

Biodiversity Department Operational Plan 2013-16

Quality for Life



greater WELLINGTON

REGIONAL COUNCIL

Te Pane Matua Taiao



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Cover photos:

Clematis

Banded Dotterel (Dr Phil Battley)

Owahanga southern wetland

1. Introduction

Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) has responsibilities to manage biodiversity under the Resource Management Act 1991. Various council programmes that contribute to the management of biodiversity are consolidated in the Biodiversity department. The department is largely operational and is guided by the Regional Policy Statement, regional plans, and the Council's 2011 Biodiversity Strategy (see box below).

The Biodiversity department has two core functions:

- Actively manage indigenous biodiversity values at priority sites
- Provide biodiversity advice and advocate for the protection and sound management of indigenous biodiversity

This Operational Plan explains the department's functions and sets out the associated work programmes and the nature and scope of its activities.

1.1 About biodiversity management

The term 'biodiversity' describes the variety of all living things on land, in water and in the sea. Biodiversity is an important part of the environment. It is crucial for the functioning of ecosystems that provide us with products and services that we could not live without. Natural ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity also form an important part of our shared heritage, and contribute to our cultural, spiritual, and mental wellbeing.

Protection of indigenous biodiversity is consistently identified as important by the general public. Much of New Zealand's biodiversity has evolved here and is not found in other places around the world. The protection of our unique natural heritage is important for ecological, cultural, recreational and aesthetic reasons.

New Zealand's indigenous biodiversity continues to decline nationally, and in the Wellington region. This is because many native plants and animals are preyed on or outcompeted by invasive pests. In addition, ecosystems and habitats are lost or degraded through human resource use and development.

To protect indigenous biodiversity many areas need active management to control threats. Common management methods include the control of pest plants and animals, fencing farm stock out of sensitive areas, restoration planting, and gaining legal protection of areas for conservation purposes.

1.2 About biodiversity at Greater Wellington Regional Council

Regional councils have the responsibility to maintain and enhance indigenous biodiversity, as well as to protect significant vegetation and habitats of threatened species, under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). For the Wellington region, this responsibility is reflected in the objectives, policies and methods of the Regional Policy Statement. Some of the pest plants and animals that are controlled to protect native biodiversity are outlined in the Regional Pest Management Strategy.

GWRC has various programmes in place to manage biodiversity. The allocation of resources and objectives for biodiversity management are set out in the Long Term Plan, Annual Plans and the GWRC Biodiversity Strategy. The Biodiversity department's activities and work programmes are tailored to be in line with these national and regional policy documents.

As biodiversity exists everywhere and is affected by all human activities, the Biodiversity department works with other GWRC departments and other organisations whose actions contribute to the overall health of regional ecosystems. Other GWRC departments working towards improved protection and management of biodiversity include Biosecurity,

The GWRC Biodiversity Strategy 2011-2021

Activities to manage biodiversity across the organisation are guided by the GWRC Biodiversity Strategy 2011-21 (the Strategy). It was adopted by Council in June 2011. The Strategy outlines the legislative, policy and scientific context, and the mandates within which GWRC manages biodiversity.

The Strategy provides a framework to guide GWRC's activities to protect and manage indigenous biodiversity in the Wellington region for the ten years ending 2021. It sets out a vision for biodiversity in the region, and three goals for the organisation:

"The Wellington region contains a full range of naturally occurring habitats and ecosystems that are in a healthy functioning state and supporting indigenous biodiversity"

- GWRC demonstrates leadership in biodiversity management
- High value biodiversity areas are protected
- Regional ecosystem functions are maintained and restored

Key actions are identified to achieve these goals. The Biodiversity department is responsible for implementing most of the key actions set out in the Strategy, but not all. The implementation of the Strategy across GWRC's departments is assessed by the Biodiversity department and reported to the Executive Leadership Team annually.

The Strategy is available at www.gw.govt.nz/document-library-2/detail/1164

Land Management, Environmental Science, Parks, Environmental Regulation, and Environmental Policy.

GWRC's Biodiversity Strategy 2011-2021 provides a common focus across the Council's departments, and guides activities relating to biodiversity (see textbox on previous page).

1.3 About this Operational Plan

This document is the Operational Plan for the Biodiversity department. It explains the department's objectives, functions and associated budget. It also describes the nature and scope of its work programmes and the projects the department intends to undertake in line with the wider responsibilities and mandate of GWRC. It covers operations for the next three financial years (2013/14 – 2015/16).

The three year Operational Plan will be updated on an annual basis to include the budget and project information for each upcoming financial year.

2. About the Biodiversity department

This section briefly describes the Biodiversity department's functions, objectives and work programmes in relation to Council and policy direction. It also presents the indicative budget for these work programmes. Sections 3, 4 and 5 describe each work programme in greater detail.

