

Report No.	21-70
Information Only - No Decision Required	

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORT

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. The purpose of this item is update members of Council's Environment Committee on the progress made in the Natural Resources & Partnership Group's activity over the period 1 January to 30 April 2021 with some additional updates up to the time of writing and forecasting to the end of the financial year (30 June 2021). The item provides updates on progress against the Annual Plan targets, including providing several annual reports to deliver on Annual Plan targets.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee recommends that Council:

- a. receives the information contained in Report No. 21-70 and Annexes.
- b. approves the receipt of the Annual Reports for:
 - i. The land and fluvial monitoring and research activity;
 - ii. The water quantity and quality monitoring and research activity and its findings;
 - iii. The Manawatū Catchment Freshwater Improvement Fund project;
 - iv. The Whangaehu Catchment Freshwater Improvement Fund project;
 - v. The Waipu Catchment Freshwater Improvement Fund project;
 - vi. Lake restoration activity including the Freshwater Improvement Fund project for Lake Horowhenua;
 - vii. The work with the horticulture sector through the Freshwater and Partnerships programme to improve water quality;
 - viii. The National Biocontrol Agent Development programme;
 - ix. The Biodiversity Monitoring and Research activity;
 - x. The management of Tōtara Reserve Regional Park for biodiversity and recreational values including managing the camping facility;
 - xi. Drinking water supply research;
 - xii. Climate Change research.

3. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 3.1. There is no financial impact associated with recommendations in this paper.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1. This is a public item and therefore Council may deem this sufficient to inform the public.

5. SIGNIFICANT BUSINESS RISK IMPACT

- 5.1. It is considered that there is no significant risk impact of this item.

6. CLIMATE IMPACT STATEMENT

- 6.1. This item reports on Horizons' activity in relation to Horizons' Annual Plan targets and is not considered to have a climate change impact. The item does include the annual report for the climate change research activity.

7. SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS

- 7.1. The Natural Resources & Partnerships Group activity includes the non-regulatory and science programmes across the land and water management, biosecurity, biodiversity and environmental reporting activities of the Long-term Plan. The group also delivers regulatory functions for biosecurity and supports Horizons' regulatory programmes.

- 7.2. This report provides an operational update for the period of 1 January to 30 April 2021 and also provides a range of annual reports as required to meet Annual Plan Targets. The timing of the reporting to Council in June, and the preparation of this report in May requires that some aspects of the progress report and Annual Reports are required to include forecasts of progress of projects by 30 June 2021. Further reporting on the programmes final delivery on Annual Plan targets will be provided via Councils Annual Report, later in 2021.

- 7.3. Reporting to Environment Committee over the 2020-2021 year has been completed in a revised format introduced for the August 2020 meeting. Council items relating to the work programmes have included:

- Jobs for Nature Funding, item to Regional Council (July 2020);
- Tōtara Reserve Poplars, item to Regional Council (July 2020) & Totara Reserve Poplar procurement, item to Regional Council (September 2020);
- Environment Committee progress reports (August 2020, Nov. 2020, March 2021 and June 2021);
- National Wilding Conifer Programme & Wilding Conifer procurement, items to Regional Council (September 2020);
- Lake Rākau Hamama item to Regional Council (September 2020);
- Biodiversity Partnerships Programme, item to Strategy and Policy Committee (August 2020);
- Pest Plan Update to Strategy and Policy Committee (October 2020);
- Biodiversity Priority Sites Update to Strategy and Policy Committee (November 2020);
- National Environmental Standards for Stock Exclusion – implications for consenting of water abstractions, item to Strategy and Policy Committee (November 2020);
- Lake Horowhenua Restoration Update, item to Regional Council (March 2021); and
- Jobs for Nature Project Update, item to Audit and Risk Committee (March 2021).

- 7.4. Further reporting on the programmes is undertaken through reporting to governance groups including the Te Apiti Governance Group, Totara Reserve Advisory Group, the Biodiversity Contestable Fund committee, the Sustainable Land Use Initiative Advisory Group, the Governance Groups for the three Freshwater Improvement Fund projects, and

the governance groups for the three Jobs for Nature projects. Work has been initiated on a governance group portal to provide for easier access to information for the many governance group members.

- 7.5. Progress on the Land Management Activity has been reported to Council via the Catchment Operations Committee meetings in September 2020, December 2020 and April 2021.

