

1 Setting the Scene

1.1 Scope and Introduction

The challenge for the Manawatu-Wanganui Region (Region) is to strike the ideal balance between using natural resources for economic and social wellbeing, while keeping the environment in good health. The Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council's (Regional Council) role is to find a satisfactory way to make this seemingly conflicting challenge a reality for the community.

The blueprint for this work is the One Plan. It has a lifespan of 10 years. This is an insignificant timeframe in the natural world but in this short period tangible progress must be made to meet this challenge.

This Plan is a full-scale review of the first set of resource management plans for the Region. Progress under these plans was slow because the Regional Council tried to spread its resources over all the many issues identified during development of the plans.

The Regional Council's approach in this Plan is to focus its resources on making significant progress on the four biggest environmental issues identified for the Region. That does not mean the remaining issues identified in this Plan are unimportant, simply that they are lower priority work for the 10-year life of this Plan.

To make the One Plan compact and easy to use we have tried to keep background and explanatory information to a minimum. Further information and explanations can be found in the State of the Environment (SOE) Reports published by the Regional Council and in the technical reports and Consideration of Alternatives, Benefits and Costs (s32 report) which accompany the One Plan.

Where the meaning of the Māori and English text used in this Plan differs, the English interpretation shall be taken as the correct one.

1.2 What is the One Plan?

The One Plan has been prepared by the Regional Council in accordance with its functions under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).

The One Plan can be described as a "one-stop-shop" regional planning document that defines how the natural and physical resources of the Region (including fresh air, clean water, productive land and natural ecosystems) will be cared for and managed by the Regional Council in partnership with Territorial Authorities and the community.

The One Plan combines the requirements for preparation of a Regional Policy Statement and a Regional Plan. Under the RMA, preparation of a Regional Policy Statement is mandatory, whilst the preparation of a Regional Plan is discretionary (except for a Regional Coastal Plan).

The Plan has effect over the entire Region (although some objectives, policies and rules apply only in specific parts of the Region).

To distinguish the different planning functions encompassed by the One Plan, the Plan is split into two main parts.

Part I is the Regional Policy Statement section of the One Plan. It sets out the regionally significant resource management issues (identified through a process that drew on both community and technical information), and outlines the objectives, policies and methods that will be used to address these issues.

Part II is the Regional Plan section of the One Plan. It specifies the controls on natural and physical resource use (that is, objectives, policies and regional rules). These controls cover both permitted activities (which allow people to use and develop resources without the need for resource consents) and the application for and issuing of resource consents. Chapter 18 (Activities in the Coastal Marine Area) and Schedule I, together with Chapters 11, 12 and 19, and the relevant definitions in the Glossary, are the Regional Coastal Plan, as required by s64 of the RMA.

1.3 Our Region's Challenges – the “Big Four”

The focus of the One Plan is four keystone environmental issues: surface water quality degradation, increasing water demand, unsustainable hill country land use and threatened indigenous biodiversity. These issues were identified during public consultation and confirmed by research of the Regional Council's science team.

By focusing on these Big Four issues, substantial progress can be made at an affordable level of expenditure for the Region. The Big Four have significant interconnection and it is expected that work on one issue will also benefit progress on one or more of the other issues. Notwithstanding the focus on these Big Four issues, other resource management issues are also important and are dealt with in the One Plan.

Issue 1: Surface Water Quality Degradation

The Problem:

Run-off of nutrients, sediment and bacteria from farms is now the single largest threat to water quality in the Region. In some water bodies it is risky to swim or gather food, and aquatic life is being damaged. Priority catchments for water quality enhancement include those listed in Table 14.1 in Part II of the Plan which sets out the specified *Water Management Zones** and *Sub-zones** (priority catchments) where management of intensive farming land use activities will be specifically controlled. These are: Mangapapa River, Mangatainoka River, Upper Manawatu River above Hopelands, Waikawa Stream, Manawatu River above Gorge, other south-west catchments (Papaitonga), and other coastal lakes (Northern Manawatu).

An Example: The Manawatu River

In the Manawatu River nutrient enrichment is one of the most critical problems. Recent research found that on an annual basis, more than 80% of the nitrogen and 50% of the dissolved reactive phosphorus found in the Manawatu River at Hopelands is coming from run-off from agricultural land. This pattern is repeated in many other catchments.

Excessive nutrients cause nuisance algae growth on the river bed, particularly during summertime low flows.

