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Committee Environment Committee
Author Wayne O'Donnell, General Manager, Catchment Management
Nigel Corry, General Manager, Environment Management
Luke Troy, General Manager, Strategy

General Managers' report to the Environment Committee meeting 1 December 2015

1. Purpose

To inform the Environment Committee of Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) activities relating to the Committee's areas of responsibility.

2. Environment Committee meeting 27 October – public participation

Russell Bell and Peter Brooking attended the October meeting of the Committee and spoke in public participation to the issues highlighted below. Kapiti Coast District Councillor, Janet Holborow, was also present.

Russell Bell raised concerns about the retirement and loss of wetlands at Queen Elizabeth Park (QEP).

Amanda Cox informed the Committee that through negotiation with Beetham Pastoral when renewing the farm licence, 32ha from the land previously grazed on the park has been retired. Much of this area (22ha) has been designated as wetlands. Aspects such as water management and weed control will be the subject of ongoing investigation to identify effective planting and maintenance options in these areas. It was also noted that various streams and drains in the park are also being fenced off from livestock and planted on as resources allow. Thus these areas are essentially being treated as "long thin wetlands". This approach has been outlined in the Sustainable Land Use Plan.

Peter Brooking raised concerns about the aerial spraying in Queen Elizabeth Park on Labour Day. Mr Brooking stated that he believed there had been inadequate public notice and signage relating to the spraying.

The Committee Chair also invited Councillor Holborow to address this issue.

Amanda Cox noted that due diligence was exercised with the aerial spraying operation which took place on Labour Day, noting that the spraying took place in areas of the park which were subject to the farm lease and not typically open to public access. All owners or occupants of neighbouring properties were notified of the planned spray work as required. These included the campground operators, Sang Sue orchard, Kapiti Pony Club (who graze horses on the former Perkins land) and Eventing Wellington. The spray work itself commenced just after 7am and concluded approximately two hours later. As required by regulation, signage was in place to alert people to the spray work being carried out.

The concerns of Mr Brooking and the broader community were acknowledged by the Committee and officers, and a public meeting was held on Saturday 14 November in Raumati to discuss the concerns of the community. GWRC acknowledged that in hindsight, it was inappropriate to carry out aerial spraying on a public holiday and has apologised to the community for doing so. Further meetings are due to take place.

3. Catchment Management

3.1 Biosecurity

3.1.1 Marine Biosecurity

Two Mediterranean fan worms have been reported on vessels at Chaffers Marina in Wellington harbour during October and November. Both vessels have been cleaned and a commercial diver inspected nearby blocks but did not see any other suspicious looking fan worms. GWRC Biosecurity has been in contact with MPI, who reported the incursions.

On 20 October, 2015, a single Sabella was detected growing attached to a tyre in approximately 2.5m water depth near Taranaki Wharf. This is the first time that Sabella has been found growing on substrate in Wellington; all previous detections have been on vessel hulls in the Chaffers Marina.

Mediterranean fan worms can form dense groups which out-compete native species. They are of particular concern to areas with aquaculture as they foul the infrastructure for marine farming. Two infestations of Sabella have previously been identified on vessels present within Wellington harbour during 2014.

3.1.2 MPI Field Trip

The Ministry for Primary Industries Biosecurity and Animal Welfare Directorate met with representatives of the Biosecurity Department as part of a field trip to the Wairarapa in early November. The MPI staff also visited dry stock and dairy farms and an orchard in the South Wairarapa.

The Tauherenikau KNE and Wairarapa Moana were visited to illustrate remnant forest, wetland and aquatic sites where GWRC operates. Biosecurity staff explained the regional pest management process and control techniques for various pest plants and pest animals. A staff member from Environmental Science explained the issues with invasive fish species. The private landowner control of Canada geese in the region was also discussed.



Biosecurity and Environmental Science team members with MPI staff at Wairarapa Moana

3.1.3 Pest animals

(a) Rooks

The annual aerial rook survey was completed in late September and the active nests were controlled on 24 October. Twenty three nests were treated at eight breeding rookeries.

(b) Rabbits

Rabbit numbers are at their highest during the spring and late summer. Despite this, the rabbit population remains at low levels across most of the region. Enquiries from the public remain relatively low, with some control required by landowners on the Kapiti coast.

