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## **Report 00.634**

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Report to Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee  
from Tim Porteous, Policy Advisor

## **Implementing the Regional Policy Statement: the Private Land Protection Programme**

### **1. Purpose**

To inform the Committee of the procedures established to assist private landowners to protect areas of ecological value on their land.

### **2. Background**

As part of its commitment to implementing the Ecosystems Chapter of the Regional Policy Statement, the Council made provision through the Long-term Financial Strategy for funding to assist private landowners to protect important areas of indigenous biodiversity on their land. For the purposes of this report, the term private landowners includes non-profit organisations such as the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, the NZ Native Forests Restoration Trust and other like bodies. The broad objective of this programme is to increase the quantum of private land, identified as having significant biodiversity value, under permanent legal protection. The programme also enables the Council to contribute to the implementation of the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy. A total of \$15,000 has been budgeted for this purpose in the 2000/01 financial year, rising to \$40,000 by 2003/04.

### **3. Proposed Approach**

The proposed approach is to support landowners wishing to protect areas of indigenous vegetation through a covenant with the QE II National Trust. In essence, the Council will use its funds to enable the Trust to protect a greater number of areas by sharing the costs of creating the covenants (i.e. fencing and survey). The Council's contribution is made available on the understanding that the National Trust will continue to expend a sum equal to the average expenditure by the Trust over the last three years in the Wellington Regional Council's area. This agreement will be

formalised in an exchange of letters between the Council and the National Trust prior to the first payment from the Council being made.

The Trust's covenanting process provides the Council with a satisfactory method of determining if a covenant proposal merits financial support without the need to establish new criteria or to duplicate the Trust's assessment process. The methodology is efficient and gives the Council control over its investment at all times. The process of establishing a covenant with the National Trust, and the role played by the Council as a source of funds for the process, is described in detail in Attachment 1 to this Report.

The National Trust operates nationally and its limited funding allows it to support the registration of only 100-120 covenants annually. As a result of this limited capacity, nearly all covenants approved are of national or regional importance. This means that, in general, areas covenanted are of a high quality and are frequently equal to the Department of Conservation's Recommend Areas for Protection (RAPs), categories 1 and 2 (under the Protected Natural Areas Programme). Indeed, covenanted areas are often RAP's. It is areas of this standard or quality that the Regional Policy Statement envisaged would be protected, and which the national Biodiversity Strategy seeks to protect as well.

#### **4. Nature and Level of Council Support**

The two significant costs associated with establishing a covenant are fencing to exclude stock and surveying of the area to enable registration of the covenant on the land title. It is proposed that the Council contributes one third of the cost of fencing (with the landowner and the Trust bearing the other thirds) and one half of the survey costs (with the Trust).

The benefits of such cost-sharing are two-fold. Firstly the cost to the landowner is reduced and this may encourage more landowners to consider voluntary protection. Secondly, with reduced demands on its resources the Trust is able to approve a greater number of covenants in the region.

#### **5. Justification for the Programme**

This is a new area of work for the Council in so far as funds are to be made available for the protection of land for ecological reasons (some years ago a similar scheme provided for covenants to be supported where the land concerned was subject to soil conservation measures). Our ability to carry out this work stems from section 30 (1) (a) of the Resource Management Act 1991. The Council indicated in its Regional Policy Statement that it would protect indigenous ecosystems of high value (in the Ecosystems Chapter, Method 12) and that the Queen Elizabeth II Trust covenants would be a means of doing this.

Funding for the programme is held within the budget of the Wairarapa Operations Department but, as with many of the programmes currently being established to implement the ecosystems provisions of the RPS, is being carried out by staff from this Department and the Resource Policy Department.

#### **6. Reporting**

An annual report will be produced for the Committee, detailing actual expenditure, forward commitments and details of the lands protected.

## 7. **Communications**

With the permission of the landowner in question, every opportunity will be taken to publicise the Council's role in assisting private land owners to protect biodiversity on their land within the region. This may include press releases, articles in "Elements" and acknowledgement in the national trust's magazine "Open Space".

## 8. **Recommendation**

*That the report be received and its contents noted.*

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Attachment: 1