

Report No.	20-100
<b>Decision Required</b>	

## BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS PROJECTS

### 1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. This item introduces Horizons' current approach to biodiversity management with a focus on the non-regulatory biodiversity activities. The paper seeks Council's decision on proposed changes to Horizons' Biodiversity Partnerships Programme, which includes the range of collaborative projects with other agencies and community groups to enhance biodiversity within the Region. The item asks for Council's decision on funding allocation for Biodiversity Partnerships projects for the 2020-21 year.

### 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1. Horizons' One Plan provides the guiding strategy for management of biodiversity by Horizons within the Region. The One Plan identified biodiversity as one of the Region's 'Big 4' key resource management issues.
- 2.2. 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. It 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.
- 2.3. Over the past two years the Non-regulatory Biodiversity Programme has been undergoing review with the aim of improving processes and biodiversity outcomes Region-wide while bringing Horizons closer to meeting requirements under the proposed **National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (NPS-IB)**. As part of the Biodiversity Partnerships review a paper and associated workshop outlining the non-regulatory biodiversity work and seeking the newly elected Council's guidance around the biodiversity partnerships programme was presented to the Strategy and Policy Committee in February 2020.
- 2.4. As a result of the review, paper, and council workshop, changes were made through the Annual Plan budget to increase staff capacity to further support community engagement and mobilise community members around biodiversity. The Committee also discussed changes to the funding structure to enable the biodiversity partnerships programme to provide a more contestable approach to funding community projects supported by clear assessment criteria. There was additional consideration and discussion about the potential to leverage available funding to actively seek external funding opportunities to assist with biodiversity enhancement projects including collaborative projects with other agencies and the community.
- 2.5. The programme structure outlined below incorporates the Committee's views and feedback on the earlier February 2020 paper and workshop with further discussion and thinking. Proposed changes include: the adoption of a strategic goal for the programme, changes to the funding structure of the programme including increasing the contestable fund component, adoption of criteria to assess projects for the contestable fund, apportioning part of the budget for community engagement, and a provision allowing for leveraging

external funding at times. The paper also discusses changes made to the programme through the 2020-21 Annual Plan process.

### 3. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee recommends that Council:

- a. receives the information contained in Report No. 20-100.
- b. approves the goal of the Biodiversity Partnerships programme as “Empowering communities to engage with biodiversity”.
- c. approves the revisited structure for the Biodiversity Partnerships programme to include community engagement, biodiversity collaboration projects (“icon” and targeted rates projects), and the contestable biodiversity grants fund;
- d. approves allocation of \$50,000 excluding GST to biodiversity community engagement activities.
- e. approves allocations of Horizons funding to biodiversity collaboration projects for the 2020-21 financial year as follows:

<b>Project</b>	<b>2020-21 FY (excluding GST)</b>
Te Āpiti	\$244,856
Kia Wharite	\$150,000
Pūkaha	\$37,292
Bushy Park	\$20,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$452,148</b>

- f. approves allocations of Horizons funding to the “Biodiversity Grants fund” allocation for the 2020-2021 financial year as follows:

<b>Project</b>	<b>2020-21 FY (excluding GST)</b>
Cape Turnagain	\$10,000
Manawatū Estuary	\$25,000
Te Pōtae o Awarua	\$15,000
Turitea Reserve	\$20,000
Awahuri Forest- Kitchener	\$8,000
Ahimate Reserve	\$5,000
Tawata	\$15,000
Kahutarawa Stream	\$8,000
Massey Hill	\$3,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$109,500</b>

- g. approves allocation of Horizons funding to the Weedbusters programme of \$22,996 excluding GST.
- h. approves the framework for a contestable fund to be run as a contestable process from the 2021-22 financial year.
- i. approves Councillor [x] as the chair for the decision-making committee for the contestable fund and Councillor/s [x] as the other committee member/s.

#### 4. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 4.1. There are no financial impacts to Horizons as a part of this item.
- 4.2. The paper does enable Councillor oversight 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 2020-21 the Biodiversity Partnerships Programme has a total budget of \$1,189,538.29, including \$143,000 from external sources. As drafted, the resolutions provide for budget allocations within the budget for 2020-21 for this activity.
- 4.3. All financial amounts in this paper are exclusive of GST.

