

Report No.	19-118
Information Only - No Decision Required	

NATURAL RESOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS PROGRESS REPORT

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. This item updates on the activity of the Natural Resources & Partnerships Group over the 2018-19 financial year. The new format of a single report for the group is to align with a focus of the Group on aligning the programmes and integrated catchment management.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1. The Natural Resources and Partnership Groups activity includes the non-regulatory and science programmes across the Land and Water Management, Biosecurity and Biodiversity and Environmental Reporting activities of the Long-term Plan. The group also delivers regulatory functions for biosecurity and supports Horizons regulatory programmes.
- 2.2. The activity of the group was expanded over the 2018-19 year with additional resourcing and new targets provided via the Long-term Plan process and through external sources. The programme has secured over \$30 million of funding from Central Government since 2012 including the funding for the three Freshwater Improvement Fund projects established in the 2018-19 year and the over \$6.4 million secured during 2018-19 for the Sustainable Land Use Initiative for hill country erosion control over the next four years.
- 2.3. The additional funding provided for further activity on the ground and enabled further community involvement. For example, the Freshwater Improvement Fund projects contributed to over 16 community projects being completed (target 14) and the biodiversity programme completed 32 biodiversity collaborations (target 10). Landowner involvement was significant over the 2018-19 year with 578 jobs within the land programme and landowners contributing over \$2.52 million of co-funding (more than half the total cost) of the over 3,600 ha of erosion control works completed, including over 2.3 million trees being planted. The external funding also enabled more community led stewardship of projects.
- 2.4. Overall the group completed 42 of the 45 Long-term Plan targets (93%) with many targets being well exceeded. The three missed targets included two within the Freshwater programme which overall completed 114 km of stream fencing for a target of 69 km, however only achieved 14 km within the Whangaehu Catchment (target 17 km). Further the programme completed 7 fish passes for a target of 7, however achieved one more than required in the Manawatū and one less than required in the regional programme. The other missed target was a result of 94% for a target of 95% of pest plant enquiries to be responded to with three days.
- 2.5. Communication was a focus for the group in the 2018-19 year. The 2019 State of Environment report was the major output for this work. Other contributions included the development of a science communication strategy and a series of papers to council on specific issues including swimmability of the regions' rivers, state and trends of water quality, lakes management and management of hill country erosion.
- 2.6. Emerging issues during the year included responding to Central Government policy processes, additional work around contamination from fire fighting foam, some biosecurity incursion responses and response to water quality results e.g. Whanganui coastal streams.
- 2.7. Further detail on the individual programmes over the 2018-19 year is provided below and in the Annexes. A single Operational Plan for the Groups activity for the 2019-20 year is scheduled to be presented to the Strategy and Policy Committee in September.

3. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee recommends that Council:

- a. receives the information contained in Report No. 19-118 and Annexes.

4. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 4.1. There is no financial impact associated with recommendations in this paper.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1. This is a public item and therefore Council may deem this sufficient to inform the public.

6. SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS

- 6.1. The summary below provides an overview of the 2018-19 year for each area of activity within the Natural Resources and Partnerships Group. Further detail is provided the attached annexes. The information below includes a summary for the Land Management Activity, however this is not reported on in further detail in an annex. A more detailed report on that activity will be provided to the Catchment Operations Committee in September 2019.
- 6.2. The context for the 2018-19 years activity includes the review of many of the programmes as a part of the Long-term Plan process and the subsequent changes made to the programmes. The summaries below provide some further context to these changes along with a summary of the results for the year.

Freshwater & Partnerships

- 6.3. Through the Long-term Plan the work of the Freshwater and Partnerships Team was reorganised to align with the successful **Freshwater Improvement Fund (FIF)** project applications (over \$5 million of Central Government funding, over three to five years). The Long-term Plan targets were set to match Horizons' requirements within those programmes e.g. to match the targets for the components of those projects that Horizons was directly leading such as stream fencing, planting, fish passes and community projects. The FIF projects include other projects such as upgrades to sewage treatment plants to remove discharges to water from rivers or lakes and to apply wastewater to land, stormwater upgrades, urban streams projects etc. To provide Council with reporting on these other activities an Annual Report requirement for each of these projects was added to the Long-term Plan targets. Council provided additional funding for a regional programme (\$200 K) and specific targets were added to the Long-term Plan for this project. This additional funding was to enable works to continue to occur regionally (outside of the catchments with FIF Fund projects). Further, Council provided additional funding for work with the horticulture sector to improve water quality. This aligned with another externally funded project through the Sustainable Farming Fund called Future Proofing Vegetable Production which included a range of work with growers in the Horowhenua area and at other locations in the country. A further Long-term Plan target was added for an annual report on this project.
- 6.4. The Freshwater and Partnerships programme had 15 Long-term Plan targets and at an overall level exceeded these, achieving:
 - Over 114 km of stream fencing (target 69 km);

