

Report No.	18-200
Decision Required	

FRESHWATER MANAGEMENT: OUR REGIONAL APPROACH

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. This report seeks Council's agreement to set 2030 as a target date for full implementation of the **National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPSFM)** in this region, and approval of our implementation plan.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1. Regional councils are required to update NPSFM Progressive Implementation Plans (PIP) by 31 December 2018. In our region, the One Plan already meets many of the NPSFM's requirements. Remaining provisions will be implemented through *Our Freshwater Future*.
- 2.2. Council's endorsement of our proposed approach to freshwater management (*Our Freshwater Future*) is sought. We make two key recommendations in relation to the process:
 - That a catchment-by-catchment approach be taken. Catchment strategies would be non-statutory in nature, drawing on a full suite of tools to achieve better outcomes.
 - That collaborative process be preferred. Traditional planning approaches are ill-suited to the social complexity of freshwater management.
- 2.3. For Whanganui and Whangaehu, Treaty settlements will determine the form catchment planning takes. Council was involved in the development of post-settlement arrangements, and is committed to supporting their implementation.
- 2.4. We propose that strategy development for the remainder of the region be conducted for five large catchment areas: Kai Iwi, Rangitīkei-Turakina, Manawatū, Horowhenua, and Coastal Tararua.
- 2.5. Regulatory plan changes are likely to be required to implement aspects of catchment strategies. We anticipate notifying the first set of changes resulting from this process in 2023.
- 2.6. Our proposed approach prioritises catchment planning in the areas with the most pressing challenges. It envisages a continued focus on working with partners across the region to improve water quality while planning takes place. We expect to have made significant progress by 2025. In light of the scale of the task ahead of us, we recommend extending the target date for full implementation of the NPSFM to 2030.

3. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee recommends that Council:

- a. receives the information contained in Report No. 18-200 and Annex.
- b. notes ongoing work to improve water quality across the region, and prioritisation of intensive catchments within the proposed *Freshwater Future* work programme.
- c. agrees to adoption of 2030 as a target date for full implementation of the NPSFM.
- d. approves the approach to *Our Freshwater Future* outlined in Annex A.

4. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 4.1. These recommendations provide detail of work to be completed within the envelope envisaged by the 2018-28 Long-Term Plan (LTP). If approved, phasing across years would be addressed through the Annual Plan process.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1. Over the course of the year, we have undertaken targeted engagement with stakeholder and community groups to develop the advice contained in this paper. Information on our proposed approach is available on Horizons' website.

6. BACKGROUND

- 6.1. Regional Councils are required to update NPSFM **Progressive Implementation Plans (PIP)** by 31 December 2018.
- 6.2. Our current PIP, produced in 2015, notes that the One Plan addresses most aspects of the NPSFM. Setting limits and targets is the major exception. At some point, objectives and metrics will also need to be aligned with the National Objectives Framework. 2017 amendments to the NPSFM alter the detail of the work to be done - e. g. suitability for swimming - but do not fundamentally change our broad assessment that the One Plan goes a long way towards meeting the NPSFM's requirements.
- 6.3. Council committed an additional \$10.7 million to freshwater planning through the 2018-28 LTP. Of that figure, approximately \$1.4 million was tagged to immediate One Plan changes. The remainder (\$9.3 million) anticipated catchment planning across the region—and full implementation of the NPSFM - by 2025.
- 6.4. Over the course of the year, we have developed an approach to the next generation of freshwater planning in this region. In developing a proposed approach to catchment planning, we have engaged with iwi, stakeholder groups, and members of the community. Our proposed approach is also informed by the experience of other regional councils that have already undertaken collaborative planning processes. Advice has been provided to Members as our thinking has developed.