#### 5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1. A primary focus of the Biodiversity Partnerships Programme is enabling communities 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, it does not have a component whereby a wider range of community engagement around biodiversity is included. Through the Annual Plan process additional staff capacity was approved to deliver increased 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

##### Horizons Biodiversity Strategy

- 7.1. 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)**.
- 7.2. The guiding strategy for biodiversity implementation to date has been the One Plan, with resourcing for the biodiversity strategy largely determined through Long-term Plan and Annual Plan processes. 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 around April 2021.
- 7.3. Central to Horizons' biodiversity work across the Region is the **Natural Resources and Partnerships (NRP)** group's 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.

**Biodiversity Partnerships Fund**

- 7.4. This item focuses on the Biodiversity Partnerships Programme, where biodiversity-related projects 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.
- 7.5. The Biodiversity Partnerships budget accounts for more than half (53%) of the total rate funding for the non-regulatory biodiversity programme. The programme is divided into two sections: biodiversity collaborations (\$547,048) and community biodiversity grants (\$157,236). Funding types are a mix of targeted and general rates. In addition to the specific projects, an amount is set aside (community biodiversity management: \$342,159), primarily for internal labour (staff costs) and vehicle costs to support these projects. While the programme has delivered biodiversity and community outcomes, a carefully developed strategic approach would likely deliver even greater benefits to biodiversity and communities in the Region.
- 7.6. A paper and associated workshop outlining the non-regulatory biodiversity work and seeking the new Councils guidance around the biodiversity partnerships programme was presented to the Strategy and Policy Committee in February 2020. As a result of the review, paper, and council workshop, changes were made through the Annual Plan budget to increase staff capacity to further support community engagement and mobilise community members around biodiversity. The Committee also provisionally agreed to support changes to the funding structure to enable the Biodiversity Partnerships Programme to provide a more contestable approach to the funding of community projects supported by clear assessment criteria. Further consideration and discussion focused on the potential to leverage available funding to actively seek external funding opportunities to assist with biodiversity enhancement projects, including collaborative projects with other agencies and the community.
- 7.7. The programme structure outlined below incorporates the Committee's views and feedback on the earlier February 2020 paper and workshop.

**Goal/Vision**

- 7.8. This programme has evolved through time and although there has been no strategic overarching goal or vision for the programme the current suite of projects includes sites or areas with environmental, social and cultural values. Projects have varying community, and biodiversity outcomes.
- 7.9. The following goal was refined after feedback the Committee in February:  
"Empowering communities to engage with indigenous biodiversity".
- 7.10. This sets out the Council's vision for the Biodiversity Partnerships Programme and represents a community opportunity to develop leadership focused on the protection, restoration or enhancement of biodiversity across the Manawatū- Whanganui Region and capture the social and economic benefits of such leadership. It aligns with the current drafting of Long-term Plan community outcomes, and links with One Plan objectives and policies.

**Programme Structure**

- 7.11. To date the Biodiversity Partnerships Programme has included projects divided into two sections – Biodiversity Collaborations (\$547,048) and Community Biodiversity (\$157,236). Currently two of the Biodiversity Collaborations projects are funded through targeted rate,

i.e. **Rangitikei Environment Group (REG)** and Waiterere Beach Community Project, with the remaining projects funded through general rates. In addition to the specific projects, an amount is set aside (Community Biodiversity Management: \$342,159), primarily for internal labour (staff) and vehicle costs, to support these projects.

- 7.12. The current structure of the community biodiversity programme is based on working with a limited number of other agencies, iwi/hapu and community groups. Last year contestable funding accounted for just over 3% of total available funding. Opening a greater proportion of the budget to contestable funding may attract funding applications from a more diverse range of groups throughout the Region and potentially provide greater opportunities for new groups to access funding. If a contestable process is to be run it is important to have clear eligibility and assessment criteria to provide a fair and transparent process. This is discussed in more detail below.