2.1 The Biodiversity department's functions

The department's role is to help protect and restore the biodiversity values of the Wellington region in line with GWRC statutory responsibilities and the Biodiversity Strategy.

To do this the Biodiversity department has two core functions. These are:

1. Biodiversity Management

Objective: Indigenous biodiversity is protected or restored in priority areas

Actively manage indigenous biodiversity values at priority sites. This is achieved by reducing the threats to those values through such activities as pest plant and animal control, fencing, planting and supporting legal protection.

2. Biodiversity Advocacy and Advice

Objective: Biodiversity advice leads to improved resource management

Provide advice on matters relating to indigenous biodiversity and ecosystems and advocate for their protection and sound management.

2.2 The Biodiversity department's work programmes and budget

To achieve its objectives, the department's work programmes are structured in line with its two core functions.

The department is largely operational and most of the budget is used to pay for front-line activities that help protect sites of high biodiversity value under the Biodiversity Management core function.

As part of the work programmes under the Biodiversity Advocacy and Advice core function, statutory and technical advice is provided to other GWRC departments, territorial authorities, other government agencies, and the regional community.

The Strategy and Systems Support work programme underpins these two core functions through strategic planning and administrative and systems support.

The work programmes contribute to the implementation of non-regulatory methods set out in GWRC's Regional Policy Statement and regional plans, and key actions in the Biodiversity Strategy.

The total operational budget for the Biodiversity department is \$3,560,000. This figure is assumed to stay the same for the next two years until the next Long Term Plan review. Indicative budget figures, anticipated projects and key outputs are provided for relevant work programmes in sections 3, 4, and 5. Table 1 summarises the department's work programmes and budget figures.

Table 1. Summary of the Biodiversity department's work programmes and operational budget for financial years 2013/14-2015/16

Department function	Work programmes/projects	Operational Budget		
		2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Biodiversity Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Native Ecosystems • Restoration support • Collaborative restoration projects 	3,312,000	3,312,000	3,312,000
Biodiversity Advice and Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy and planning advice • Technical and best practice advice • Advocacy 	210,000	210,000	210,000
Strategy and Systems Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General administration • Strategic planning • Programme and systems development 	38,000	38,000	38,000
Total		3,560,000	3,560,000	3,560,000

The main activities of the Biodiversity department are the planning and coordination of ongoing, long-running management programmes. However, some of the other projects are more discrete pieces of work defined in approved project plans. The number of individual projects within each work programme is expected to vary depending on the nature of the work, changing environmental circumstances, and annual priorities.

In working towards the department's objectives, some of the work programmes are implemented across ecosystem types and habitats (land-based, freshwater, estuarine, coastal and marine), while others focus on priority sites based on biodiversity values.

3. Core function 1: Biodiversity Management

The Biodiversity department has developed several work programmes to give effect to statutory and Council direction to protect or restore sites with high biodiversity value. These are explained in further detail in the sections below:

- Key Native Ecosystems
- Restoration support for land owners
- Collaborative restoration projects

3.1 Key Native Ecosystems

The objective of this programme is to protect and enhance indigenous biodiversity values at the best remaining examples of ecosystem types in the Wellington region. Sites with the highest biodiversity values have been identified and then prioritised for management. These sites are managed as Key Native Ecosystems (KNEs) for their biodiversity values, and the budget is allocated accordingly.

Decisions about actions to manage biodiversity values are made once the objectives for the site are set. Objectives, actions, and the three-year operational budget are outlined in the KNE management plan for each site.

Active management of these KNEs can involve the following:

- control of pest plants and animals;
- fencing to protect areas by excluding stock, vehicles, or people;
- restoration planting; and
- helping land owners to gain legal protection for areas.

This is the primary programme under the Biodiversity Management function in terms of budget spend. KNEs will be managed in accordance with three year KNE plans prepared for each area in collaboration with the landowners and other stakeholders. These plans will outline the site values and threats to the site and provide the operational actions and budget required to meet site-specific objectives.

Much of the work planned for KNEs will be carried out by other departments or contractors. For example, the Biosecurity department carries out pest plant and animal control to achieve the objectives set in the KNE plans.

Under this programme, Biodiversity staff also work with landowners and volunteer community groups involved in protection or restoration within KNEs.