Proposed Approach:

Set water quality targets for ecosystem, recreational, cultural and water-use values identified for catchment *Water Management Sub-zones**. Identify *Water Management Sub-zones** most affected by nutrient enrichment and/or bacterial contamination. Use a mixture of persuasion, advice and rules to manage agricultural run-off in these *Water Management Sub-zones**.

Look For:

Objectives, policies and methods that address this keystone issue in Chapter 5 and rules in Chapter 14.

Issue 2: Increasing Water Demand**The Problem:**

The amount of water used from ground and surface water resources increases each year. At certain times of the year *public water supply** and irrigation demand exceed what some water bodies in the Region can supply.

An Example: The Upper Manawatu River

Across the Region, total consented abstraction volumes have more than doubled since 1997 (Horizons Regional Council, 2005, SOE Report). In the upper Manawatu River and its tributaries, the current demand for water is close to three times that of 1997. Most of this increased demand is for agricultural irrigation which, in 2005, was four times the 1997 levels and took up over 80% of the water allocated.

Proposed Approach:

The Regional Council has set minimum environmental flows and defined core allocation volumes for *Water Management Sub-zones** under pressure from surface takes. These will be used to manage and allocate water. The Regional Council is also working with water users to encourage water-use efficiency and accurately define abstraction rates using telemetered water meters.

Look For:

Objectives, policies and methods that address this keystone issue in Chapter 5 and rules in Chapter 16.

Issue 3: Unsustainable Hill Country Land Use**The Problem:**

Unsustainable pasture-based farming practices in the Region's steeper hill country damage soil structure and accelerate erosion causing muddy rivers, increasing river siltation downstream and reducing the protection level of flood control schemes.

An Example: February 2004 Storm

The Region has 300,000 hectares of hill country land at risk of moderate to severe erosion. In the severe storm events of February 2004, huge quantities of soil poured off the hills of the middle catchments west of the Ruahine Ranges and into some water bodies such as the Whanganui, Rangitikei, Oroua and Pohangina Rivers. Many areas of the Region were badly affected, with severe hillside scarring and valley in-filling often reported in national media coverage.

Proposed Approach:

Implementation of a Sustainable Land Use Initiative (SLUI) on hill country land that is subject to an elevated risk of *accelerated erosion** within the Region, in combination with rules where appropriate. The initiative is underpinned by the development of voluntary management plans. These voluntary plans provide paddock-scale best land management advice while optimising economic return to the landowner. The first voluntary management plan was piloted on a farm in the Pohangina Valley in 2005 and the programme is currently being rolled out in priority areas.

The SLUI has the additional benefit of assisting the Region to adapt to the effects of climate change.

Look For:

Objectives, policies and methods that address this keystone issue in Chapter 4 and rules in Chapter 13.

Issue 4: Threatened Indigenous Biological Diversity

The Problem:

Due to more than a century of landscape modification, the Region has lost much of its indigenous habitat. Habitat remnants continue to be threatened by land development and by pest plants and pest animals.

An Example: Vanishing Wetland Habitats

The Manawatu Plains were once covered by a mosaic of wetland habitats. Large-scale drainage has reduced this wetland habitat to about 3% of its former area and, although drainage has mostly stopped, the few remaining wetland habitats are still vulnerable.

Proposed Approach:

The Regional Council will be the lead agency for indigenous biodiversity¹ management for the Region by controlling activities in rare habitats, threatened habitats and at-risk habitats, and working with landowners to protect and enhance these habitats.

The Regional Council has identified the Region's top 100 wetland habitats and is encouraging their owners through advice and financial incentives to actively manage these habitats. The objective of the programme is to have all 100 wetlands under active management within 10 years.

Look For:

Objectives, policies and methods that address this keystone issue in Chapter 6 and rules in Chapter 13.

1.4 Planning for Climate Change

Climate change is not one of the Big Four issues dealt with in the One Plan, but it is an overarching issue for the regional community and touches on many of the keystone issues.

The Problem:

There is conclusive evidence that our climate is changing. The Region can expect (New Zealand Climate Change Office, 2005):

- a 30-50 cm rise in sea level in the next 100 years
- an increase of up to 3°C in temperature in the next 70-100 years
- more rainfall in the western part of the Region and less in the east
- more westerly winds
- an increase in more extreme weather events – floods, droughts and high winds.