### **Annual Plan Changes**

- 7.13. Changes made through the Annual Plan process include additional expenditure on biodiversity, partially offset by reduced expenditure on biosecurity. This includes new income plus operational and capital expenditure for biodiversity enhancement at Te Āpiti - Manawatū Gorge, through increased rate funding and revenue from Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency. Additional changes were made to the Biodiversity Partnerships budget to support broader community engagement around biodiversity. This included an additional staff position for community engagement activity related to biodiversity
- 7.14. It is proposed that the Biodiversity Partnerships funding is split into three areas:
- community engagement
  - biodiversity collaborations including “icon” projects and projects funded through targeted rates, and
  - a contestable biodiversity grants fund.
- 7.15. This would allow for a small number of “iconic” or highly collaborative projects to be funded on a longer-term basis at Council’s discretion, but would open up a greater portion of the fund to a contestable process supporting the development and inclusion of new projects in the programme. Projects included as “icon” projects or those funded through targeted rates would be reviewed by Councillors through the Long-term Plan process, with the remainder of the funding contributing to a contestable fund overseen by Councillors. More information on these three parts of the biodiversity partnership programme including process and selection criteria for the contestable fund are outlined in the sections below and in Table 1.

### **Community Engagement**

- 7.16. Additional community engagement activity has been enabled via the Annual Plan process with the increase in staff capacity. This aims to provide opportunities to engage and mobilise community members at an individual or household level through a calendar of community events and activities, e.g. [BioBlitz](#), planting days, trapping workshops etc. The new community biodiversity position and proposed associated operational budget (\$50,000) were partially offset by a reduction in the amount of grant money for community biodiversity, which included a decrease in the funding available to some projects.

### **Biodiversity Collaborations**

- 7.17. The biodiversity collaborations projects are proposed to be made up of potential “icon” projects and projects that are target rate funded
- 7.18. The proposed icon projects are Te Āpiti, Kia Wharite, Bushy Park, Pūkaha. Selection criteria were modified from contestable fund criteria (outlined in section below) and can be broadly categorised as: level of partnership, value to biodiversity, educational value and recreational or public engagement, and duration of investment.
- 7.19. Rangitikei Environment Group and Waitarere Beach Community Project are both included in the Biodiversity Collaborations projects due to their targeted rate status.

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- 7.20. The Te Āpiti Manawatū Gorge project has additional external funding this year for operational and capital expenditure for biodiversity enhancement at Te Āpiti - Manawatū Gorge, through increased rate funding and additional funding from Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency. Horizons contribution of \$244,856 of operational funding is in addition to the external funding paid to Horizons for activity at this location of \$143,000 from a range of partners including Palmerston North City Council, Department of Conservation, Tararua District Council, Manawatu District Council, Kiwirail and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency. It is noted that other agencies are also contributing to work at this location separate to the funding that is administered through Horizons budgets.
- 7.21. The Kia Wharite project receives \$150,000 per annum. This is to complement significant investment by the Department of Conservation at the location. Horizons contribution is managed by Horizons separate to the Department of Conservation Funding. The Department of Conservation are currently undertaking a review of their activity at this location and should they decide to reduce funding of their effort at the site, Horizons would also review the level of funding at this location.
- 7.22. Funding for Pūkaha is proposed to be increased (Table 1) by \$10,531 from last year, for pest plant control in the buffer zone (which includes some privately owned native forest). This previously was funded through the priority sites programme but will now be funded through the community partnerships budget. This takes the total funding for this project to \$37,292.
- 7.23. Funding for Weedbusters was adjusted through the Annual Plan process. From the 2020-21 financial year the Weedbusters programme and associated funding (\$22,996) will be managed by the Biosecurity Plants team (where previously this has been managed by the Biodiversity Team).