The Key Native Ecosystems work programme is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Work programme: Key Native Ecosystems (KNE)

Component	Activities for 2013-16	Key Outputs 2013/14	Key Outputs 2014-2016
Coordinating management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pest plant and animal control • Restoration activities • Legal protection • Fencing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination of active management in 70 KNEs • Review of management activities to achieve efficiencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination of active management in 70 KNEs
Preparing management plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of and consultation on plans for KNEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70 three-year plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual review and optimisation of KNE plans
Engaging with the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve partners and stakeholders to implement objectives for KNEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support landowners and community groups contributing to the KNE programme • Refine procedures for working with landowners and the wider community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support landowners and community groups contributing to the KNE programme

3.2 Restoration Support

The department can provide support for landowners who want to protect or restore areas with native biodiversity on their land. There are currently three components to this programme but others may be developed over time to support the implementation of the next Regional Plan (currently in draft).

Landowners wishing to protect their bush block or wetland by means of a covenant with the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust (QEII) can get advice and logistical support, and may be eligible for financial help towards fencing and other management initiatives.

We aim to advise and support landowners across the region to restore fish passage that has been obstructed by developments in the past.

In line with the biodiversity-related objectives of the Regional Policy Statement we are currently developing a programme that incentivises the protection of wetlands.

The Restoration Support work programme is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Work programme: Restoration Support

Project	Activities for 2013-16	Key Outputs 2013/14	Key Outputs 2014-2016
QEII covenant support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with QEII to streamline processes • Support landowners to covenant land with biodiversity values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of protocols and procedures for working with QEII • Work with landowners who wish to establish a covenant on their land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with landowners who wish to establish a covenant on their land • Ongoing support for landowners to protect remnants of indigenous vegetation through QEII covenants
Fish passage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a programme to provide support and guidance for restoring fish passage in the region's streams and rivers • Work to remove barriers to fish passage on GWRC land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify barriers to fish passage in regional parks, flood protection schemes and other areas managed by GWRC • Work with other GWRC departments to remove identified barriers to fish passage on public land • Develop a project that supports the removal of barriers to fish passage on private land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with GWRC departments, TAs, and landowners to remove identified barriers to fish passage on public and private land
Wetland protection support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a wetland protection support programme • Incentivise protection of wetlands on private land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop incentives programme for private land owners • Work with land owners eligible for support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with land owners eligible for support

TAs = territorial authorities

3.3 Collaborative Restoration Projects

The protection and restoration of native biodiversity values often spans several land parcels and is the responsibility of more than one agency. Some larger scale projects have emerged that require a collaborative approach to help maintain or enhance ecological areas. Under this programme the Biodiversity department works with other landowners, groups and agencies on behalf of GWRC.

One example of this is Porirua Harbour, one of the most significant coastal sites in the region. Because the primary threats to the biodiversity in the estuary come from land-based activities, a whole-of-catchment approach is necessary to restore this vulnerable receiving environment. GWRC is a signatory to the Porirua Harbour and Catchment Strategy and Action Plan (PHCSAP), which was developed in collaboration with Wellington and Porirua City Councils, Te Runanga O Toa Rangatira, and a range of other stakeholders. The Biodiversity department represents GWRC on the PHCSAP Strategy Implementation Team and is also responsible for implementing some actions listed in the PHCSAP. These include efforts to reduce the rate of sedimentation and to restore the ecological health of the harbour.

Another example is Wairarapa Moana - the largest remaining wetland complex in the region. Many

threats to the lake and wetlands come from the surrounding land use and so a broader landscape approach is needed to restore their health. To address this issue, interagency governance and management structures have been created that include GWRC, the Department of Conservation (DoC), South Wairarapa District Council, Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa and Rangitane o Wairarapa. The Wairarapa Moana project has also received funding from the central government's Fresh Start for Freshwater Fund. The Biodiversity department leads the Edge Wetland Restoration Group and coordinates management actions at some sites, as well as engaging the local community in restoration.

Other collaborative projects include supporting Wellington City Council's Halo project, where areas of high value to native birds are protected by enlarging zones of intensive pest control throughout the urban landscape. GWRC also works with DoC, NGOs and landowners to better manage the Aorangi Forest Park and surrounding land area and coast for biodiversity protection and recreation.

The Collaborative Restoration Projects work programme is summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Work programme: Collaborative Restoration Projects

Project	Activities for 2013-16	Key Outputs 2013/14	Key Outputs 2014-2016
Porirua Harbour and Catchment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate and deliver GWRC's contribution to implementing the PHCSAP strategy Undertake ecological restoration with community groups and schools around the estuary Coordinate projects within the catchment to reduce sediment entering the harbour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination and delivery of GWRC's contribution to implementing the PHCSAP, including managing projects relating to sediment reduction and ecological restoration Dissemination of information about the estuary, the threats to it and the restoration actions available to the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination and delivery of GWRC's contribution to implementing the PHCSAP, including managing projects relating to sediment reduction and ecological restoration Dissemination of information about the estuary, the threats to it and the restoration actions available to the community
Wairarapa Moana – Fresh Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead the Edge Wetland Restoration Group Implement projects to restore wetlands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of the edge wetland restoration plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of the edge wetland restoration plan
Other collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide support to projects driven by stakeholders that further the objectives of the department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Aorangi: provide technical and strategic planning support Halo project: Support Wellington City Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing support for collaborative projects at the discretion of the department

