partner. This commitment will support their application to Cabinet for additional funds for the 2007/08 year.

6. Recommendations

That the Committee recommends to Council that it:

1. *Agrees to be a partner with Biosecurity NZ and other agencies in the future management of the aquatic pest Didymo within the Wellington region.*
2. *Notes that Biosecurity NZ has some funding available in 2007/08 for social marketing and other activities to be undertaken by Regional Councils.*
3. *Notes that future ongoing costs related to the proposed partnership are currently being assessed and are intended to be available for consideration at the June 2007 Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee.*

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