

BEFORE THE HEARINGS COMMITTEE

IN THE MATTER

**of hearings on
submissions concerning
the proposed One Plan
notified by the
Manawatu-Wanganui
Regional Council**

**SECTION 42A REPORT OF ALISTAIR BEVERIDGE
ON BEHALF OF HORIZONS REGIONAL COUNCIL
CONCERNING INDIGENOUS BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

1 INTRODUCTION

My qualifications/experience

1. My full name is Alistair Beveridge. I have a Bachelor of Science with Honours and Master of Science degrees, both in physical geography, from Otago University. I have been with Horizons Regional Council for approximately twelve years, and have held a number of positions within the organisation during this time. My most recent position has been that of Manager – Biodiversity and Water Quality, which I have held for three years. This role is primarily responsible for coordinating the delivery of Horizons' non-regulatory approach to biodiversity and water quality management, with secondary responsibilities for managing Totara Reserve Regional Park and Horizons' environmental education programme. Of relevance to the hearing proceedings is that I have a lead role in developing and delivering (in conjunction with Horizons staff and external stakeholders) a comprehensive and successful non-regulatory approach to biodiversity protection and enhancement within the Region.
2. I have read the Environment Court's practice note 'Expert Witnesses – Code of Conduct' and agree to comply with it.

Scope of evidence

3. My evidence is limited to providing background and context to Horizons' non-regulatory biodiversity protection and enhancement programme, that is, why the programme was developed, how it works, Horizons' funding, the involvement of partnering organisations, and how the programme is progressing. My evidence should be read in conjunction with that prepared by Helen Marr and Fleur Maseyk who provide much of the contextual information relating to the state of the Manawatu-Wanganui Region's biodiversity resource and Horizons' policy/regulatory response.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

4. Biodiversity in the Region is in a perilous state, and Horizons has a statutory responsibility towards biodiversity management. Helen Marr and Fleur Maseyk cover the policy/regulatory response to biodiversity management, whilst I cover the non-regulatory response.
5. Up until the early 2000s Horizons' involvement in biodiversity management was limited and low-key, with most works being on a Region-wide scale (eg. pest plant control), with the small

amount of site-led works typically undertaken on an ad hoc basis. Generally, there was little management support for, staff skills in, or resources to assist with, biodiversity management

6. This all changed in the early 2000s with biodiversity becoming an organisational priority, on the back of strong support through the community consultation process of the organisation's first Long Term Community Council Plan (LTCCP), and a consequent increase in management emphasis and resourcing. It was at this time the Regional biodiversity programme was established, initially with a wetland programme and more recently with a bush remnant programme. These programmes are based on sound site information and clear targets, and supported by appropriately trained and resourced staff. The initial priority was those sites located on private land, but as the programme has matured community and joint biodiversity projects have been added.
7. The programme has evolved over time, as improvements have been made, and will continue to be made. The programme is proving very successful, exceeding all agreed targets. This success can be attributed to the willingness of landowners to engage and participate in the programme, the efforts and passion of staff, the assistance (funding and in-kind contributions) from partnering organisations, and the role Horizons plays in weaving these elements together into a package with clear directions and outcomes.

3 HORIZONS' BIODIVERSITY PROGRAMME

8. In this section of my evidence, I outline:
 - why Horizons' non-regulatory biodiversity programme was developed;
 - how the programme works;
 - Horizons' funding support for the programme;
 - the role and importance of partnering organisations; and
 - how the programme is progressing.

Why the biodiversity programme was developed

9. As outlined in Fleur Maseyk's evidence the Region's biodiversity is in a perilous state, and this has been identified as one of the big four environmental issues facing our Region. Horizons and its predecessors have been doing much over the years to assist biodiversity; it just hasn't done this work under the heading of "biodiversity". These activities have generally been carried out on a Region-wide scale, such as pest plant and possum control. Site-led

work, such as the fencing of bush remnants and wetlands, has been a more recent activity - over the last 10 years or so.