Two Biosecurity staff visited Otago to investigate alternative methods of control for rabbits. This included historically popular methods such as the use of trained ferrets and rabbit dogs to target rabbits in burrows and close cover. The use of a contractor with these skills has potential for rabbit control in dune systems in the Wellington region.

(c) Possums

A new possum control operation was set up for Wellington City Council as part of the rural HALO project. This operation will help to protect the rare native bird species which are spreading from Zealandia.

(d) Feral Ungulates

Feral deer have been damaging nursery plantings at the GWRC Mangapakeha Nursery in the Eastern Wairarapa. Biosecurity have set a motion sensitive

camera to capture when the animals are visiting the nursery so they can be controlled. This type of issue is becoming more common in the Wairarapa hill country as deer numbers continue to increase.

Pig traps continue to be in high demand. Pasture damage from pigs will reduce as paddocks dry out over the summer.

3.1.4 Pest Plants

(a) Surveillance and Total Control

Inspections of Total Control species sites continued with 185 sites inspected in Kapiti. Two new sites of woolly night shade were found.

The annual Freshwater Pest Advocacy (CCD) programme commenced in late November. The recruitment and training of an advocate was completed during early November.

(b) Containment

All boneseed ground control inspections were completed in early November. The site inspections report a continued decline in plant numbers and few mature plants with seeds removed. The Wellington south coast escarpment aerial contract is still waiting for favourable weather.



Helicopters with human sling load crewmen removing boneseed at Ngawi escarpment

(b) Biocontrol

The biocontrol species Green thistle beetle has established extremely well in the region compared to other parts of NZ. Active management through collecting and transferring beetles (210 releases) has been underway since 2008. This organised strategic approach has achieved widespread

establishment across a large area of the region. Populations have increased rapidly and early inspections during October again showed high numbers of beetles moving from hibernation habitat to feed on thistle leaves and lay egg clusters. GWRC has worked with AgResearch to establish six long term monitoring sites in the region. AgResearch visited to collect beetles in the Wairarapa during October and establish more trials in Canterbury.

3.1.5 BioWorks

(a) TB Free New Zealand Control Programme

Project Aohanga (2,948 ha) was successfully completed on 8 September. The pre-feed for the Eastern Tararua project (11,089ha) was undertaken in November. The 1080 application will occur at the next fine weather opportunity.

During October TBfree NZ undertook BioWorks annual performance review and we are currently ranked as the highest scoring control contractor for the Southern and Eastern North Island, scoring 97%.

(b) Regional Possum Predator Control Programme (RPPCP)

The RPPCP will cover approximately 68,000 hectares during the 2015/16 year. There is approximately 2,900 ha of new initial control areas. Approximately 40% of the programme is now complete with three projects around Porirua finished.

3.2 Land Management

3.2.1 Metro Forests

(a) Beech Spur Harvesting

The Beech Spur block is located in the Valley View forest and covers some 4.4 hectares. The trees are 38 years old and were to have been harvested prior to the sale of Cutting Rights in June 2014. It is a difficult site because of the isolated location, steepness of the land and the presence of transmission lines close to large trees.

The Forestry Right allows the harvest manager to seek approval from Council for weekend harvesting under exceptional circumstances up to six times each financial year. Application has been made by PF Olsen for weekend work involving tree felling and log processing to occur in the period up to Xmas. Wet weather will cause the site to be closed down due to environmental impacts on water quality.

Staff are currently considering this application and assessing the risk for Council, particularly around setting precedence for circumstances that are largely operational. The Beech Spur site is relatively close to the main access road and is visible from SH2. The impact of the weekend work on recreational activity will be a major consideration.



Logging on Beech Spur

3.2.2 Farms Plans

(a) WRECI Plans

Despite ongoing discussions with Ministry of Primary Industries staff there is still no signed contract for the hill country erosion programme. This is the case for contracts with Horizons and Taranaki Regional Councils. The major sticking point with MPI is that they want a degree of separation from the Hill Country Erosion Fund (HCEF) and the Afforestation Grant Scheme (AGS). Currently grants for the AGS start at 5 hectares. This means that afforestation work as part of HCEF can only be areas up to five hectares. Discussions with MPI over the last three years have indicated that a 20 hectare threshold is a more workable proposition.