14 August 2019

- 148,984 riparian plants planted (target 63,333);
 - 7 fish passes (target 7);
 - 16 community projects completed (target 14);
 - All annual reports completed.
- 6.5. Within the programmes the stream fencing target for the Whangaehu was not met (14.1 km completed for a target of 17 km, 83%). Also there was one more fish pass than the target completed in the Manawatū and one less than the target achieved in the Regional programme. Overall 13 out of 15 Long-term plan targets were achieved.
- 6.6. One of the 2018-19 years achievements for the Freshwater Team was the establishment of the Freshwater Improvement Fund projects including the cross organisational teams and the associated governance groups and the completion of the associated quarterly reports to the Ministry for the Environment.
- 6.7. In summary:
- the regional programme completed additional fencing and planting in the regional programme through Council approved use of rate reserves.
 - The year included further contributions to the Te Mana o Te Wai projects for the Rangitīkei, Manawatū and Lake Horowhenua.
 - The Manawatu River Leaders' Accord Forum held two meetings, completed a progress report, new website and holding a river festival.
 - Work to restore Lake Horowhenua was delayed through ongoing court processes with legal challenges to the election of the Lake Trust. This impacted on timeframes for legal processes around establishing the boat ramp to enable weed harvesting. Monitoring of Lake Horowhenua was significantly interrupted due to health and safety issues. An item summarising the Lake Horowhenua restoration work was presented to Council in September 2019 and the attached annexes provide and update on the legal processes.
 - Two reports on lake restoration options were completed to inform the work of the freshwater programme. Additional work on Lake Dudding was undertaken in response to observed water quality results.

Biosecurity Animals

- 6.8. Through the Long-term Plan the Biosecurity Animals programme received additional funding and targets to enable Horizons to add new area to the possum control programme to continue control in areas where OSPRI were no longer going to provide possum control. In 2018-19 the target was for an additional 135,668 ha and increase of approximately 12% of the over 1.1 million ha already in the programme.
- 6.9. The Operational Plan set out a plan to complete over 184,555 ha of new area. The approach to delivering this was based on deferring control in some areas of the programme to enable new work to be completed elsewhere. A control programme was determined using the possum modelling tool and information from the updated possum monitoring programme. Further changes to the programme included introducing new standardised protocols for bait station set ups. The programme also went through a more detailed procurement process for external contractors introducing three year contracts with an increased level of auditing.
- 6.10. Overall all of the planned new area received treatment during the year (184,555 ha) well exceeding the target of 135,668 ha and 93% of the planned maintenance possum control was delivered. The procurement process did not find a contractor for one of the possum control areas. This required some changes to delivery over the year and this contributed to

some of the planned work not being completed. Some operational areas also required more bait stations to be installed to meet the requirements of the new standardised protocols around bait station set ups. This reduced the capacity to complete all of the planned work. The monitoring programme revealed low possum numbers in some of the new Ex-Ospri area and as a result all of these will be monitored prior to any decisions to treat these areas in the future. Overall the possum density in the programme is estimated to average between 3 and 4% for a target of below 10 percent. Some areas with results greater than 10% were picked up by the new monitoring programme and these will be a focus for 2019-20.

- 6.11. All four targets were achieved in the Biosecurity Animals programme. The new hectares of possum control and possum density measures are discussed above. The other targets were for rook control and the amenity pest programme. The rook control programme found more active nests this year (152) than last year (135) and this was influenced by a single large rookery being treated that had 31 nests. The Amenity Pests programme responded to 837 enquiries, all within the Long-term Plan target timeframe for response of two working days.