10. This site-led work has tended to be haphazard in its application across the Region, with on-the-ground works generally only happening in those areas where staff had a passion for bush or wetlands, or where there was strong landowner support. A list of important habitat sites (HVCAs – High Value Conservation Areas, mostly bush, but some wetland sites) located on private land was available, but was not well promoted to staff; staff were not sufficiently trained to carry out biodiversity restoration work; there was a lack of management support or funding to give effect to the list; and there were significant omissions and errors in the HVCA list.
11. Compounding problems with the approach at this time was that our involvement with a site stopped when the fencing was completed and paid for. Whilst fencing is important in terms of removing stock pressure, many sites continued to degrade through the combined effects of plant and animal pests. Also, few examples of collaboration with community groups or other biodiversity agencies exist from this time, whether it be in the sharing of information, resources, or funding. For example, Horizons' relationship with the Department of Conservation at this time could be described as non-existent at best.
12. It was apparent that biodiversity was declining in our Region, and that Horizons and various other agencies/groups had a role to play in its protection. However, up until the early 2000s, due to the reasons mentioned above, Horizons was not in a position to provide more than minimal assistance to landowners or others. Works that were carried out were at the request of landowners rather than as a part of a strategic Regional biodiversity programme. Furthermore, despite the initial investment in fencing, many sites continued to decline through a lack of follow-up support.

How the programme works

13. The early 2000s was a watershed period for biodiversity management within Horizons and the Region. The term biodiversity started being used in Council documentation, Horizons employed an ecologist, community interest in biodiversity was on the rise, and Council began taking an active interest in biodiversity, which was in turn matched by an increase in funding. It was also around this time that the first of the Regional habitat inventories was completed; the Regional wetland inventory was completed in 2005. This meant that for the first time Horizons staff had a clear mandate to be involved in biodiversity work, an accurate list of sites

to target for action, and sufficient resources to give effect to this list. The next step was to weave each of these critical elements together into a programme that was meaningful to staff and would be attractive to landowners and third parties.

14. The wetland programme was the first part of the biodiversity programme to be developed. This involved key wetland stakeholders coming together to discuss what a programme should look like. The wetland inventory was used as the starting point for this discussion. From these initial discussions the concept of a top-100 wetland list was developed, that is, the parties agreed that of the 300 wetlands surveyed as part of the inventory, the goal would be to have the top-100 wetlands (as determined by their ecological values) under active management within 10 years. In this context, active management means the site is fenced, any supplementary planting is carried out, and the site is under sustained plant and animal pest control.
15. The works required to protect/enhance a site are detailed in a site management plan which is discussed, negotiated and agreed with the landowner. The management plan sets out what works are to be done, the cost of those works, who pays for the works, and over what timeframes the works will be completed. In general, the cost of fencing and planting is shared between the landowner, Horizons and any third party (eg. Queen Elizabeth II Trust), and the plant/animal pest control is paid for by Horizons. Horizons' contribution to fencing and planting is negotiable, with more funding made available to the more important and/or threatened sites.
16. A bush programme with strong similarities to the wetland programme has been developed in the last two years. The target for this programme is to have the top-200 bush remnants under active management within 10 years. The bush priority list is based on DoC's Protected Natural Areas Programme (PNAP) surveys which were carried out on private land at various times in different parts of the Region over the last twenty years. Sites selected for action under this programme are referred to as RAPs (Recommended Areas for Protection). Not all part of the Region were covered by the PNAP programme, nor were they completed to the same standard. However, they provide a very good starting point for the bush management programme.
17. Over time, these programmes have been enhanced as lessons have been learnt, staff have grown into their new roles, and feedback has been gained from project owners. Key changes have been made to:

- Staff skills – training of staff in non-traditional skill sets such as negotiation with landowners, plant identification, fencing layout and planning, and project management, has been critical.
- Project management – possibly the single most important contributor to the success of the programme has been the introduction of a project management service. In the past, many projects that had been allocated funding never progressed because the planning and works were left up to the farmer to organise. For most farmers, biodiversity improvement is a nice-to-do activity, and other farm duties have a much higher priority, so as pressures come on the farmer biodiversity works get pushed down the to-do list. Under the new system, Horizons staff can organise all of the works, from arranging the fencing materials and fencer, plants and planting, and pest control. This ensures the works are done to our timeline, the works are to a prescribed standard and if we use the same suppliers/contractors we can negotiate discounts.
- Legal protection – Horizons has resisted calls to make funding for sites contingent upon the landowner legally protecting the site (eg. through a Queen Elizabeth II Trust covenant). Many landowners are wary of covenants, believing it represents a loss of property rights. This is not the case, but such a requirement would be a deal-breaker for many landowners. It is interesting that after several years of watching a site improve and associated wildlife increase, many of these originally concerned landowners, are now seriously considering legal protection options.
- Pest management strategies – sitting alongside the biodiversity programme are the Regional Pest Plant and Animal strategies. These documents set out what plants and animals will be managed, where they will be managed, and for what purpose. The Pest Plant strategy was recently reviewed and is now more closely aligned with Regional biodiversity objectives, and the non-regulatory biodiversity programme. The pest animal strategy is in the process of being reviewed. Plant and animal pests are the greatest threat to our remaining biodiversity at this time.