Table 1: Expenditure in the Biodiversity Partnerships Programme

Biodiversity Partnerships	Notes	Horizons Funding	Operational
<b>Total Rateable Revenue</b>			<b>\$1,046,538</b>
<i>Community Biodiversity Management</i>	<i>Internal labour and associated costs</i>		<i>\$342,159</i>
<b>Targeted Rate-funded Projects</b>			<b>\$102,000</b>
<i>Rangitikei Environment Group (REG)</i>			<i>\$95,004</i>
<i>Waitare Beach Community Project</i>			<i>\$6,996</i>
<b>"Icon" Projects</b>			<b>\$452,148</b>
<i>Te Āpiti</i>			<i>\$244,856</i>
<i>Kia Wharite</i>			<i>\$150,000</i>
<i>Bushy Park</i>			<i>\$20,000</i>
<i>Pūkaha</i>			<i>\$37,292</i>
<b>Other</b>			
Community Engagement Budget			\$50,000
Weedbusters			\$22,996
Remaining funding	Contestable fund		\$77,235

### Contestable Biodiversity Grants Fund

- 7.24. The contestable funding approach recommended is based on the processes used in the freshwater programme. Development of a set of criteria to support the prioritisation and assessment of projects provides a useful mechanism to consider the relative benefits of projects while supporting a transparent, robust, repeatable ranking process. A framework for assessing projects was outlined in the February paper and workshop and provided a useful mechanism to assess projects. The Committee supported the four main criteria but

requested changes and more detail. Feedback has been considered and given the time required for a contestable process it has been determined, in consultation with the Chair of Horizons that in the 2020-21 year staff would apply the criteria and seek Council's direction on projects. A contestable process will be run in 2021 for the 2021-22 year projects.

- 7.25. Applications are assessed by Horizons' staff according to how well they meet the following four criteria:

**Place** – how unique or special is the project and how does the project contribute to restoring and/or maintaining the full range of indigenous ecosystems within the Region? Projects that benefit threatened ecosystems will be prioritised. Place may also include how the project involves iwi Māori, including their cultural values, interests and associations, the relationship of Māori and their culture and traditions with land, water, sites, waahi tapu and other taonga including fauna and flora.

**Biodiversity Outcomes** – is there a clear benefit and what is the size of that benefit in relation to the size of investment. These criteria represent a clear need for the project and how the project will directly promote, enhance or protect biodiversity within Horizons Region. This includes the likelihood of success, and the applicant's capability to deliver the outcomes of the project. Desirable attributes include a robust project plan and a clear link between the action to be undertaken and biodiversity outcomes including a method for monitoring the success of the project that is appropriate to the size of the grant.

**Community Outcomes** – participation and awareness; how the project involves the wider community including iwi and increases public awareness of the importance and issues surrounding biodiversity. This considers the ongoing accessibility of the site to the community, the educational value, and the number of people involved.

**Collaboration and Partnership** – whether the applicants have explored and developed opportunities for collaboration and partnership with others resulting in contributory funding from other parties. This includes applicant contribution, i.e. whether the applicant is actively involved in the project and making a contribution in the form of material, labour, advisory role, education or financial contribution. Desirable attributes include a project budget providing visibility of all funding sources for the project.

- 7.26. The Community Biodiversity Grant Programme is forecast to have an available budget of \$77,235; however, this year (2020-21) a projected shortfall in staff costs has been reallocated to increase available grant funding to \$109,500. In future years the Community Biodiversity Grant Programme would operate as a contestable process, supporting both one-off and multi-year project grants. For one-off project grants, grant recipients would have 12 months to complete project work and grant accountability requirements. A limited number of multi-year project grants are recommended to be available, allowing applicants to apply once to receive funding annually for up to three years.

- 7.27. 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. These types of funding programmes often require a funding share. It is proposed that funding for this type of initiative is made available from the contestable fund amount if an appropriate opportunity is presented/available.

#### **Funding Projects for this year**

- 7.28. In addition to the "icon" projects and targeted rates projects outlined above, a number of projects have funding committed for this year, so a fully contestable process outlined in the section above will not be possible until the 2021-22 financial year.
- 7.29. The funding committed for the 2020-21 year through "icon" projects, targeted rates projects and Weedbusters is \$577,144. A further \$134,240 is available to fund remaining projects this year. This is higher than the budgeted amount of \$77,235 as projected savings in staff

time this year have been reallocated to grant funding, resulting in a larger budget this year than expected in future years.

