

Report No.	20-05
Decision Required	

HORIZONS BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT UPDATE

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. This report introduces Horizons current approach to biodiversity management with a focus on the non-regulatory biodiversity activities. The paper also overviews a review of non-regulatory biodiversity activity that has been underway for some time and seeks councils decision on one part of this review in relation to Horizons' Biodiversity Partnerships Programme. This programme includes the range of collaborative projects with other agencies and community groups to enhance biodiversity within the Region.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1. Horizons' One Plan provides the guiding strategy for management of biodiversity by Horizons within the Region.
- 2.2. The One Plan identified biodiversity as one of the Big 4 key resource management issues for the Region. The One Plan identified that the Region has only 23 percent of its original forest cover and three percent of its original wetland habitat.
- 2.3. The biodiversity chapters of the One Plan outlined the Regional Council has taken a more proactive approach to coordination of indigenous biodiversity management in the Region and outlined a two tiered strategy involving (1) halting the decline and (2) active management. The strategy for halting the decline related to a range of specific habitats identified in the One Plan to be provided a high level of protection through rules from activities likely to cause any further loss or modification. The active management component sought to proactively manage sites through collaboration with landowners for works such as pest control and fencing and provision of economic incentives such as grants and rates relief.
- 2.4. The One Plan outlined both rules and non-regulatory methods to achieve the strategy and Horizons' current non-regulatory programme has broadly been built around the non-regulatory methods in the biodiversity chapter and contains the following programmes:
1. The priority biodiversity site programme; a site led programme working with landowners to maintain and enhance priority sites on private land;
 2. The biodiversity partnerships programme, where projects extend beyond the boundary of a single landowner and/or involve community groups or external agencies; and
 3. Management of the Regional Park – Tōtara Reserve.
- 2.5. All of these programmes are currently undergoing review with the biodiversity partnerships programme being the focus of this paper. This paper seeks the new Councils guidance around the goals of the non-regulatory biodiversity programme and the biodiversity partnerships programme within that. Further the paper seeks councillor input into the structure of the community biodiversity programme which is currently predominately based on working with a limited number of other agencies, iwi/hapu and community groups. The paper seeks to work with Council to confirm a process by which programmes are selected for funding within the available budget and what proportion of funding should be allocated to projects over different timeframes e.g. 10 years, 3 year or annually.
- 2.6. The paper also identifies potential ways the programme could be enhanced to further engage or mobilise a large number of community members and seeks councillors view on

apportioning a part of the budget for this type of activity and for the purpose of leveraging external funding. The paper also provides an overview of the existing projects (Annex A) that are funded within this programme as outlined in the Natural Resources and Partnerships (NRP) Operational Plan.

3. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee recommends that Council:

- a. receives the information contained in Report No. 20-05 and Annex.
- b. Holds a council workshop to scope:
 - i. the strategic overarching goal for the non-regulatory biodiversity programme;
 - ii. the goal/s for the community biodiversity programme;
 - iii. the process and criteria for allocating funds to the biodiversity partnerships projects with other agencies and community groups;
 - iv. options for a broader programme of community engagement around biodiversity projects; and
 - v. options for the allocation of funding between projects that engage with community groups; initiatives that mobilise community members at an individual or household level; and ensuring budget is available to capitalise on opportunities that bring additional funding to projects.
- c. directs the Group Manager of Natural Resources and Partnerships to report back on work of the Councillor workshop to Council for final decisions around the matters identified in (b).

4. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 4.1. There are no financial impacts associated with this item. The paper does however relate to ensuring Councillor oversight of the efficiency and effectiveness of the expenditure of the biodiversity partnerships budget including identifying the strategic goals for this work and providing for a process by which projects are selected for ratepayer funding. In 2019-20 the biodiversity partnerships programme has a budget of \$1,001,336 including \$89,000 from external sources.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1. One of the primary focuses of the biodiversity partnerships programme is enabling community and community groups to undertake work to enhance biodiversity. The current format of the programme provides for Horizons selecting a range of projects working with community groups and/or other agencies, however does not have component whereby a wider range of community engagement around biodiversity is included. One matter for consideration by Council is if there is a desire for a component of the budget to be utilised to increase the level of community engagement in biodiversity enhancement by methods other than directly engaging community groups.