Biosecurity Plants

- 6.12. As a part of the Long-term Plan process the Biosecurity Plants programme targets were aligned with the new Regional Pest Management Plan providing targets around increasing the percentage of known sites of particular pest types at zero levels by 10%. The Long-term Plan process also provided additional resourcing for control of a range of pest species to enable these targets to be met. The other targets for the Biosecurity Plant programme were around responding to pest plant incursions, supporting and monitoring of biological control programmes and responding to pest plant enquiries.
- 6.13. Overall the pest plant programme achieved six out of seven of the Long term Plan targets, narrowly missing achieving all seven. The missed target was a result of 94% for a target of 95% of pest plant enquiries being responded to within three working days. The exclusion pest targets were met as there were no new incursions to respond to. There were previous incursions that responses continued for including velvet leaf and myrtle rust. The targets for reducing the percentage of sites at zero levels were exceeded with the requirement for eradication plants being 65% of sites at zero levels and the year end result being 75%. The target for progressive containment plants was 64% of sites at zero levels and the year end result was 78%.
- 6.14. The biological control programme provided several highlights for the year and an annual report is provided in the annexes to this report. A significant milestone was achieving the approval to release a new biocontrol agent for Old Man's Beard. Staff also finished three years of monitoring for an AgResearch assessment on the effectiveness of green thistle beetle releases and began recording natural spread of this agent and the broom gall mite bioagent

Biodiversity

- 6.15. As a part of the Long-term Plan process the Biodiversity programme was aligned into three activities priority site protection, biodiversity partnerships and Totara Reserve Regional Park. This was a simplification of the previous structure and closed a programme called environmental initiatives with the funding for this being split evenly between the priority sites programme and the biodiversity partnerships programme.
- 6.16. The priority sites programme underwent a review as a part of the Long-term Plan process. Linking with the science programme, a review of the prioritisation of sites for inclusion in the programme has been undertaken and also a review of the management of sites within the programme. A new management level rating has been introduced that incorporates assessments of the level of knowledge of the biodiversity at a site through a **Rapid**

Ecological Assessment (REA) and whether Horizons has completed some restoration work at the site, which was previously the mechanism the programme used to indicate whether a site was actively managed. The programme review also introduced the requirement for site management plans, and these, along with frequency of visits, are key factors for achieving management level 3. The level of priority works in the site management plan that are being implemented are also part of the management level index with level 4 indicating all priority works are being completed. Levels 5 and 6 reflect sites receiving a greater level of management.

- 6.17. During the 2018-19 year the sites within the programme were reviewed and assigned within the management level framework. To assist with this sites that had previously received support from Horizons, however had not had an ecological assessment were prioritised for rapid ecological assessments. Seventy rapid ecological assessments were planned for 2018-19 and over the year 127 REA's were completed (122 bush remnants and 5 wetlands).
- 6.18. The number of bush remnants and wetlands in each management level as at 30 June 2019 is reported in Table 3. Overall 13 sites are above management level 4 or above, 49 sites are at management level 3 and 151 sites are at management level 2.
- 6.19. The Annual Plan target for biodiversity for four new wetlands to be added to the programme was met and the target for 7 new bush remnants to be added was exceeded with 16 new bush remnants added over the year. The addition of the four new wetlands was somewhat offset by the audit process removing three wetlands from the actively managed list as they did not meet the criteria of management level 2.
- 6.20. The Biodiversity Partnerships activity encompasses work completed in collaboration with others to deliver biodiversity and recreational benefits to the Region via projects such as the Manawatū Gorge and Pukaha Mount Bruce, and projects to support community-led initiatives such as the Rangitikei Environment Group's efforts to control Old Man's Beard. The 34 projects approved in 2018-19 included seven Biodiversity Collaborations, 13 Community Biodiversity projects and 14 Community Grant projects. Overall 32 of the 34 allocated projects were completed exceeding the target by 167%. The two projects that were not completed were the Tawata Mainland Island project where there has been some changes within the organisation Horizons partners with on this project and the Ohau Beach walkway where stakeholder support did not eventuate.
- 6.21. The work at *Tōtara* Reserve Regional Park over the 2018-19 year focused on remediation of the June 2018 flood damage, enhancing flood protection, some works around safety in the park including management of trees, additional signage and reviewing pest management.
- 6.22. The Annual Plan target for an Annual Report was met with the report provided to the Environment Committee in May 2019.

Land management

- 6.23. The Long-term Plan process increased rate funding for the Sustainable Land Use Initiative programme by approximately \$60 K to offset a similar reduction in funding from the Hill Country Erosion Fund.
- 6.24. In June 2018, \$970 K of further funding for the 2018-19 year was secured for forestry through the Provincial Growth Fund. This was followed by a successful application to a Hill Country Erosion Fund application for just over \$300 K. The additional funding from these sources did refocus the team efforts and some new projects were completed including an expression of interest process for new forestry in the region, the completion of forestry appraisal's and a storm resilience programme to support Ruapehu farmers who had been recently impacted by a storm event.