- 7.30. Nine remaining projects have been assessed by a panel of four Horizons Regional Council staff according to how well they meet the criteria outlined above and are prioritised for funding. A further four were not assessed as there is no activity expected in the coming financial year for these projects (Foxton River Loop, Gate Pā, Ōhau Beach, Moawhango River Willow Clearance). A summary, including proposed funding for this year is prioritised in descending order in Table 2 below.

*Table 2: Community Projects in prioritised order, showing funding allocated last year (2019-20) and the proposed funding for the 2020-21 financial year. Total funding for the 2020-21 financial year is greater than budgeted (\$77,235) because a projected shortfall in staff costs has been reallocated to increase available grant funding.*

<b>Project</b>	<b>2019-20 FY</b>	<b>Proposed 2020-21 FY</b>
Cape Turnagain	\$5,000	\$10,000
Manawatū Estuary	\$8,000	\$25,000
Te Pōtae o Awarua	\$15,000	\$15,000
Turitea Reserve	\$23,000	\$20,000
Awahuri Forest- Kitchener	\$8,000	\$8,000
Ahimate Reserve	\$7,000	\$5,000
Tawata	\$50,005	\$15,000
Kahutarawa Stream	\$11,000	\$8,000
Massey Hill	\$5,000	\$3,500
Moawhango River Willow Clearing	\$5,000	\$-
Foxton River Loop	\$1,000	\$-
Gate Pā	\$1,000	\$-
Ōhau Beach	\$1,000	\$-
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$135,005</b>	<b>\$109,500</b>

- 7.31. The suggested funding structure for several projects differs from previous years and where this is considered significant, reasons are outlined below:

#### Cape Turnagain

- 7.32. The 2020-21 financial year is the final year of a three-year collaborative project to restore the coastal vegetation at this ecologically important site. The project has a total budget of \$144,000 with Horizons committing to \$30,000, split \$15,000 in year one, \$5,000 in year two and \$10,000 in year three.

#### Manawatū Estuary

- 7.33. Manawatū Estuary is the largest estuary in the lower North Island of New Zealand. Much of the site remains in a highly natural state and it is one of the largest remaining natural areas in the Region. The site is nationally important for migratory shorebirds with at least 95 species recorded. The budget at this site has in the past provided advice and funding assistance to the Manawatū Estuary Management Team for pest animal control, weed control and environmental initiatives. This year a significant amount of additional funding (\$17,000) has been allocated to fund a further pest management action plan and further pest management. This is additional to the \$8,000 already allocated for pest control at the Estuary.

#### Tawata

- 7.34. This project's goal is to restore the health of approximately 100 ha of forest on land administered by the Tawata Whanau Trust and Taiaoroa I.T. Farm (formerly Titi Tihu



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Putere Farm). With Horizons support the forest is now completely fenced from stock. After a year of no work being carried out due to changing personnel at Tawata Whanau Trust, work has resumed in the sanctuary area with bait stations filled for possum and rat control, and goat control undertaken to allow the continued regeneration of the forest. The Trust are very keen to progress this project and are reviewing and updating their operational plans to move forward successfully. The decrease in funding reflects the decreased activity at this site.

## 8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1. The proposed changes the Biodiversity Partnerships Programme may be of considerable interest to the various parties that receive this funding 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:

- Council accept the proposed structure outlined above for this financial year with a fully contestable process to begin in the 2021-22 financial year.
- Any changes to the “icon” and targeted rates projects to be made through the Long-term Plan process.
- Council elect a committee to approve contestable grant funding under recommendation for the 2021-22 financial year.

Alternatively Council may prefer a different approach.

- 9.2. If Council approves the the proposed structure outlined above for this financial year, with a fully contestable process to begin in the 2021-22 financial year, staff will work with stakeholders to deliver projects for this year, and develop a timeline and process for contestable funding for the 2021-22 financial year.

## 10. SIGNIFICANCE

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

Dr Lizzie Daly

**SENIOR SCIENTIST – ECOLOGY**

Dr Jon Roygard

**GROUP MANAGER NATURAL RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS**

## ANNEXES

There are no attachments for this report.