6. SIGNIFICANT BUSINESS RISK IMPACT

- 6.1. This item is not considered a significant business risk impact.

7. BACKGROUND

State of Biodiversity in the Region

- 7.1. The state of biodiversity in the Region has recently been reported in Horizons' [State of Environment](#) (SoE) report. The SoE report identifies that in total around 34 percent of the Region, 757,000 ha, remains under native cover. Native bush would once have covered 86 percent of the Region or around 1,912,000 ha and now less than 32 percent of the original bush cover remains taking the current extent to around 611,000 ha. Around 80 percent of this is estimated to be secondary cover and much of the remaining 20 percent is likely to have been modified by selective logging. For wetlands less than three percent, 700 ha of the Region's original 22,000 ha of wetland habitat remain.

Horizons Biodiversity Strategy

- 7.2. Horizons' current biodiversity management programmes are primarily driven from the strategy within the One Plan. The One Plan identified indigenous biodiversity as one of our four keystone issues. The One Plan employs both regulatory processes (rules) and non-regulatory measures (incentives) to protect, maintain or enhance our Region's biodiversity. The objectives, policies and methods for managing indigenous biodiversity, including the non-regulatory approach, are set out in Chapter 6 and Chapter 13 of the One Plan. This is consistent with the current obligations of Regional Councils under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).
- 7.3. Regulatory methods are delivered via plan rules, which control activities that have the potential to have an adverse effect on areas of the region that are of value in terms of their contribution to indigenous biodiversity. These rules are described in Chapter 13 of the One Plan with supporting information in Schedule F.
- 7.4. Many of the region's indigenous ecosystems have fallen below self-sustaining thresholds and, without management, the original ecosystem will collapse and disappear. The One Plan identifies that the regulatory framework is not enough to protect these areas. In order to maintain these indigenous ecosystems restorative management action is required and this is outlined in the One Plan as being contributed to by the non-regulatory biodiversity programme. The non-regulatory methods are outlined in Chapter 6 of the One Plan and include proactive management: maintaining and enhancing indigenous biodiversity in partnership with landowners and others.
- 7.5. Regulatory and non-regulatory methods are complementary and work together to ensure both biodiversity pattern and process are maintained across the landscape.
- 7.6. Biodiversity work, by its very nature, requires a 'whole of agency' approach. The Council has a number of existing programmes that work alongside the non-regulatory biodiversity programme delivering biodiversity outcomes on private land, rivers, streams and wetlands. Work is underway to identify further opportunities for alignment between these programmes. Whether it be governance, monitoring, research, implementation, enhancement, protection, or communication, advice and education, the protection and enhancement of indigenous biodiversity, practically every section of the Council contributes to the biodiversity outcomes for the region.
- 7.7. To date the guiding strategy for biodiversity implementation has been the One Plan with resourcing for the biodiversity strategy largely being determined through Long-term Plan and Annual Plan processes. Our understanding of biodiversity in the region has increased since the time of the development of the One Plan. In part the new knowledge has come from implementing the strategy and this knowledge adds to new information from the science programme of Horizons and others. In particular, knowledge has increased of the number and type of biodiversity sites as well as their condition and the threats that they face has grown over the last decade. This new information is now being used internally to implement a more strategic, and nationally consistent approach to biodiversity management. A further consideration for the next steps of the non-regulatory work

programme is the signalled requirements of the proposed National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity which is currently going through a legislative process and is signalled to be finalised later this year.

Horizons’ Non-Regulatory Biodiversity Programme

7.8. Central to Horizons biodiversity work across the region is the NRP Biodiversity Programme. This programme delivers work across three components:

1. The priority biodiversity sites programme; a site led programme working with landowners to maintain and enhance priority sites on private land;
2. The biodiversity partnerships programme, where projects extend beyond the boundary of a simple landowner and/or involve community groups or external agencies; and
3. Management of the Regional Park – Tōtara Reserve.