18. As staff have become more comfortable in dealing with projects on private land, the biodiversity programme has expanded to include working with community groups and entering into joint projects with other agencies. There are many community biodiversity projects operating in the Region. These projects have generally developed out of a sense of frustration with how a site has declined over time and/or are close to where people live, and the project provides social interaction and exercise. It is for these reasons that many of these sites are not high priority biodiversity sites on a Regional scale. However, a key component of the biodiversity programme is to encourage and foster community spirit and involvement in biodiversity. For community projects this is achieved through the provision of funding,

Horizons carrying out the large/dangerous work, and assistance in the preparation of a management plan for the site to coordinate energy and resources for maximum return. A recent development that has assisted community groups is Horizons agreeing to pay suppliers of goods or services directly. In the past, all biodiversity payments were on a reimbursement basis. That is, the landowner/community group would first have to pay for a good/service, and Horizons would reimburse its share of the costs. This was a serious barrier to community group project progress.

19. The latest addition to the biodiversity programme has been the establishment of multi-agency joint projects. In these projects anything up to seven separate agencies (Crown agencies, local government, community groups and landowners) can be involved (eg. Manawatu Gorge project). In many cases Horizons has a lead or joint lead role because of its experience in biodiversity management, and its recent track record of delivery around biodiversity projects. It is this proven track record that is attractive to third party funding and biodiversity agencies, who increasingly want to work collaboratively on biodiversity projects (refer partnering organisation section below).
20. Future developments in the biodiversity programme include:
 - development of a comprehensive monitoring programme to assess the effectiveness of the programme and tools used in protecting/enhancing biodiversity in the Region;
 - research to refine the existing habitat inventories and to develop inventories for additional habitat types;
 - expansion of the programme to include a wider range of habitat types eg. upland, aquatic, and coastal habitats; and
 - ongoing refinement of the programme, tools, and staff skill sets to ensure the programme continues to evolve and offer the services which landowners, community groups and partnering organisations have come to expect.

Horizons' funding for biodiversity

21. Given the organisation's long term involvement in biodiversity management, and the significance of biodiversity loss as one of the big four environmental issues facing the Region, Horizons has allocated a considerable budget towards biodiversity management. This budget can be split between programmes that have a direct impact on biodiversity, such as pest plant management, and those programmes that are carried out for another purpose but still return a biodiversity benefit (eg. the Sustainable Land Use Initiative).

22. This funding can be split still further between those activities that are carried out across the entire Region, such as Old Man's Beard control, and those activities that are carried out at a site, such as the bush and wetlands programmes. The total budget for those activities with a direct contribution towards biodiversity management is approximately \$2.3 million, and \$3.4 million for those activities with an indirect benefit. Not all of the indirect activity budget translates into biodiversity benefits.

Programme	2007-08 budget	
	Direct benefit	Indirect benefit
Region-wide programmes		
Old Man's Beard control	\$419k	
Zero-density/Containment plant control	\$283k	
He Tini Awa Trust	\$66k	
Rates remissions for protected sites		\$100k
Pest plant awareness		\$97k
Possum control operation		\$1538k
Environmental education		\$45k
Green RIG		\$170k
Iwi initiatives		\$100k
Sustainable Land Use Initiative		\$1389k
Site-led programmes		
Bush	\$438k	
Wetlands	\$460k	
Animal pest control	\$279k	
Community biodiversity initiatives	\$83k	
Totara Reserve Regional Park	\$250k	
Total	\$2278k	\$3439k

23. Region-wide activities carried out with a direct benefit to biodiversity are generally met from the General Rate. Site-led programme costs are met by the General Rate and an Environmental Initiatives Uniform Annual Charge (UAC), typically on a 50:50 split. In 2007-08 the Environmental Initiatives UAC was almost \$11 per rateable property in the Region, and is forecast to increase in 2008-09.

