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| Report No. | 20-180 |
| Information Only - No Decision Required | |

RANGITIKEI MANAGEMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. This item provides members with an update on the development of a management strategy for the Rangitikei River.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1. The Rangitikei Scheme is the largest and most challenging river control scheme that Horizons administers, encompassing a 63km length of the Rangitikei River from the river mouth to Rewa. A number of factors prompted staff in 2019 to fundamentally reassess the management approach for the river.
- 2.2. The development of a management strategy has a number of challenging elements to it, not the least of which is the fundamental consideration around how tightly to manage the river corridor (the key sustainable management consideration) and the implications that has for adjoining landowners.
- 2.3. The timing of this initiative has proved fortuitous with the COVID-19 national lockdown and central government's subsequent initiative to drive economic stimulus through infrastructure projects; the scheme has been able to access shovel ready funding to build a greater level of resilience for the lower reach of the scheme while minimising the financial impact to ratepayers.

3. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee recommends that Council:

- a. receives the information contained in Report No. 20-180.

4. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 4.1. The financial impacts associated with the strategy development have been partly addressed through the item to the August Council meeting around shovel ready projects and the approval of the local share component of the funding.
- 4.2. There are however two components that will need to be addressed when the strategy is finalised. The first is the progressive loss of lease revenue as the Council-owned corridor of land adjacent to the Parewanui stopbank currently leased for pastoral farming is transitioned to trees. Staff are not yet in a position to quantify what those financial impacts might be, noting that there are options for retaining some income through plantation forestry or other means.
- 4.3. The second is the upfront investment required to establish riparian margins along either side of the river. This is a particularly challenging task upstream of Kakariki and one that staff will look to map out in more detail in 2021, including how to incentivise landowners to allow protection plantings to be established on land that is currently grazed. Neither the potential loss in revenue nor the short to medium term potential for increased operational spend associated with establishing riparian margins has to date been budgeted for with the updated Long-term Plan.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1. Community engagement with the strategy development has occurred progressively, culminating in two meetings on 17 and 19 November 2020. The Tuesday meeting was focussed on management issues / operating risks associated with the reach downstream of the Bulls Bridge – all those landowners in that area paying direct benefit targeted rates were invited to that meeting. The Thursday meeting focussed on issues upstream of the Bulls Bridge, with a similar mail out invite list.

6. SIGNIFICANT BUSINESS RISK IMPACT

- 6.1. As noted previously to members, arguably the issues that exist with the configuration of the scheme downstream of the Bulls Bridge constitute a significant business risk; during the June 2015 flood event a section of the Parewanui stopbank was at risk of failure due to river scour, with potentially catastrophic consequences.

7. CLIMATE IMPACT STATEMENT

- 7.1. As with the item related to the Lower Manawatu Scheme, the focus with the Rangitikei Strategy is about developing resilience in the face of a changing climate – the impacts that more frequent/ severe flooding will have on a scheme that is already rather fragile.

8. BACKGROUND

- 8.1. The Rangitikei River Scheme has a considerable history to it that dates back to the early years of the Rangitikei-Whanganui Catchment Board. The awa has many unique characteristics to it that make managing it challenging, reflected in the relatively large number (four) of scheme reviews that have taken place since inception.
- 8.2. A series of events has prompted the development of a strategy; the damage repair bill and the apparent fragility of the scheme with the June 2015 flood event, issues highlighted again with the prolonged period of high river flows (but no particularly large flood events) over winter 2018.
- 8.3. In the course of developing the strategy staff have done an excellent job of putting together a complete picture of the landforms / processes that have given rise to those characteristics, including the assistance of Massey University Professor of Physical Geography Ian Fuller and his team.

9. DISCUSSION

- 9.1. The key tenets of the management strategy were the subject of a workshop presentation on 28 January 2020 and accordingly the full detail of the management strategy (in its current / evolving form) is not reproduced here.
- 9.2. In essence the strategy has two key areas of focus; the apparent vulnerability of the Parewanui stopbank to breach failure due to river scour and the large scale failure of bank protection works upstream of Kakariki over the last five or so years. Both issues are, to some degree, a function of the fairly thin economics associated with managing the Rangitikei River; the scale of the management task and the limited ratepayer base to support that management approach.
- 9.3. The vulnerability of the Parewanui stopbank to breach due to river scour is a function of a poorly maintained river corridor, high suspended sediment loads and a dependence on lease income; the corridor of Horizons-owned land between the stopbank and the river corridor leased for pastoral farming.
- 9.4. The remedy at a high level is in essence to give the river more room and progressively transition the lease land into protection plantings. Those elements and other key

considerations (public access, enhanced biodiversity) form the main elements of the shovel ready project, with central government contributing \$3.9M toward the total estimated project cost of \$5.2M. The completion timeframe for the project is 30 March 2024 but elements of the lease land use transition may run beyond that timeframe.

- 9.5. The second area of focus - the sustainability of the management approach upstream of Kakariki – is also one that relates to scheme income. Previous reviews identified an over-reliance on gravel extraction as a management tool, an activity that also used to generate income in the form of royalties that the scheme received.
- 9.6. Although gravel extraction is now used in a much more measured way, the legacy of past over extraction remains; a more mobile river corridor is a reflection of recovering bed levels but the past bed degradation associated with the over extraction of gravel means existing edge protection works are undermined.
- 9.7. The technical work undertaken by Horizons and Massey University Staff suggests the need to establish a mobility corridor to give the river more room and to transition the management interventions away from hard edge protection to one focussed more on contiguous planted riparian margins.
- 9.8. While such a management approach is ultimately a more sustainable one it also creates a range of short to medium term challenges; the investment already made in hard edge protection at key points and how much, if any, further investment should be made if the river attacks or outflanks those structures.
- 9.9. Aligned to that is the need to establish vegetated margins set further back from the river; a significant part of the mobility corridor not currently river bed is privately owned land, requiring landowners to progressively allow in many cases pastoral farmland to be planted in trees.

10. COMMENT

- 10.1. As noted at the landowner meetings, staff have recently visited Environment Canterbury to look at the management approaches employed with both the Waimakariri and Ashley River systems. While the Rangitikei is a river unique to Aotearoa (personal view) many of the management techniques applied in north Canterbury (such as deep pole planting) are applicable.

11. CONSULTATION

- 11.1. The development of a management strategy for the Rangitikei is something of an organic process – the river will continue to evolve and change requiring the same level of adaptation on the part of Council. Consultation and in particular dialogue with iwi and those landowners in the 'firing line', as it were, will be ongoing.

12. TIMELINE / NEXT STEPS

- 12.1. Staff are continuing to work on developing the strategy, with the next key milestone the scheme meeting scheduled for March next year. That's intended to include an information kiosk at the new Bulls Community Centre mainly focussed on the detail / vision associated with the shovel ready project.

13. SIGNIFICANCE

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

Ramon Strong

GROUP MANAGER RIVER MANAGEMENT

ANNEXES

There are no attachments for this report.