(b) Farm Environment Plans

In recent weeks a start has been made on connecting with landowners around Wairarapa Moana who have recently been involved with the Ministry for the Environment's Fresh Start for Freshwater programme over the last three years. A new staff member is starting at the end of November to ensure that landowners will receive a level of support that enables expectations to be met and agreed work nutrient management and biodiversity programmes are completed.

3.3 Flood Protection

Major achievements since the last report have been:

- Completing community consultation on the Hutt River City Centre project leading to a Hearing Panel recommending Option A to the HVFMS
- Planning for the 2015/16 Capital works programme for the LWVDS project
- A busy weekend involving staff from across the Department at the Clareville A&P Show and the Waikanae Iwi Walkover
- Signoff of the Waiohine FMP Phase 3 Summary report and approval to prepare the Draft FMP
- Pinehaven draft FMP consultation completed

The key activities looking ahead are:

- Gaining HVFMS/Council approval of a preferred City Centre ICD option for the detailed design and NOR/Consents;
- Lodging NOR/Consent application for the Jim Cooke Park stopbank project
- Development of Waiohine draft FMP for a final round of consultation
- Hearing of submissions on Pinehaven FMP
- Commencement of Otaki River survey and aerial photogrammetry trial

3.3.1 Floodplain Management Plan Implementation

(a) Hutt River City Centre Upgrade Project

The community feedback period on the Integrated Concept Design options for the City Centre Upgrade project closed on 14 September 2015 with 279 submissions. On 15 October, a Hearing Panel of the Hutt Valley Flood Management Subcommittee (HVFMS) considered all written responses and 28 oral presentations and resolved to recommend Option A to the consideration of the HVFMS. The Subcommittee is expected to consider the recommendations on 26 November. This process is currently on track for a Council decision on 9 December.

(b) Jim Cooke Park Stopbank Upgrade

Officers are currently progressing with the preparation of the NOR/Consent applications for the project on the basis of the preferred stopbank alignment approved by the former S & P Committee. It was decided to include the river channel improvement works in the same application so that all FMP recommended works in the Jim Cooke Park reach of the river can be completed. Officers are planning to lodge the application in December 2015. Negotiation of land entry agreements with KCDC and a private land owner are also progressing with the aim of completing them by November 2015.

(c) Hutt River edge protections

Rock supply for completing the Ebdentown edge protection works on the Hutt River in Upper Hutt is progressing. Construction works are programmed for completion in Summer 2015/16.

(d) Pinehaven FMP Implementation

The second round of consultation on the Pinehaven FMP was completed in October 2016. A 'hearing' of feedback is planned for February 2016 with the expectation of seeking FMP signoff in March 2016.

Geotechnical and Ecological investigations and the preliminary design are progressing pending the FMP signoff. The property purchase has been completed. An MOU with UHCC on cost sharing is also being finalised.

(e) Lower Wairarapa Development Scheme Improvement Works

Landowner entry permits for the Whakawhiriwhiri Stream upgrade project have been finalised except for Jim Hedley and John Barton. Construction work in the reach upstream of Pahautea Road will commence once the above land entry permits are finalised. The Barrage Gate control gear upgrade and Tawaha Culvert upgrade contracts will be awarded shortly. All these construction works are scheduled for the coming summer.

(f) Otaki Edge Protections

The planned Otaki Edge protection works are on hold until the Otaki FMP review is completed. The river management practices in the lower reach are being considered through the FMP review process to be completed in 2017. Only urgent bank edge repair works and maintenance of recently completed capital works will be carried out this year.

(g) Waiohine River Capex

A draft FMP for the Waiohine River is currently being developed with the aim of consulting with community in early 2016. The 2015/16 Annual Plan provides a budget of \$2.9 million for commencing the Waiohine FMP implementation works. The programme for implementing this component of work was set in anticipation of completion of the Waiohine FMP. The FMP is taking more time to complete and it is proposed to defer any construction work until the FMP is complete.

3.3.2 Operations, Delivery and Planning

(a) Western River Schemes

Work programmes and budgets are being monitored closely after a number of flood events in the western river systems that have resulted in a considerable amount of flood damage. Staff have been busy completing clean-up work, undertaking inspections and responding to public enquires after each flood event.

