

AGENDA ITEM NO: 8	SUBJECT MATTER: ECOSYSTEM HEALTH AND BIODIVERSITY
REPORT: Regional Water Management Committee	DATE OF MEETING: 7 th February 2012
REPORT BY: Matthew Ross, Facilitator	

PURPOSE

The purpose of this agenda item is to update the full Committee on progress made since the last Regional Committee meeting, and to provide an update on further developments by the working group to obtain final sign off on the draft RIP content for engagement/consultation.

ATTACHMENTS – Electronically supplied

- Working group update
- Draft content for the RIP on Ecosystem Health and Biodiversity

Ecosystem Health and Biodiversity Working Group update

Meeting: 25th January, 2012, South Rakaia Hotel

Present: Jane Demeter, Donald Couch, Jay Graybill, Robin Murphy, Bill Chisholm (Session 1 only)

Staff: Matthew Ross, Stephen Hall (Session 1 only), Tamsin Page for Facilitation and Technical Support.

Session 1

The working group discussed the allocation of Immediate Steps funding for the Regional Committee's Te Waihora Regional Flagship Project as part of the Whakaora Te Waihora Joint Restoration Plan.

The group was informed by Bill Chisholm that there are unresolved matters between the Lake Ellesmere Commercial Fishermen and Ngāi Tahu. Both parties had an agreement which contained provisions, yet to be negotiated, which he considered were directly relevant to the Whakaora Te Waihora Joint Restoration Plan. Bill advised the group that he had a professional involvement in this matter. The group decided to note the information but that it was not directly pertinent to the delegated decision they had to make.

The group was updated on the evolution of the Whakaora Te Waihora Joint Restoration Plan and on the decision taken by the committee previously in 2011 to allocate Immediate Steps funding to 3 regional flagship projects including Te Waihora.

The group discussed their relative concerns with regards to the mix of individual projects as part of the overall project and checked alignment of the Immediate Steps spend with the strategic goals of the Whakaora Te Waihora Joint Restoration Plan. In particular, there was discussion about the use of willow control as an effective conservation management tool. On balance, the group felt that if willow control was as part of a package of weed control, planned on a site specific basis with recognition of the potential benefits and possible adverse effects, that they could support willow control as part of an overall programme.

In the context of delegated decision making from the Regional Committee, the Ecosystem Health and Biodiversity Working Group* agreed that the remaining 4 years of Te Waihora Regional Flagship Immediate Steps funding of \$432,000 contribute to Whakaora Te Waihora Joint Restoration Plan, with spend split 50/50 between native planting and weed control. This would include the 11 sites put forward by the Selwyn-Waihora Zone Committee and identified as a priority by Ngāi Tahu and DoC. It is requested that site/project managers be mindful of the:

- i) potential possible adverse effects of willow control
- ii) potential for re-infestation of sites by willow following control
- iii) cost effectiveness of willow control on a site by site basis

**Bill Chisholm was also present and took part in discussions and decision making. Written comments from David Painter were considered by the group.*

The group reflected on the need for discussion of willow control in general, but that the site by site decision was best left to well-informed site managers.

Session 2

The group reviewed the draft Regional Implementation Programme content on Ecosystem Health and Biodiversity, specifically working through the priority outcomes and recommendations. On balance the group felt that they adequately captured the issue in a cross cutting way, accepting that some important matters would be part of the forward work programme i.e. mahinga kai, recreation.

In addition, the group identified the need to address lowland streams more specifically in the content of the RIP as a common theme emerging from the ZIPs.

Further discussion was had in relation to the role of the working group around identifying the constraints and wins for ecosystem health and biodiversity that could be related to regional infrastructure projects, and the importance of considering wins and constraints during the design stage. The overlap with the Regional Infrastructure working group needs to be clarified.

Prepared by Jay Graybill/Matthew Ross

REGIONAL PRIORITY ISSUE

ECOSYSTEM HEALTH AND BIODIVERSITY

Background

From the mountains to the sea, in urban and rural catchments, and from the Clarence River to the Waitaki River, healthy ecosystems and biodiversity are valued for a range of reasons including:

- the services ecosystems provide to people (e.g. water purification)
- as a source of food / mahinga kai
- for cultural associations
- the recreational and tourism benefits they provide
- for their own intrinsic worth as animals, plants, birds, habitats, and nature

The importance of maintaining, restoring, recreating, improving or enhancing the health of ecosystems and biodiversity, underpins the priorities, principles and targets of the CWMS.