7. DISCUSSION

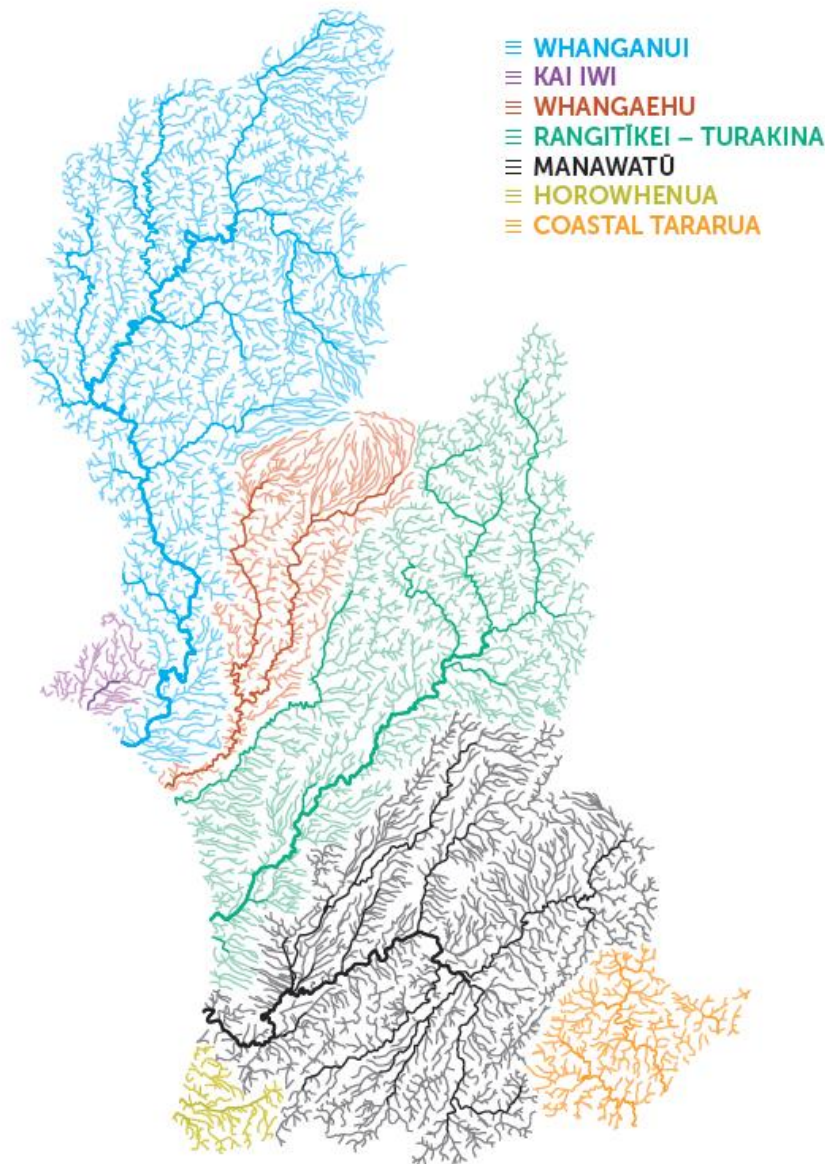
- 7.1. The requirement to update our PIP by the end of the year aligns well with our transition from engaging about how best to run a freshwater planning process (during 2018), to setting that process in motion (from 2019).

Our Freshwater Future

- 7.2. Staff have considered how best to approach the next phase of freshwater planning. Our proposed approach is outlined at **Annex A**. Two key recommendations underpin it.

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- 7.3. Firstly, we recommend a catchment-by-catchment approach to freshwater management, taking into account the full suite of tools available to achieve better outcomes. Catchment strategies must provide confidence that interventions will deliver intended outcomes within a specified period of time. They must also be adaptable, recognising the inevitable uncertainties of environmental management. This is no small task. Meaningful progress will require an integrated approach that combines regulation, funding and economic incentives, education, and locals' enthusiasm for their environment. We suggest that this is best achieved by focusing first on non-statutory catchment strategies, then considering changes to regulation (the One Plan) necessary to implement them.
- 7.4. Secondly, we recommend a collaborative approach to freshwater planning. We suggest that traditional, 'technical' planning solutions are ill-suited to the complexity of freshwater management. Collaborative processes are not without their pitfalls. Nonetheless, we believe that they represent the best approach to complex decisions, in which environmental science and competing social expectations must be accommodated. Done well, they also provide a stronger foundation for implementation work and evaluation of which interventions work in practice (and which should be discontinued or amended).
- 7.5. There is no single, 'correct' model of collaboration. We suggest that there are a set of principles that should guide our approach, and that the details should be worked out in discussion with key partners in each catchment area. The guiding principles we have identified are:
- *Ki uta ki tai*: Our rivers and lakes form dynamic, connected systems from mountains to sea. They sustain all life and are the lifeblood of our communities. Decisions about the parts should be made in consideration of the whole.
 - *Kaitiakitangi*: Freshwater is a taonga. We have responsibilities towards it, the life it supports, and future generations.
 - *Uniqueness*: Each of our water bodies is different. Communities across the region have already come together, in different ways, to work towards better outcomes. Our approach within each catchment will reflect its special characteristics.
 - *Shared purpose*: Action should be driven by a long-term vision. We need to prioritise to make progress on the issues we are most concerned about. We need plans that help us align our efforts toward our goals - and that give us the confidence to respond to new opportunities along the way.
 - *Partnership*: There are many different perspectives on freshwater issues and solutions. We all have a part to play in achieving better freshwater outcomes; none of us can deliver them alone. Success will depend on the strength of our relationships and an inclusive process that people can trust.
 - *Knowledge empowers good decisions*: Different types of knowledge—including mātauranga Māori, western science, and on-the-ground know-how—will be relevant to decision making. Evidence informs sound judgement. We must be prepared to learn together, and to communicate openly.
- 7.6. We propose that the catchment planning process be undertaken in seven blocks:



- 7.7. Te Awa Tupua Act 2017 establishes a legal framework for the Whanganui, including development of a river strategy, Te Heke Ngahuru. We will be guided by that process.
- 7.8. The Ngāti Rangi Treaty settlement, once it comes into effect, will similarly provide a framework for development of a Whangaehu catchment strategy.
- 7.9. Council was involved in the development of both arrangements, and is committed to supporting their implementation.
- 7.10. Regulatory plan changes would be developed and notified as we complete catchment strategies. Indicatively, a first plan change proposal might be notified in 2023 to implement the Manawatū and Horowhenua catchment strategies. It would include a future approach to intensive land use: for this to be robust, discussions with stakeholder groups across the region, most notably in the Rangitikei-Turakina area, will have to be well advanced. By that time, the direction of Government regulations announced as *Essential Freshwater* in October 2018 should be clearer.
- 7.11. A second set of changes to the One Plan would be notified once the remaining catchment strategies have been completed. Both regulatory plan change processes would present opportunities to make minor technical amendments not considered by catchment groups—though care will have to be taken not to undermine the catchment processes.

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7.12. We propose to begin work in the Manawatū catchment early next year. There are a number of reasons to prioritise that part of the region, including the size of the catchment, the significance of the freshwater management challenges within it, public expectations, and the maturity of stakeholder relationships. The work of the Manawatū River Leaders Forum since 2010 has contributed significantly to preparing the way for a collaborative planning process. Decisions on the form of the Manawatū process are not sought at this time.

NPSFM implementation: extension of timeframes

7.13. As we have developed our thinking this year, a number of factors have led us to conclude that completion of *Our Freshwater Future* by 2025 is unlikely to be achievable - or only achievable by focusing on minimum compliance with the NPSFM, at the expense of better outcomes for our waterways and communities. Those factors include:

- A fuller understanding of collaborative process, and how best to apply it within our region;
- Reservations about the number of processes we will be able to run in parallel;
- Our preference to separate the development of integrated, non-statutory catchment strategies from regulatory plan-change processes;
- Official guidance suggesting that we should only consider the NPSFM fully implemented in our region once all regulatory plan changes are fully operative;
- Greater than anticipated resource demands to support short-term corrections to the One Plan;
- The likelihood of further amendments to the NPSFM (which will need to be accommodated into the process) and National Planning Standards (which may require an additional plan-change process).

7.14. There is provision in the NPSFM for councils to extend their implementation programmes to 2030, if meeting the 2025 deadline is impracticable or would result in lower quality planning. We suggest that such an extension is warranted.

7.15. This change is cost-neutral: it works within existing operating budgets, making better use of staff time over the course of the 2018-28 LTP.

Near-term progress

7.16. Although completing this process will take time - and, indeed, is likely to be an iterative process extending beyond 2030 - it is important that we prioritise our effort, dealing with the most urgent challenges first. This is reflected in the timetable indicated in Annex A. The pressures of population and intensive land use in the Manawatū, Horowhenua, and Rangitīkei must be addressed early in the process.

7.17. Challenges in other parts of the region (including erosion and sedimentation) will need to be actively managed through existing regulatory and non-regulatory mechanisms in the interim. Considerable work is already underway to improve fresh water across our region, with community groups, iwi, local councils, landowners and industry organisations involved in different ways. It will be important to maintain this momentum while we revisit our plans, working with communities to do the things that obviously need to be done - preventing erosion, riparian planting, getting direct discharges out of our rivers, developing more sustainable agricultural practices.

7.18. By 2025, we will have catchment strategies in place for our most intensive catchments, along with regulatory changes to back them up. We will also see the benefit of another seven years of on-the-ground effort, together with iwi and local communities, to enhance waterways throughout the region.

Updating our implementation plan

7.19. Our approach to freshwater management across the region is outlined at Annex A. It provides both a programme of work and a rationale for the approach we propose to take.

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The document covers NPSFM requirements to update our PIP and publish swimmability targets (the subject of Report No. 18-201) by the end of the year.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1. Targeted engagement with stakeholder groups on the proposed approach to *Our Freshwater Future* has occurred over the course of 2018. We have also drawn on the experience of other regional councils.
- 8.2. No specific consultation has been undertaken on the proposed implementation timeframes.

9. NEXT STEPS

- 9.1. Council is required to update its NPSFM implementation plan and finalise regional swimmability targets by 31 December 2018. Adopting the programme at Annex A fulfils both requirements.

10. SIGNIFICANCE

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

Tom Bowen
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ANNEXES

- A Our Freshwater Future: implementation programme