7.9. Other programmes within the NRP group activity also contribute to biodiversity, for example science contributes greatly to the strategic develop of the programme, as well as data management and development of monitoring protocols. The possum, pest plant control programme contribute in terms of landscape scale pest control, and the freshwater and land management programmes contribute in terms of fencing, retirement and indigenous planting. Figure 1 illustrates existing work programmes within the NRP group that contribute to positive outcomes for biodiversity.

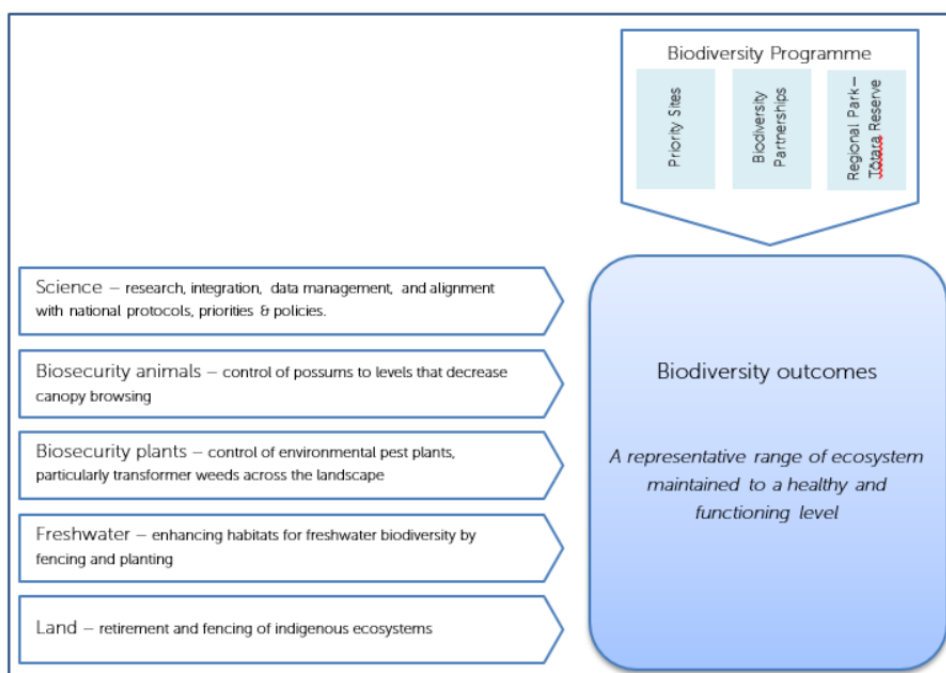


Figure 1: Illustration showing the contributions that programmes within the Natural Resources and Partnerships Group contribute to biodiversity outcomes across the region.

Biodiversity Programme

- 7.10. Over the past 18 months the biodiversity programme has been undergoing a review looking at ways to improve processes and biodiversity outcomes across the Region, whilst working to bring Horizons closer to meeting requirements under the proposed National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity. The biodiversity programme review includes:
1. The priority biodiversity site programme; the development of a new and nationally consistent approach to selecting and managing priority sites across the Region. Reviewing the way sites are assessed in terms of their level of active management and introducing site management plans to assist with this.
 2. The biodiversity partnerships programme; confirming the strategic goals and providing for Councillors to review the decision making processes around which projects are funded and type of work being funded.
 3. Management of the Regional Park - Tōtara Reserve; development of a strategic plan by the advisory group to assist with prioritisation of activity within the work programme.
 4. Science support: providing research to develop and support the strategic direction; alignment with national direction and policies; assessing opportunities for integration with other programmes in the group; scoping of potential data management solutions; and assessing the proposed NPS – Indigenous Biodiversity to consider how this national policy direction compares to the current programmes (regulatory and non-regulatory).