The Regional Committee recognises that implementation of ecosystem and biodiversity outcomes needs to be delivered as part of an integrated catchment management approach. This will enable the practical “hands on” tools of conservation management (e.g. weed control, native planting) to be used in a co-ordinated way with efforts to improve water quality and provide water in sufficient quantities for environmental needs. Crucial to the success of this approach will be the buy-in of local landowners and communities through Zone Committees. Where catchments cross the boundaries of zones, as is the case with the Waimakariri, Rakaia, Rangitata, and Waitaki rivers, the Regional Committee will work with relevant Zone Committees on implementation.

The Regional Committee also believes that a co-ordinated approach at a regional level is required to support in-catchment efforts. This is because some species move between catchments, migrate from freshwater to saltwater environments, spend different seasons in different parts of Canterbury or beyond, or may move in-response to changes in climate. Ensuring that a network of wetlands, riparian corridors, and migration routes are protected at a regional level is thus important to the overall health of ecosystems and biodiversity in Canterbury. Implementation will require local and regional government, Tangata Whenua, land owners, and others to work together at a regional level to succeed. For example, an integrated regional approach to supply and distribution of water has the potential to benefit ecosystem health and biodiversity where environmental constraints are addressed in the early stages of concept planning.

The Immediate Steps Programme was developed by Environment Canterbury in response to public opinion on the declining state of the region’s biodiversity resource, and the desire to achieve some immediate biodiversity benefit. In addition to the priorities and projects for this funding identified at a local level by Zone Committees, the Regional Committee has identified 3 “regional flagship” projects focussing on Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere, High Country Braided Rivers (Rakaia and Rangitata rivers), and Wainono Lagoon.

Allocation of Immediate Steps funding is however a short-term contribution to achieving priority biodiversity goals. Additional tools to maintain and restore biodiversity values in the region over the longer-term, include planning tools and advocacy. Planning measures directly or indirectly impacting on biodiversity protection involve setting environmental flows, water

quality standards, resource consent conditions (including mitigation requirements for new developments), managed live stock access and biosecurity works.

Advocacy approaches may include supporting the formation of local or catchment level land and water care groups, encouraging industry to promote best practice, assisting projects/groups to obtain funding through multiple agencies, and educating landowners on sustainable land management practices and the importance of local biodiversity.

Links to CWMS targets

The CWMS contains a set of targets on Ecosystem Health and Biodiversity. In addition, other targets throughout the CWMS relate to healthy ecosystems and biodiversity including braided rivers, kaitiakitanga, drinking water, recreational and amenity opportunities, and environmental limits.

Regional Committee Role

The Regional Committee wishes to take a leadership role by:

- Ensuring the intrinsic value of healthy ecosystems and biodiversity are protected and where appropriate enhanced
- Protecting indigenous biodiversity at a regional level as an indicator of the environmental well being of the region
- Addressing overarching threats to ecosystem health and biodiversity at a regional level
- Promoting the understanding of environmental limits and inclusion of environmental restoration/enhancement measures into proposed infrastructure projects at the design stage.