Partnering Organisations

24. Many agencies and groups within the Manawatu-Wanganui Region have a statutory responsibility towards, or a strong interest in, biodiversity protection/enhancement. These agencies and groups operate across both public and private land. For instance, the Department of Conservation is responsible for managing biodiversity outcomes on large tracts of public land within the Region. These responsibilities extend from general habitat protection, to species protection, and ultimately through to facilitating the public's easy and safe access to wild and natural parts of our Region.
25. In addition to its role on public land, the Department also has several funding streams available to groups and individuals to undertake biodiversity works on private land. These funds include the Biodiversity Condition and Advice Funds, Nga Whenua Rahui (for biodiversity work on Maori-owned land), and Nature Heritage Fund (for the purchase of key habitat areas for inclusion within the public conservation estate).
26. Other agencies with a statutory role around biodiversity include Territorial Authorities (policy and planning requirements, and in some cases making funding available), and Fish and Game (advocacy for the protection of wetlands for hunting purposes, and making funding available through its Game Bird Habitat Trust).
27. Several other agencies or groups have non-statutory roles around biodiversity improvement in the Region including Queen Elizabeth II Trust (funding and legal protection), Forest and Bird (advocacy for protection, enhancement and management of certain sites, and advice), and the many community groups and individuals that are actively involved in local biodiversity restoration projects.
28. Working in isolation, Horizons and these agencies, groups and individuals are only partially effective, with inefficient work practices, fragmented funding, duplication of effort, and no passing on of lessons learned or knowledge gained. A critical component to the success of the biodiversity programme in this Region is that many of these agencies and groups are in constant contact with each other, and are working collaboratively in many areas.
29. Examples of where these relationships are working well include:
 - the involvement of Department of Conservation staff in the development of pest plant and site management plans on private land (eg. Totara Reserve);

- one or more funding agencies providing funding to undertake the initial works at a site (ie. the initial knockdown of major pest plants), thereby making the task of restoring the site far more achievable for a community group eg. Te One bush in the Kawhatau Valley;
- multiple agencies agreeing to consolidate their energies and resources on one site to accelerate the results achieved (eg. Manawatu Gorge project involving seven separate agencies);
- multiple agencies working with community groups to develop a logical and manageable management plan, with clear objectives and targets and funding streams eg. Kitchener Park near Feilding;
- multiple funding agencies supporting a single project, which allows large projects to proceed eg. fencing of the 400 ha Patitapu bush near Eketahuna; and
- a financial commitment from one agency (eg. Horizons) towards a project is generally reciprocated by an equal (eg. QEII Trust – generally a three-way split of costs between the landowner, QEII and Horizons) or greater contribution from a second agency (eg. Nga Whenua Rahui – in the last year Horizons has made a 25% contribution towards a \$250k fencing programme in the Waimarino area involving thousands of hectares of bush and hundreds of hectares of wetland).

30. Whilst the current situation is a long way from being perfect, all parties agree this is the preferred way of working, and all parties are committed to strengthening existing relationships and coordinating efforts, resources and knowledge.

Programme progress

31. As at 1 May 2008, progress in key elements of the biodiversity programme was as follows:

Programme	Target	Duration (years)	Progress
Bush	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 sites per year • top-200 in 10 years 	2	61 sites under active management
Wetlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 sites per year • top-100 in 10 years 	3	58 sites under active management
Community biodiversity projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 new project per year 	2	3 projects underway

32. In general the biodiversity programme is progressing at twice the rate expected in Horizons' 2006-2016 LTCCP. This is only possible through the willingness of landowners to engage and participate in the programme, the efforts and passion of staff, the assistance (funding and in-kind contributions) from partnering organisations, and the role Horizons plays in weaving these elements together into a package with clear directions and outcomes.

33. I believe the mix of tools and assistance offered by Horizons, combined with the strengthening relationships with partnering organisations, makes this a very successful programme. Landowners find the programme supportive and non-threatening, and as a consequence it is producing excellent results. We have also had several other regional councils make enquiries about our programme in the last couple of years, as they begin to build their own regional programmes.

Alistair Beveridge

11 June 2008