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Committee Regulatory Committee
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Plan effectiveness monitoring report: Regional Soil Plan

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of the results of monitoring of the effectiveness of the Regional Soil Plan.

2. Background

The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) requires regional councils to monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of policies, rules and other methods in regional plans and take appropriate action where this is shown to be necessary. At least every five years, the regional council must compile and make available to the public a review of the results of its plan monitoring. The Regional Soil Plan for the Wellington Region (the Plan) was made operative in October 2000.

This report presents the results of monitoring the effectiveness of the policies and methods, including rules, in the Plan. This report does not present any results of any efficiency monitoring. Greater Wellington does not monitor the efficiency of policies, rules and other methods in any of its policy statements or plans.

3. Information used and limitations of the review

The effectiveness of policies, rules and other methods has been assessed by comparing the results of state of the environment monitoring, complaint statistics data, and feedback from interested groups with the implementation of the methods (including rules). Provisions have been deemed to be effective if implementation of the provisions has contributed to achieving the plan objectives, as measured by the state of the environment monitoring, complaint statistics data, feedback from interested groups, other publications like the Dominion newspaper, and comments received by Greater Wellington officers.

This review, like the review of the Regional Plan for Discharges to Land (Report 06.108) and the Regional Freshwater Plan (Report 06.86), highlights

the limitations in our ability to monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of our regional plan provisions.

One of the findings from the previous reviews was that our consents and compliance database (COCO) did not contain sufficient information to allow efficiency or effectiveness of regional plan rules to be assessed. Pollution complaints are recorded on the Incident Database which is not easily linked to the consent and compliance database and has not been set-up to assess regional plan provisions. A new integrated database is being developed. As with the other reviews, we also found that information about compliance with permitted activity rules is also difficult to obtain.

4. Results of plan effectiveness assessment

The Plan has objectives, policies, rules and other methods that address the sustainable management of soil. These are grouped broadly into ‘general’, ‘management’, ‘tangata whenua’, ‘vegetative cover’, and ‘soil disturbance’. The key findings follow:

4.1 General

The “general” provisions of the Plan include three objectives, five policies and 10 methods to manage land use activities that may have an adverse effect on soil in the region.

The ‘general’ policies promote and encourage the principles of sustainable land management, promote land management practices that recognise instability of the land, promote the ethic of stewardship, and encourage whole of catchment and individual farm land management schemes.

Greater Wellington has made some progress in each of these broad policy areas. The related methods use various means to implement the policies, such as workshops, field days, publications, guidelines, strategies, and schemes on a catchment and farm scale. Implementation of the methods represents a large amount of work by staff from different parts of the organisation over many years. Although Greater Wellington does not monitor each policy for its effectiveness in meeting Plan objectives, it is evident that progress has been made in changing attitudes towards sustainable land management practices in both the rural and urban parts of the region.

4.2 Management

The “management” provisions of the Plan include three objectives, seven policies and 10 methods to manage land use activities to further sustainable land management in the region.

Policies and methods address research and monitoring, working with other agencies, recognising voluntary actions, and information and support services required to fully promote sustainable land management principles.

Greater Wellington has made progress with all the policies and methods that recognise and promote sustainable land management in the region. Principles

of the National Sustainable Land Management Strategy have been promoted and encouraged through farm plans, catchment schemes, workshops, field days and other information sessions. Again, Greater Wellington does not monitor or survey how effective this has been in meeting the objectives of the Plan, but there are documented improvements in awareness and knowledge.

Since *Measuring up* 1999, Greater Wellington has started a soil monitoring programme and small research projects to further sustainable land management. This information will assist landowners to make better decisions on sustainable management of their land. Work on the *Muddy Waters* programme has lifted awareness of the need for appropriate erosion and sediment control for subdivisions and other earthworks in the region. The programme includes a series of publications with various information and training sessions for council staff, consultants, contractors and others involved in earthworks. The programme has made significant progress towards raising awareness and meeting the Plan objective. It will require ongoing education resources and upgrades to publications and guidelines as industry practices are constantly improving and changing.

4.3 Tangata whenua

The Plan has one objective, one policy and one method to manage sites of significance to iwi.

The policy and method encourage resource consent applicants to notify and consult directly with any affected iwi group before earthworks commence at or adjacent to sites of significance.

Greater Wellington recommends that resource consent applicants consult with local iwi prior to undertaking earthworks where there are known sites of significance. In most cases applicants make contact with local iwi to ensure sites are safeguarded during earthworks operations. Greater Wellington's erosion and sediment control guidelines for small sites also have information and procedures for when artefacts are accidentally uncovered during earthworks.