Priority Outcomes and Recommendations

Priority Outcomes	Recommendations	Who * denotes suggested lead body	When
All ecologically significant wetlands are protected.	Undertake a programme to compile and assess wetlands across the Region, using existing information sources in the first instance.	Environment Canterbury*/DOC/ Fish & Game/TAs/ Tangata Whenua	June 2012
	Work with landowners and other agencies/organisations to progressively develop management plans for the on-going protection and active management of ecologically significant wetlands.	Environment Canterbury*/DOC/ Fish & Game/ Tangata Whenua	On-going
All other ecologically significant habitat areas referenced in CWMS targets are protected.	Undertake a programme to compile and assess ecologically significant habitat areas across the region, using existing information sources in the first instance.	Environment Canterbury/ DOC/ Fish & Game/TAs/ Tangata Whenua	2015
	Work with landowners and other agencies/organisations to progressively develop management plans for the on-going protection and active management of ecologically significant habitat areas.	Environment Canterbury/ DOC/ Fish & Game/TAs/ Tangata Whenua	On-going
The overarching health of ecosystems and biodiversity at a Canterbury wide level are protected.	Undertake a programme to identify key sites and 'corridors' that are critical to maintaining the overarching health of ecosystems and biodiversity at a Canterbury wide level.	Environment Canterbury/ DOC/ Fish & Game/TAs/ Tangata Whenua	June 2012
	Develop and implement management mechanisms for protecting a "network" of critical sites and corridors at a Canterbury wide level and across zones	Environment Canterbury/ DOC/ Fish & Game/TAs/ Tangata Whenua	June 2012
Improved trends in biodiversity and ecosystem health at a Canterbury wide level, across and between Zones	Prioritise the establishment of environmental limits (water quantity and water quality)	Environment Canterbury/ Tangata Whenua	June 2012
	Liaise with Zone Committees to develop ecosystem restoration and protection programmes for lowland streams and rivers.	Regional Committee	Ongoing

Statutory and industry organisations work together to help and support landowners on the ground to get it right in rural and urban catchments	Develop a prioritised, coordinated and funded approach to support catchment groups and landowners with better access to expertise and tools	Environment Canterbury/ Tangata Whenua /TAs/Industry partners (including fertilizer companies)/ Zone Committees/ River protection groups/Crown Research Institutes/ Universities	2012
	More people are made available to help facilitate and work with catchment groups	Environment Canterbury/TAs/ Industry partners (including fertilizer companies)/ Tangata Whenua	Ongoing
We have the knowledge and understanding of ecology and ecosystem functioning that we need to implement CWMS targets	Identify gaps in our knowledge and understanding of key matters relating to ecology and ecosystem functioning	Environment Canterbury/ Universities/Crown Research Institutes/DOC/ Tangata Whenua	2012
	Encourage and support scientific research in gap areas e.g. breeding requirements, acute and chronic toxicity levels for indigenous species etc.	Environment Canterbury/ Universities/Crown Research Institutes/DOC/ Tangata Whenua	Ongoing
	Encourage and support increased community knowledge and learning about Ecosystem Health and Biodiversity	Environment Canterbury/ Universities/Crown Research Institutes/DOC/ Tangata Whenua	Ongoing
District and Regional Plans are an effective regulatory backstop	Develop provisions in regulatory frameworks that direct good resource/land/water management practices that protect significant biodiversity and ecosystems that support and encourage restoration and enhancement.	Environment Canterbury/TAs/ Tangata Whenua	Ongoing
Regional supply and distribution infrastructure benefits ecosystem health and biodiversity at a Canterbury wide level	Develop and apply criteria to ensure that environmental wins and constraints are considered upfront in developing the big picture thinking on regional supply and distribution infrastructure.	Regional Committee	April 2012

Canterbury wide level	Facilitate infrastructure projects that ensure environmental wins and constraints are addressed as a integral design element of any constructed component of regionally significant infrastructure	Environment Canterbury/MFE	Ongoing
Ecosystem health and biodiversity CWMS outcomes are supported by wider agencies	Liaise with Central and Local government for statutory support within NPS, funding initiatives, and cross border issues	Regional Committee/ Environment Canterbury*	Ongoing

Forward work programme

In addition to the priorities and recommendations above, the Regional Committee will consider the following areas in 2012:

- Working with Zone Committees to address the implementation of CWMS targets on braided rivers
- Ecosystems health and biodiversity priority outcomes related to mahinga kai
- Recreation and amenity priority outcomes associated with biodiversity
- The relative benefits of constructed and recreated wetlands to biodiversity versus restoration of existing wetlands, and how to best integrate biodiversity benefits in to wetlands constructed for other purposes e.g. nutrient stripping
- The balance between “no further loss” and “no net loss” of wetlands identified in CWMS targets
- The relative benefit of focusing wetland restoration activities on a few “flagship” projects versus many smaller scale projects across the region
- The opportunity to develop environmental levies and enhancement funds associated with new infrastructure and key principles/criteria
- The effectiveness of the current regulatory backstop at a Canterbury wide level

