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Committee Council  
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## Ramsar application for Wairarapa Moana Wetland complex

### 1. Purpose

To seek Council's approval to nominate Wairarapa Moana Wetlands to be recognised as an internationally significant wetland under the Ramsar Convention.

### 2. Background

Wairarapa Moana Wetlands complex (Wairarapa Moana) is a 10,000 hectare area made up of the beds of Lakes Wairarapa and Onoke and the publicly owned reserves around them. Refer to map in **Attachment 1**.

Wairarapa Moana is the largest wetland complex in the southern North Island and contains the third largest lake in the North Island. Significant ecological, cultural and recreational values are associated with the complex, which includes the tidal zone, an estuarine lake, a large freshwater lake and associated wetlands. These ecological features are nationally and internationally significant in terms of the habitats they provide for flora and fauna and the presence of threatened and migratory species.

Wairarapa Moana is subject to a Water Conservation Order (WCO) under the Water and Soil Conservation Act 1967. The purpose of WCOs is to provide recognition of the outstanding amenity or intrinsic values of water bodies. The Lake Wairarapa order was gazetted in 1989, and has the effect of maintaining lake water levels within a specified range, balancing the needs of biodiversity and farming.

The Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Project (the Project) is a collaborative, multi-agency project involving Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, Rangitāne o Wairarapa, Papawai Marae, Kohunui Marae, Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC), South Wairarapa District Council (SWDC) and the Department of Conservation (DOC). The involvement of landowners and engagement of the wider community is an important part of the Project.

The Project began in 2008 with objectives to protect and restore the ecology, spiritual identity, recreation and cultural opportunities around Wairarapa Moana.

Implementation of the Project is coordinated through an administrative structure. Representatives of the partner organisations make up the Governance Group, Management Team and Coordinating Committee, and form the Implementation and Project teams. Seeking Ramsar status for Wairarapa Moana has been an aspiration of the project partners since the formation of the collaboration.

### **3. Ramsar status**

The Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Under the Convention, members commit to:

- work towards the wise use of all their wetlands;
- designate suitable wetlands for the list of Wetlands of International Importance ( the “Ramsar List”) and ensure their effective management;
- cooperate internationally on transboundary wetlands, shared wetland systems and shared species.

New Zealand is one of 168 signatory countries to the convention and has six wetlands subject to Ramsar status. These are:

- Whangamarino;
- Kopuatai Peat Dome;
- Firth of Thames;
- Manawatu River Mouth and Estuary;
- Farewell Spit;
- Awarua Wetlands.

DOC manages the Ramsar process within New Zealand and, therefore, does not promote sites for consideration. In the case of Wairarapa Moana application, the project partners have asked that GWRC be the nominator . To be considered for Ramsar status a wetland must meet a number of ecological criteria. Wairarapa Moana meets seven out of nine criteria.

Ramsar status is non-statutory and has no effect over the existing regulatory roles of management agencies or over the existing Water Conservation Order. It is a requirement that the designated site’s ecological values are maintained or enhanced. As all parties in the Wairarapa Moana Wetlands project are committed to enhancing the values of the site, there is absolute confidence that this requirement will be met.

Designation of the site is likely to increase awareness of the site’s values, increase levels of visitation and perhaps increased external funding opportunities.

#### **4. Comment**

A Ramsar designation for Wairarapa Moana was initially proposed by the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society in 2001. Since 2008, the Wairarapa Moana Governance Group has been undertaking preparatory background research to support an application. Consultation has also taken place with a range of community groups, hapu (those not directly represented on the Governance Group), and landowners having a direct relationship with Wairarapa Moana. With the exception of a small number of landowners adjoining the lake, support for the concept has been strong. Those with concerns appear to fear increased regulation and, therefore, restrictions on their farming activities that may result from a Ramsar designation.

Ngati Kahungunu ki Wairarapa and Rangitane o Wairarapa (and their respective Treaty negotiating teams) have expressed their support of a nomination, as has South Wairarapa District Council.

The Wairarapa Moana Governance Group is of the view that sufficient background work has now been undertaken and that the application for Ramsar status should now be progressed with GWRC as the nominating party.

Once GWRC's nomination is received DOC will commence the formal process of consulting with a range of government departments before obtaining the Director-General of Conservation's and the Minister of Conservation's approval. The Minister will then submit the application to the Ramsar secretariat in Switzerland. It is unknown how long their decision-making process might take.

#### **5. Communication**

Once confirmation is received that an application for Ramsar status has been lodged this will be recognised with appropriate publicity acknowledging the collaborative efforts of the project partners. Obviously, if the application is successful then this would present a significant publicity opportunity for Wairarapa Moana.

#### **6. The decision-making process and significance**

Officers recognise that the matters referenced in this report may have a high degree of importance to affected or interested parties. The matter requiring decision in this report has been considered by officers against the requirements of Part 6 of the Local Government Act 2002 (the Act).

Part 6 sets out the obligations of local authorities in relation to the making of decisions.

##### **6.1 Significance of the decision**

Part 6 requires Greater Wellington Regional Council to consider the significance of the decision. The term 'significance' has a statutory definition set out in the Act.

Officers have considered the significance of the matter, taking the Council's significance and engagement policy and decision-making guidelines into

account. Officers recommend that the matter be considered to have low significance.

Officers do not consider that a formal record outlining consideration of the decision-making process is required in this instance.

## **6.2 Engagement**

Engagement on the matters contained in this report aligns with the level of significance assessed.

## **7. Recommendations**

*That the Council:*

- 1. **Receives** the report.*
- 2. **Notes** the content of the report.*
- 3. **Supports** an application for Ramsar designation over the Wairarapa Moana Wetlands complex.*
- 4. **Agrees** that GWRC will be the nominator specified in the application for Ramsar designation over the Wairarapa Moana Wetlands complex.*

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**Attachment 1:** Map showing extent of proposed Ramsar site