Large lengths of erosion have occurred along the Otaki River which now need repair. The Waitohu and Mangaone Streams have also required erosion repairs at a number of locations following the May and June flood events. The erosion on the Hutt River banks below the Kennedy Good Bridge has continued to get worse with each successive flood event and is likely to require some capital work in order to fully mitigate the erosion problems.

(b) Wairarapa River Schemes

The Lake Onoke sea mouth last blocked on 15 October and again on 12 November. GWRC staff control the Barrage Gates and manage the lake levels in both Lake Onoke and Lake Wairarapa to facilitate a machine-operated opening.



Lower Ruamahanga (Brian Tucker's)
bank erosion looking upstream (before) & willow cabling looking downstream (after)

(c) Community Recreation

A successful walkover of the Waikanae River with Te Ātiawa ki Whakarongotai was held on the 1st November to discuss projects relating to the river. The Waikanae Friends Group walkover has been arranged for 27th November.

3.3.3 Investigations, Strategy and Planning

(a) Floodplain Management Plan development

All three Wairarapa FMPs currently in development or preparation (TKURFMP, Waiohine FMP, LWVFMP) were discussed with the community at the Clareville A&P Show over the weekend 30th October to 1st November. Almost entirely positive feedback was received and we had contact with a large number of people.

Progress is being made resolving Waipoua River flood hazard issues between GWRC and Masterton District Council through a joint project team. As this work progresses, TKURFMP is focussing on rural option development and community/stakeholder engagement. Delays to the urban options development will impact on delivery of the TKURFMP project.

3.4 Biodiversity

3.4.1 General

A draft of a refreshed Greater Wellington Regional Council's Biodiversity Strategy was approved by the Executive Leadership Team on Monday 10 November to be finalised for publishing. The Strategy sets a framework that guides how the organisation protects and manages biodiversity in the

Wellington region. The Strategy also communicates to the public about our mandate, role and functions for protecting and managing biodiversity.

Staff are assisting the Friends of Queen Elizabeth Park and Nga Uruora in preparing project and operational plans for their Kapiti Biodiversity Project. This project, funded by a central government grant, aims to fill gaps in pest control coverage between existing projects in the Paekakariki area; Queen Elizabeth Park, Whareroa Farm and Paekakariki Escarpment.

3.4.2 Biodiversity Management

(a) Key Native Ecosystems

Staff are currently approaching private landowners to sign landowner agreement forms to be part of the KNE programme. More than 50 landowners have now signed up.

Most pest plant work agreements for 2015/16 have been completed between the Biodiversity and Biosecurity departments. Chemical weed control is currently suspended at the Queen Elizabeth Park KNE site following concerns raised in the community about agricultural aerial spraying in the regional park. The outcome of discussions between the Parks department and the community will determine how operations proceed.

(b) QEII Covenant Support

Financial support of \$24,500 has been provided to assist with the establishment of three Open Space Covenants in the Wairarapa which will protect 16.5 hectares of lowland indigenous forest in perpetuity.

3.4.1 Biodiversity Advice and Advocacy

(a) Biodiversity Advice

Biodiversity staff wrote a GWRC submission to the Porirua and Wellington City Councils on their draft Outdoor Recreation Park development plan. The submission expressed support for the plan's proposal to enhance access to public open space and improve connectivity and buffering for biodiversity. The advice emphasised GWRC's longstanding work and ongoing interests in the area and requested further involvement in the planning of the park.

Staff provided advice to Hutt and Upper Hutt City Councils on their proposed district plan changes to remove blanket tree protection provisions. These changes respond to amendments made to the Resource Management Act in 2013. The advice suggested that removal of blanket rules in the urban environment should not be taken as an opportunity to reduce protections for significant indigenous biodiversity values in urban and rural areas.

(b) Collaborative Restoration: Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Project

Visitor facilities are under construction at Lake Domain and are expected to be completed in late-November. This work includes new fencing and landscaping at the entrance and a car park near the Barton's Stream outlet.

An environmental education programme that was developed for the Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Project has been piloted at two primary schools.

Applications for the Community Restoration Contestable Fund were received from four groups in south Wairarapa. A total of \$15,000 will be allocated to the projects of successful applicants.