PHCSAP = Porirua Harbour and Catchment Strategy and Action Plan

4. Core function 2: Biodiversity Advocacy and Advice

Critical components for achieving GWRC's vision for regional biodiversity are ensuring consideration of biodiversity in statutory and operational planning, and fostering the wider understanding of the importance of protecting native biodiversity. The department will endeavour to contribute to this through the provision of sound advice on the protection and management of indigenous biodiversity and ecosystems. There are two work programmes under this core function.

4.1 Biodiversity Advice

Under this programme department-wide technical and policy expertise is coordinated to provide advice on the management of biodiversity. The programme provides advice to other GWRC departments, territorial authorities, other agencies, and the regional community. Biodiversity advice may be on statutory or non-statutory matters, general best practice, or technical issues.

The Biodiversity Advice work programme is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5. Work programme: Biodiversity Advice

Projects	Activities for 2013-16	Key Outputs 2013/14	Key Outputs 2014-2016
Policy and planning advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ongoing policy advice within GWRC and to TAs • Implement relevant components of the RPS and regional plans • Contribute to statutory plans developed by GWRC that may affect biodiversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for development of the new Regional Plan • Contribution to GWRC submissions on issues that affect biodiversity • Provision of planning support on RMA resource consents prepared or processed by GWRC • Preparation of a guidance document for TAs on the identification of significant biodiversity • Development of a project plan for an inter-agency management forum for the CMA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution to GWRC submissions on issues that affect biodiversity • Provision of planning support on RMA consents prepared or processed by GWRC departments • Provision of ongoing guidance for TAs on the identification of significant biodiversity
Best practice and technical advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to internal and external queries • Collating and making available information on specific issues of interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of advice on Flood Management Plans and Farm Environment Plans • Provision of advice for the Flood Protection and Land Management departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing response to internal and external queries • Ongoing collation and making available information on specific issues of interest

TA = territorial authority. RPS = Regional Policy Statement. RMA = Resource Management Act. CMA = coastal marine area.

4.2 Biodiversity Advocacy

The advocacy work programme recognises GWRC's role to communicate the importance of biodiversity protection and restoration to the public. The outputs of the work programme are set out in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Work programme: Biodiversity Advocacy

Projects	Activities for 2013-16	Key Outputs 2013/14	Key Outputs 2014-2016
Information to the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain website Contribute to the Nature Space management team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update and maintenance of website with current and accurate information Development of a process to ensure consistent communication of key biodiversity messages across GWRC and TAs Publication of a brochure on GWRC support for landowners to protect biodiversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing maintenance of website Ongoing liaison with Nature Space Update and release of new publications in line with GWRC priorities
Staff and community training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support biodiversity restoration efforts Facilitate staff and community group training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for Restoration Day Funding regional Enviro-schools Induction/staff training Support for Nature Space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for Restoration Day Funding regional Enviro-schools Induction/staff training Support for Nature Space

TA = territorial authority

5. Strategy and Systems Support

The Biodiversity department, as every other, is supported by systems and administrative effort. Much of this work is ongoing, with effort directed towards supporting staff and the functioning of the department, and providing administrative support to the other work programmes.

However, as a relatively new department, many strategic relationships and systems that support the department's work are still being developed. Over time, the focus of strategic planning and engagement will change and the department will spend less effort developing systems and move into ongoing maintenance or adaptive management of these. The work programme is set out in Table 7, below.

Table 7. Work programme: Strategy and Systems Support

Projects	Activities for 2013-16	Key Outputs 2013-14	Key Outputs 2014-16
Department planning and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing internal reports to Council Planning and reporting to stakeholders and the public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational Plan Quarterly and Annual Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational Plan Quarterly and Annual Reports
Systems support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop systems that support the department's activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Production and streamlining of internal SOPs Review of departmental management systems for the KNE programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintenance and review of department systems in line with priorities
Strategic engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinating delivery of the Biodiversity Strategy Working with Nature Central Seizing opportunities that arise in line with the department's priorities and objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report on progress toward the GWRC Biodiversity Strategy Engagement in national discussions on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ecosystem services approach Climate change Offsetting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development and maintenance of stakeholder relationships that enable achievement of the department's objectives

SOP = standard operating procedure. KNE = Key Native Ecosystem

The Greater Wellington Regional Council promotes **Quality for Life** by ensuring our environment is protected while meeting the economic, social and cultural needs of the community

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