Climate change could result in both positive and negative effects for the Region. People are likely to enjoy the benefits of warmer winters with fewer frosts but hotter summers will bring increased risks of heat stress, drought and possibly the introduction of new pests and subtropical diseases. The Region is likely to experience more frequent heavy rainfalls and floods. Changing weather patterns may provide new horticultural or cropping opportunities, but may also impact on biodiversity by affecting the balance of ecosystems. Species that are already under threat or are at the limit of their climatic range may not be able to survive.

¹ "Biodiversity" may be used as an alternative to "biological diversity".

Proposed Approach:

The Regional Council's primary focus is to help the Region adapt to the effects of climate change by:

- promoting resilient land-management practices under the SLUI, which will reduce the effects of climate change and provide carbon sinks at the same time
- managing water quality within a values framework responsive to climate change
- managing water quantity according to minimum flows and a core allocation framework responsive to climate change
- planning for changes to the scale and frequency of natural hazards.

Look For:

Objectives, policies and methods that directly or indirectly address climate change in Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 9.

1.5 Working Towards a Better Future

Achieving the right balance, between encouraging and supporting change and requiring it, using rules in this Plan, is a significant challenge. The Regional Council's overall approach to One Plan implementation is to use methods which encourage responsible resource use, benefit responsible resource users and punish irresponsible resource users.

To make progress on the Big Four issues, a number of changes to the way natural resources are developed and used will need to be made. Some changes are a significant departure from existing practice and may be viewed as daunting by resource users. This is understandable and part of the Regional Council's role is to encourage and support resource users through this period of change.

The Regional Council holds the view that:

- (i) working with people and communities to evaluate and deliver local solutions for local issues is the preferred approach to resource management
- (ii) solutions need to be practical, appropriate to the scale of the problem and affordable for ratepayers and communities in the Region.

To deal with the issues the Regional Council will use a suite of policies and methods. The preference in this Plan is to use approaches that promote and encourage voluntary adoption of environment-friendly resource use practices. These could include encouraging activities that do any of the following:

- (i) operate in accordance with codes of practice and other good practice initiatives
- (ii) have net environmental benefits, especially where the benefits support progress on the Big Four issues
- (iii) assist the Region to adapt to climate change
- (iv) reduce the demand for water at low river flows - for example, water harvesting
- (v) provide habitat enhancement, especially if it results in benefits to indigenous biodiversity
- (vi) result in innovative ways to reduce the impact of otherwise adverse effects on the environment - for example, the use of new technology or science.

If this emphasis on promoting and encouraging change is not effective, the Regional Council will be forced to switch its policy emphasis to using rules to

require appropriate changes, either at the time of the next Plan review or through the plan change process.

1.6 Codes of Practice and Other Good Practice Initiatives

It is acknowledged that the initiatives of others can be more effective than rules developed by the Regional Council. For this reason, standards produced by Standards New Zealand, industry-developed codes of practice and other good practice initiatives are encouraged and supported by the Regional Council.

The Regional Council is especially supportive of codes of practice or good practice initiatives that:

- (i) are consistent with the RMA and the environmental provisions of this Plan
- (ii) are prepared by the users, for the users
- (iii) in cases where they are used as conditions in a rule or resource consent, ensure that they satisfy legal tests.

The Regional Council will recognise codes of practice and other good practice initiatives in one or more of the following ways:

- (i) utilising codes of practice produced by industry groups and standards produced by Standards New Zealand in permitted activity rule conditions, where appropriate
- (ii) preparing rules requiring resource consents that give favourable treatment to activities complying with codes of practice or other good practice initiatives
- (iii) granting consents for longer durations for activities complying with codes of practice or other good practice initiatives
- (iv) recognising codes of practice and other good practice initiatives in consent conditions
- (v) reducing compliance monitoring, especially where the codes of practice or other good practice initiatives include a component of independent audit.

The Regional Council has a particular interest in collaborating with resource users undertaking such activities as forestry, pastoral farming on hill country land that is subject to a risk of *accelerated erosion**, *dairy farming**, pig farming, Territorial Authority utilities, and river and drainage scheme works. The purpose of this collaboration is to develop and recognise codes of practice, training programmes and other good practice initiatives that complement changes needed to make progress on the Big Four issues. The Regional Council will also willingly be involved in the preparation of any code of practice or other good practice initiative that is likely to be of environmental benefit in the Region.