(c) Collaborative Restoration: Porirua Harbour and Catchment Project

Te Awarua-o-Porirua Sediment Reduction Plan has been completed and submitted for endorsement by the Joint Committee which meets on 26 November. This plan summarises the activities of the four Te Awarua-o-Porirua Harbour Strategy partners - GWRC, PCC, WCC and Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangātira - that aim to reduce the volume of sediment eroding from the catchment and washing into the harbour.

The annual summary report for Te Awarua-o-Porirua Harbour Strategy has also been completed and submitted for endorsement by the Joint Committee, along with work plans for 2015/16 and 2016/17.

31 October marked the end of the long running Pauatahanui Vegetation Framework (PVF) which is being replaced by the work of a permanent GWRC Land Management Officer delivering a Farm Environment Plan programme across the Kapiti and Porirua area. Over nine years the PVF involved 35 landowners, almost 65,000 native seedlings, and over 50,000 exotic trees that were planted to stabilise land in the catchment, including 40 hectares of steep pasture. Almost 10,000 metres of fencing has also been installed to protect riparian areas and wetlands. In addition, almost 60 hectares were retired from grazing to allow the regeneration of native scrub and to protect existing native forest.

(d) Biodiversity Advocacy

Biodiversity staff coordinated GWRC's contribution to Pest Fest as part of Conservation Week at the beginning of November. Staff from the Parks and Biosecurity departments also attended. The event was very successful with approximately 500 people attending.

4. Environment Management

4.1 Parks

GWRC hosted a public meeting in Raumati South on Saturday 14 November, primarily to address concerns around spraying in Queen Elizabeth Park. This identified a wide range of issues, from policy through to detailed operational activities. A team of people from across GWRC is focussed on analysing the concerns raised, identifying key themes, bringing together information and recommending a way forward. We have undertaken to respond to the issues and questions raised within a few weeks, and will be working with the community to design a future partnership approach.

Also at Queen Elizabeth Park there has been excellent progress with construction of Te Ara o Whareroa trail, which is now sealed from Poplar Ave to the intersection with the Yankee Trail. The section from Rainbow Court to Whareroa Road and we expect to open the remainder well before Christmas.

Works on the Transmission Gully motorway are due to start shortly in the parks, with preparations for Bridge 7 at Battle Hill, and for upgrades to the Duck Creek track to be two of the first signs of work.

Consents and conditions are now in place for structure and track repair work in the Korokoro Valley, and the teams will be starting the work in earnest from mid-November. We have almost concluded investigations into the optimal solution to address issues with the Woollen Mills Dam, and will be consulting with stakeholders (and obtaining appropriate consents) prior to confirming a course of action. Councillors will be kept informed throughout this process.

5. Strategy

5.1 Parks Planning

Preparation of a draft management plan for the Hutt and Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collections areas is in underway in liaison with Wellington Water. A steering group from Wellington Water and GW is providing guidance, with the plan focussing on addressing issues related to threats to water quality and supply and the management context.

The Whitireia Park Board held a hearing for submitters on the draft plan and in deliberations reviewed the officer recommendations. Discussions centred on park issues including dog walking, trails and the management approach to non-local native species such as pohutakawa and karaka. The final plan and bylaws are now being prepared for approval by the Park Board at its next meeting on the 30th November. As required by the Reserves Act, the plan and bylaws will then be sent to the Minister for Conservation and the Department of Conservation for approval.

A number of concession applications or reapplications are in progress, the most significant a proposal for a future Riding for the Disabled operation at Battle Hill Farm Forest Park and at Queen Elizabeth Park a proposal for a new surf lifesaving club room for the Paekakariki Surf Lifesaving Club, likely to be located behind the existing facility.

Redevelopment plans for the Baring Head lighthouse keepers cottages and precinct is progressing with the precinct concept plan and cottage redevelopment plans finalised, and estimated cost plans in progress. A steering group has been formed to investigate possible operational models in liaison with the Friends of Baring Head community group.

6. The decision-making process and significance

No decision is being sought in this report.

6.1 Engagement

Engagement on this matter is not necessary.

7. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. *Receives the report.*
2. *Notes the content of the report*

Report approved by:

Wayne O'Donnell
General Manager, Catchment
Management

Report approved by:

Nigel Corry
General Manager,
Environment Management

Report approved by:

Luke Troy
General Manager, Strategy