Review of the Biodiversity Partnerships Programme

- 7.11. This item focuses on the Biodiversity Partnerships Programme, where biodiversity-related projects that extend beyond the property boundary of a single landowner and/or involve community groups or external agencies. This programme has evolved through time and although there is no strategic overarching goal, the current suite of projects includes target sites or areas with environmental, social and cultural values. The accessibility or recreational potential of a site, is generally a factor in investment. Projects have been added to this programme over time through a range of mechanisms including Long-term Plan and Annual Plan processes. This paper seeks Councillors input to develop processes by which projects can be assessed alongside each other to provide a mechanism for allocating funding based on a set of strategic goals and criteria. This would also provide a mechanism for new potential projects to be considered for funding within the framework where the funding sought by projects currently exceeds the available budget.
- 7.12. The Biodiversity Partnerships budget accounts for over half (53%) of the total rate funding for the non-regulatory biodiversity programme. The programme is divided into two sections: biodiversity collaborations (\$490,094), and community biodiversity grants (\$135,852). Funding types are a mix of targeted and general rates. In addition to the specific projects, an amount is set aside (community biodiversity management), primarily for internal labour (staff costs) and vehicle costs to support these projects.
- 7.13. Whilst the current programme delivers biodiversity and community outcomes, a carefully developed strategic approach to the programme would likely deliver even greater benefits to biodiversity and communities within the region. Staff have undertaken a preliminary assessment to test this concept. To do this projects within the current programme were assessed for their relative contributions (low, medium, high) to each of the following:
1. Biodiversity value:
This measure included consideration of: the threat status of the ecosystem or protection for threatened species; if the project provided buffer protection for nearby taonga ecosystems or species; or provides habitat connectivity, or amenity value.
 2. Biodiversity outcomes:

This was a measure of what the project delivered in terms of contribution to biodiversity management, including protection, restoration and enhancement. As outcomes are not measured for most projects management inputs were used as a proxy for outcomes.

3. Community empowerment:

This measure included consideration of: the level of active participation from the community; the accessibility of the site; and the educational values associated with the project.

- 7.14. This framework of assessing projects provided a useful mechanism to consider the relative benefits of projects and it was identified that some more detailed criteria will be required to ensure a robust repeatable ranking process can be undertaken. This paper is seeking a workshop with Councillors to assist with refining the process by which projects can be ranked to determine funding priorities. To finalise the process the outcomes sought from these projects will require further refinement and an underlying ranking criteria will need to be developed. Another consideration for Council is the duration of funding for the projects e.g. should projects be funded on an annual basis or should some be funded for longer periods of time e.g. Over the term of the Long-term Plan (10 years) or over the first three years of a Long-term Plan.
- 7.15. In summary staff suggest that council consider a review of the Biodiversity Partnerships Programme addressing:
1. The development of a strategic overarching goal
 2. The format of the programme for example, implementing a three tiered funding structure:
 - a. identifying icon projects which will receive for a ten year period
 - b. projects that are funded for LTP duration (3 years)
 - c. projects that are funded for annually
 3. The development of a set of assessment criteria to assess projects against
 4. Assembling a Councillor panel or council process to annually assess projects against the developed criteria and make funding allocation decisions.
- 7.16. The proposed process is that Councillors hold a workshop to discuss the items identified above and this is reported back to a Council Committee meeting for decision making and that the new system be implemented from the start of the new financial year.
- 7.17. As a part of this process, staff are also seeking Councils view on the current approach of solely funding, directly with other agencies, community groups and not having a component of broader community engagement around biodiversity. An initiative such as this would seek to engage and mobilise community members at an individual or household level through activities such as urban pest control programmes or having an active programme of opportunities for community members to attend biodiversity type events e.g. [BioBlitz](#), planting days etc.
- 7.18. A further component of the biodiversity partnerships programme could be actively seeking external funding opportunities to assist with biodiversity enhancement projects including collaborative projects with other agencies and the community. Often a requirement of these types of funding programmes is the requirement to have a funding share and Councils view on utilising some of the biodiversity partnerships programme funding for this type of initiative is sought.

11 February 2020

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1. The decision to review the biodiversity partnerships programme is one that may be of considerable interest to the various parties that receive this funding at present and also to those that would seek funding should there be an opportunity for new projects to be funded.

9. TIMELINE / NEXT STEPS

- 9.1. It is proposed that a Council workshop be arranged for a time in March/April, and that the Group Manager of Natural Resources and Partnerships reports back to Council for final decisions to provide for the approach to be utilised in the 2020/2021 financial year that starts in 1 July 2020.

10. SIGNIFICANCE

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

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ANNEXES

- A Biodiversity Partnership Programme Projects