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Committee Environmental Wellbeing Committee  
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## Background to Biodiversity Strategy

### 1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of:

- the formation of a Biodiversity Department within the Catchment Management Group;
- the preparation of a biodiversity strategy to guide the department's work; and
- some of the significant external issues the strategy will need to take account of.

### 2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report do not trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

### 3. Background

In September 2010 a dedicated Biodiversity Department was established, bringing together the Council's various biodiversity activities. It was felt that bringing relevant staff together would allow the Council to more effectively meet its obligations under the Resource Management Act 1991, provide a greater organisational focus for biodiversity and allow greater opportunities for synergies between programmes across the region. Staff were appointed to positions by Christmas, with fourteen staff based in the Wellington office and a further seven based at the Upper Hutt depot.

While establishing a Biodiversity Department has brought together those staff whose core work is biodiversity, the activities of other departments such as Biosecurity, Land Management and Flood Protection have a significant influence over regional biodiversity outcomes. The Biodiversity Department

has established and will maintain a close working relationship with these and other departments of Council.

#### **4. Comment**

Prior to the establishment of the Department, a series of ecosystem-specific biodiversity action plans guided the Council's biodiversity work. It was recognised during the process of setting up the new Biodiversity Department, that the preparation of a strategy to guide its work programmes is necessary. Work on the Biodiversity Strategy has started, and we intend to have the strategy completed and ready for Council approval by 30 June this year. A draft of the strategy, including the thinking behind it, will be one of the subjects for the Environmental Wellbeing Committee workshop on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May.

The strategy development is a collaboration between the Strategic Planning and Biodiversity Departments with the former providing overall project management support.

The strategy is an internal, non-statutory document intended to provide guidance and a common focus for policy and decision making, resource allocation, voluntary effort and on the ground projects and initiatives relating to biodiversity management in the Wellington region. It is a strategy primarily to guide the new department but it will also highlight the role the whole organisation has in achieving regional biodiversity outcomes. While the document will describe the role that other organisations play in regional biodiversity and highlight actual and potential synergies with organisations such as the Department of Conservation, territorial authorities and NGOs, it not intended to guide the work of these other organisations. These organisations have been invited, however, to input into the strategy's development.

The strategy takes as its starting point high level statutory and non-statutory documents such as the Resource Management Act 1991, the proposed National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity, the proposed Regional Policy Statement for the Wellington region, and the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy.

The document will be based on the best science that is currently available describing the state of the region's biodiversity, the threats it is subject to and best practice approaches to managing and enhancing biodiversity.

#### **5. Significant issues**

Greater Wellington is only one of a number of players influencing biodiversity in the region. The Wellington region is acknowledged as having had considerable success in recent years in managing indigenous biodiversity, frequently as a result of the coordination of the activities of a range of agencies. Initiatives such as Zelandia (formerly the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary), the management of off-shore islands such as Kapiti and Mana by the Department of Conservation, Greater Wellington's Key Native Ecosystem programme and management of its Parks network and the plethora of

community care groups have resulted in a noticeable increase in native bird populations and a raised awareness of indigenous biodiversity. Another significant and beneficial influence on regional biodiversity has been the control of possum numbers to control the spread of Bovine Tb, primarily through funding from the Animal Health Board.

There are potentially significant changes to the level of biodiversity activity undertaken by two of Greater Wellington's regional biodiversity partners that may limit future collaborative 'wins'.

### **Department of Conservation (DOC)**

DOC is currently undertaking a rigorous prioritisation of its activities using its recently completed Natural Heritage Management System. This is described as "an objective, transparent process for identifying conservation priorities". While the details are still being worked through, in essence this work has prioritised New Zealand's indigenous threatened species and habitats and DOC will direct its funding to these, working down from Priority 1 as far as funding allows. This is likely to result in changes to where and how the department works in our region particularly as the Wellington region is relatively devoid of high priority areas. In addition, and unrelated to the current prioritisation project, DOC is implementing Project Kaka in the Tararua Ranges. This will result in intensive pest control being applied to approximately one third of the DOC land in the Tararuas with the balance receiving no pest control whatsoever. This is a significant management change as previously, most of the Tararua Range received possum control on a 7 year cycle.

As a result it is likely that in some areas of the region the current level of pest plant and animal control is likely to be reduced.

### **Animal Health Board (AHB) Bovine Tb vector control**

The AHB have introduced a revised national strategy that seeks to eradicate Bovine Tb from NZ. Their previous strategies focused on containing and steadily reducing areas infected by the disease. This change will result in a reduced area of the Wellington region receiving regular possum and ferret control. In particular, parts of southern Wairarapa will be affected. Conversely, parts of central and northern Wairarapa will receive more regular control.

Reduced frequency of control in southern Wairarapa will have a negative impact on biodiversity. Possums and other pests such as rats and mustelids will increase again with a consequent impact on flora and fauna.

Greater Wellington does not have any budget flexibility to commence a replacement control programme in the affected areas.

## **6. Communication**

Staff are meeting with a range of stakeholders during the development of the Strategy to get their views. No further communication is necessary at this time.

## 7. Recommendations

*That the Committee:*

1. **Receives** the report.
2. **Notes** the content of the report.

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