- 6.25. The new programmes and new funding required agility in their delivery as other Central Government programmes continued to evolve over the year. A programme of free manuka seedlings, and the announcement of the grant rates for the 1 billion trees programmes resulted in some work on farms in the region that were allocated to advance within Horizons programmes being funded via other programmes.
- 6.26. Work over the year included establishing supply of seedlings for the allocated forestry and further implementation of the willow and poplar nursery upgrade at Woodville. Another key task was the application to the Hill Country Erosion Fund for the contract for the next four years. This application was successful and secured over \$6.4 million over four years being a more than 55% increase on the baseline Central Government funding for the HCEF contract for the 2018-19 year. A paper on the changes to the land management and SLUI programme as a result of the new contract and other changes to the context of the programme was presented to the Catchment Operations Committee in June 2019.
- 6.27. Over the year 573 jobs were completed in the land programme (SLUI, Whanganui Catchment Strategy and environmental grant). In total over 3600 ha of erosion control works were completed with over 2.3 million trees planted. Overall this result exceeded the targets for SLUI, the Whanganui Catchment Strategy and the Regional and Coast Environmental Grant programme. A particular highlight was the increase in work within the Whanganui Catchment Strategy where the additional Government funding and changes to the SLUI programme enabled 319 ha of work to be completed more than double the 117 ha of work in this programme in the previous year.
- 6.28. While all targets were met, it was notable that a considerable amount of further works were allocated during the year with total allocation levels being over 5000 ha. Further analysis of the works that were not completed and if they are being completed this financial year is underway to inform the Catchment Operations Committee report for September.

Science and Innovation

- 6.29. As a part of the Long-term Plan process the targets for the Science and Innovation team were revised with an increased requirement for annual reporting on activity. The Annual Plan process also provided additional funding for climate change research, drinking water research and for research into the issue of sedimentation of rivers. All ten Long-term Plan targets were achieved.
- 6.30. A major focus for the Science and Innovation Team in the 2018-19 year was the completion and release of the 2019 State of the Environment report. The report was released in May 2019 and provided information on a range of indicators including pressures on the environment as well as state, and trends in both of these. The report also presents some information on the response to identified issues. The chapters of the report included a regional summary, climate, air, land (including biodiversity and biosecurity) and water.
- 6.31. The water quantity and quality monitoring and research programme produced updated information on the state of water allocation for surface water and groundwater for the State of Environment report and information on water quality of the regions groundwater, rivers, lakes, estuaries and coast. Papers to Council over the year included reports on regional swimmability targets, Whanganui coastal streams, river water quality state and trends and lakes management. To inform policy development a range of studies of the drivers of water quality, periphyton and macroinvertebrate drivers were undertaken and some of these are continuing into the new financial year. The core monitoring programmes have continued over the year with some additional studies being completed including faecal source tracking work and the national pesticide monitoring programme.
- 6.32. The land monitoring and research programme worked closely with the Land Management Team and the River Management Team on the issue of sedimentation of rivers. The work programme was reported to Catchment Operations Committee in June 2019.

14 August 2019

- 6.33. The biodiversity monitoring and research programme completed a range of work to support the review of the biodiversity implementation programme including completing an updated prioritisation process for the regions biodiversity sites with a methodology used by other agencies to provide a more nationally consistent assessment for the region.
- 6.34. The climate change research programme worked with NIWA to determine the likely impacts of climate change on the region and Horizons activity. The study was presented to Council in June 2019.
- 6.35. The drinking water research programme was considerably expanded with additional investment by the Territorial Authorities enabling an increased programme to be completed. The study in collaboration with the territorial authorities focussed on council managed water supplies for communities of over 500 people. For each of these water supplies, three source protection zones were defined and assessed for risks. The groundwater supplies were physically inspected to assess bore head security.
- 6.36. A range of other studies were completed as outlined in the annual summary report for the science team in the annex attached.

7. SIGNIFICANCE

- 7.1. This is not a significant decision according to the Council's Policy on Significance and Engagement.

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ANNEXES

- A Freshwater & Partnerships Progress Report
- B Biosecurity Animals Progress Report
- C Biosecurity Plants Progress Report
- D Biodiversity Progress Report
- E Science & Innovation Progress Report