Biosecurity animals

- 7.6. The Biosecurity Animals programme (Annex A) includes the possum control and rook control programmes as well as the amenity pest programmes. Overall, all three of these programmes are projected to meet the annual plan targets.
- 7.7. The possum control programme has completed a significantly greater amount of new area added to the programme, 45,225 ha, than the Annual Plan target of 6,217 ha for the year. There are currently 153 **possum control operations (PCO's)** that make up the over 1.574 million hectare programme (over 70% of the region). A total of 87 PCO's were planned for completion this year. One PCO, Whakarongo, will not be completed as a contractor has been unable to meet contractual commitments. The programme has encouraged further landowners to opt-in to the voluntary programme and focussed on returning to parts of PCO's with high possum density to provide further treatment.
- 7.8. Of the 153 PCO areas, 25% are monitored each year. Of the planned 38 PCO's to be monitored, 26 have been completed and the remainder are on track for completion by June 30. The average of the 26 possum monitoring results completed at this stage in the year is 2.9% **Residual trap catch (RTC)** for a target of less than 10%. Two results have been over the 10% target. Both PCO's, Waitarere and Ruatiti Stage 1 returned 13% RTC results, the next highest result was Matahiwi at 6.3% RTC. Follow up treatments, with further measures, are being planned in the Waitarere and Ruatiti State 1 PCO's for early in the new financial year.
- 7.9. The rook programme treated additional nests this year with 152 active nests spread over 47 active rookeries treated, within the 136 sites visited. This is up from 94 active nests treated over 56 active rookeries sites last year. Additional resourcing provided through the Annual Plan enabled a second round of treatment to treat nests where rooks had re-established nests following the initial treatment. A total of 56 rookeries were revisited and 14 treated. Increased public reporting was very helpful to the programme this year.
- 7.10. The amenity pest programmes programme received 376 enquiries during the reporting period with the highest number of enquiries being about rabbits. During the reporting period, Horizons initiated the collection of the data for the three yearly survey of rabbits including collection of blood samples to estimate the levels of resistance to rabbit calicivirus. Rabbit counts are on track to be completed by the end of the financial year. Results from the rabbit counts and blood samples will be reported to Council later in the year.

Biosecurity plants

- 7.11. The biosecurity plants programme (Annex B) provides an activity update for the reporting period. The biosecurity plants activity has been significantly increased over the financial year in response to new incursions and incursions in new locations (including alligator weed and delta arrowhead). The programme has also been expanded through additional funding from the Ministry for Primary Industries for Wilding Conifer control. Horizons administrates the funding for the Central North Island programme. This programme has recently received an additional \$110,000 of funding for completion by the end of June 2021. Horizons is undertaking \$10,000 of the work within this recent new funding allocation.
- 7.12. During the year, Councillors received a paper identifying progress against the pest plan that outlined the 46 of the 55 plant species in the pest plan, 84%, are on track to achieve

pest plan targets and nine species are not likely to achieve the pest plan targets. The nine species include two eradication species (Chinese penistetum and purple loosestrife), two progressive containment mapped species (evergreen buckthorn and old man's beard) and five progressive containment unmapped species (the aquatic weeds eelgrass, egeria, hornwort, lagrosiphon and reed sweetgrass).

- 7.13. The biological control programme has had several highlights over the year including across agents for tradescantia, tutsan and field horsetail. During the reporting period a field horsetail field day was held, including further releases of weevils. Work is now underway to secure funding for further breeding of weevils for future distribution. The national biocontrol collective has been financially supported again this year. The programme supports projects against nine pest plant species. Two of these are championed by Horizons, old man's beard and field horsetail. Two others are of direct benefit to the region, banana passionfruit and Japanese honeysuckle.

Biodiversity

- 7.14. The Biodiversity Programme (Annex C) is on track to meet Annual Plan targets. The priority sites programme is on track to add seven new bush remnant and four new wetland sites raising the number of sites at management level 3 from 68 to 79. Of the 68 sites at management level 3 at the start of the year, 30 are to receive some maintenance control with four of these being funded by other programmes (icon sites and regional park). The community biodiversity programme received additional funding in 2020-21. The programme has 18 projects allocated for a target of 12. The increased programme of pest management at Te Apiti Manawatū Gorge has been slower to initiate than anticipated. Updates on the individual projects are provided in the Annex. Totara Reserve also received additional funding in 2020-21, this has enabled an increased pest control programme to be established. Council approved additional work at Totara Reserve to remove poplar trees. This additional work programme was delivered and delayed the opening of the camp ground. The focus on the poplar removal did delay planning for some of the other capital work including the water supply upgrade and some of these capital projects may now need to span across financial years.