4.4 Vegetation disturbance

The Plan has three objectives, one policy, and two rules to manage vegetation clearance on erosion prone land. Policies and rules for vegetation disturbance are directed at plantation forestry and planting and maintenance of soil conservation plantings on erosion prone land.

Greater Wellington has been involved with soil conservation plantings on erosion prone for over 50 years. Landowners and land managers approach Greater Wellington for advice and support to restore eroding or potentially erodible hillslopes. Greater Wellington provides poles – poplars and willows - for planting on eroding land and gives advice. There are approximately 500 farms plans in existence. Comments received from Greater Wellington Land Management officers and newspaper reports show that farmers do embrace the

concept of conservation plantings and these appear to be effective (on a local farm scale) against further soil erosion on steep slopes.

Greater Wellington does not monitor the success or otherwise of the pole plantings, or if the landowner continues with any form of aftercare. A monitoring programme is important to establish the effectiveness of pole plantings on different geology, soil types, slope aspects, and species. A pilot study will be introduced in the coming year that monitors plantings, and if this is successful a monitoring programme will be developed.

Plantation forestry has the potential to erode and disturb soil, leading to sediment entering waterways. Problems occur when the forest is harvested close to waterways or the underlying geology is made up of soft sediments. Greater Wellington promotes compliance with the industry codes of practice for harvesting and provides advice on best practice techniques, including riparian plantings, through Rule 3 of the Plan.

The Incident Database shows that not all companies are compliant with the industry code and there have been some well documented breaches of the code with discharges to waterways. Most of the recorded breaches have all been in the western part of the region. District Plans have varying approaches to plantation forestry. Some require adherence to the code of practice, and others provide no guidance.

Greater Wellington promotes riparian management through its Riparian Strategy and the *Streams Alive* programme. There are other forms of riparian promotion as well, including *Take Care*, field days and workshops. Work promoting riparian management has been effective, however the overall task is large compared to the total number of streams that require some form of riparian cover.

Rules 3 and 4 of the Plan control vegetation clearance on erosion prone land. Rule 3 is a permitted activity that includes a clause requiring contact with Greater Wellington's soil conservator. The rule is important to have in the Plan, as district plans have no controls over erosion prone land. The rule requires improvements to be more effective and useful to apply in the field.

4.5 Soil disturbance

The Plan has one objective, two policies, and two rules to manage soil disturbance from roads and tracks and on erosion prone land. The two policies are to ensure that recognised erosion control and land rehabilitation techniques are considered when resource consent applications are made. Both rules exclude earthworks associated with subdivisions in the region.

Rule 1 has not always been effective. It requires specific lengths and heights of a track before the rule applies. Roading or tracking operators can adjust their measurements to be 'under' the rule by a few metres in some instances. This rule is important to have in the Plan as the city and district plans have no controls covering roads or tracks other than for subdivisions. The rule was designed for forestry operations in the eastern Wairarapa and there is evidence

that the rule is complied with there. However, to help achieve Plan objectives effectively the rule could be changed to include more situations where roads and tracks are adjacent to waterways.

Rule 2 is easier to apply than Rule 1 and is more effective for this reason. The threshold limits in the rule of 1000 cubic metres of soil within an area of one hectare may be too high for erosion prone land. District plans do not provide any controls for soil disturbance on erosion prone land. This rule is important because over 30 per cent of the region is deemed to contain unstable land.

It's already been mentioned that both rules exclude soil disturbance associated with subdivisions. Earthworks associated with subdivisions are an ongoing cause of adverse environmental effects on water bodies in the region. Greater Wellington has prepared guidelines for subdivision and small sites earthworks. There has been good progress working with developers and city and district councils to ensure these guidelines are adhered to. Work by Greater Wellington will need to be ongoing to ensure that uptake continues. One reason is that high staff turnover in city and district councils, and consultancies and contractors, means that knowledge gained by their staff is frequently lost.

5. Implementing the findings

The Plan's provisions have been met with some success from landowners and land managers alike as is evident by the uptake of sustainable practices and improvements to erodible land in the region. But with over seven years experience in implementing the rules, it appears that almost all of the rules would benefit from at least minor changes to make them more effective in meeting Plan objectives.

The following should be considered as part of the formal Plan review that is anticipated to occur in the next two years:

- ensure that vegetation disturbance rules in the Regional Soil Plan are consistent with policies and rules for fresh water and discharges to land, particularly for vegetation disturbance around water bodies
- begin monitoring and assessment to determine whether the existing practical soil conservation practices on erosion prone are effective
- survey land managers and land owners to assess the most effective methods for promoting and encouraging sustainable land management practices.

6. Communication

The *Effectiveness report: Regional Soil Plan* will be available on Greater Wellington's website and hard copies will be available for anyone who requests it.

7. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. ***Receives the report; and***
2. ***Notes the content.***

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