Water, Land and Fluvial monitoring and Research

- 7.15. Progress on the Water Quantity and Quality Activity and land and fluvial research and monitoring programme is reported in Annex D. This includes the annual reports on these activities as required by the Annual Plan. These annual reports are integrated with the reporting on implementation activity within Annex D.
- 7.16. The water quantity monitoring and research programme provides a seasonal update for the region on groundwater levels, river flows and the water allocation restrictions. In the Tararua District there have been significant water use restrictions in the Norsewood/Dannevirke area, with one site having water use restrictions for 89 days. This is a second year of significant water use restrictions for the irrigators in this area and a second year of significantly low flows for the water resources. The water monitoring programmes have progressed well over the summer season. The report overviews results from the 81 contact recreation sites monitored across the region. The recent season that was completed at the end of April 2021 was the 5th year of the expanded contact recreation monitoring programme. The annex also overviews lake and estuary monitoring results.
- 7.17. The fluvial survey programme has been focused on the completion of the remaining four catchments in the South-eastern Ruahine area which were paused due to COVID-19 Level 4 and Level 3 restrictions as well as the Kawhatau Catchment and Rangitikei Catchment fluvial surveys. A further piece of work is being undertaken on best practice guidelines for gravel extraction.
- 7.18. The land monitoring and research programme has commissioned work with Landcare Research to provide soil mapping information for the Horowhenua and also continued the collaborative work with Landcare Research on the smarter targeting of erosion control

research programme. Both of these projects have received significant external research funding. A further project completed with Landcare Research during the year produced an updated regional land-use map.

Freshwater and Partnerships

- 7.19. Progress on the implementation part of the Water Quantity and Quality Activity is also updated on in Annex D.
- 7.20. The Freshwater and Partnerships programme in the Annual plan included the three Freshwater Improvement Fund projects (Whangaehu, Waipu and Manawatū) as well as the work with Horticulture growers and the lake weed harvesting activity. The programme was significantly further expanded through the addition of the three Jobs for Nature projects (Regional Stream Fencing and Planting, Enhancing Fish Populations and Horowhenua Freshwater Management Unit Water Quality Interventions). The addition of the Jobs for Nature projects in July 2020 has required a significant upscaling of activity and all three of these projects are on track for delivery this year.
- 7.21. Each of the projects are reported on within the Annex. Overall the stream fencing, riparian planting and fish pass targets across the projects are on track for delivery, with several of the targets within the specific projects having already been met at the time of writing this report. At an overall level,
- Over 84 km of fencing has been completed for an overall target of 102 km of fencing, with a total of 178 km allocated.
 - Over 139,000 riparian plants have been planted for a target of 78,333 with a total of 182,579 allocated.
 - Eleven fish pass repairs have been completed for a target of 7, with 20 fish passage repairs allocated for the year.
 - Five community projects have been completed for a target of 13, with 21 projects allocated.
- 7.22. The Lake Waipu Freshwater Improvement Fund project seeks to secure land and fully apply Rātana's wastewater to land, rather than the current discharge to Lake Waipu. The project secured funding in 2017 and was contracted in 2019. Work to date by Rangitīkei District Council has not resulted in securing of land for the project. The Ministry for the Environment have communicated with Horizons in May identifying their view of the high delivery risk and identified a process for reallocating the funds if land is not procured or close to procurement by 30 August 2020.
- 7.23. The Lake Horowhenua work programme has continued with the boat ramp for lake weed harvesting having been completed, and land secured for the wetland complex component of the Jobs for Nature project. Work with horticulture growers has continued through the Sustainable Farming Fund project "Future Proofing Vegetable Production".

Environmental Reporting

- 7.24. The Environmental Reporting programme (Annex E) is on track to meet all of the Annual Plan targets. The Air Quality monitoring programme has continued in the Taumarunui and Taihape air sheds with monitoring upgrades being undertaken this year to include the additional "PM2.5" measurement. An air quality public campaign has been undertaken in March and will be followed up in June. The drinking water research programme has focussed on public supplies for communities with populations between 25 and 500 people. Further work to prioritise and undertake bore inspections has also been initiated. The Climate Change research topic for the year has been the regional climate change risk assessment. The project is divided into two stages, Stage 1: Exposure and Stage 2: Vulnerability and Consequence. The first stage considers hazards and consequences in terms of community values. The interim report will be delivered early June 2021. The final report covering both Stage 1 and Stage 2 will be delivered by June 30 2021 and will be presented to the Strategy and Policy Committee next financial year.

09 June 2021

8. SIGNIFICANCE

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

Logan Brown

FRESHWATER & PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER

Rod Smillie

BIODIVERSITY, BIOSECURITY & PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER

Dr Jon Roygard

GROUP MANAGER NATURAL RESOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS

ANNEXES

- A Biosecurity Animals progress report
- B Biosecurity Plants progress report
- C Biodiversity progress report
- D Water Quality & Quantity progress report
- E Environmental Reporting and Air Quality Monitoring progress report