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Committee Environmental Wellbeing Committee
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General Managers' report to Environmental Wellbeing Committee meeting 13 March 2012

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of Greater Wellington activities relating to the Committee's areas of responsibility.

2. The decision-making process and significance

No decision is being sought in this report.

3. Catchment Management

4.1 Land Management

4.1.1 Akura Nursery Development

Good progress is being made with the lease of 13.4 hectares adjacent to the existing Akura nursery. The intention is to take up a lease of 6.0 hectares on 1 April 2012, with a further 5.1 hectares added in 2013 and 2.3 hectares in 2014. The variable areas are required to integrate new production with the existing production cycles in the main nursery. Access to the new nursery has been approved by an adjoining landowner in exchange for access across the stopbank at the river end of the existing nursery. Land preparation will begin in April and the first area will be planted in September 2012.

The expansion of nursery operations at Akura will require the yard and trading area to be redeveloped. Key aspects of this development will be:

- Safer access off the bypass road and improved traffic flow within the site
- Separation of the retail area from the operational area (pole processing)
- Relocation of the chiller and chemical shed
- Increased storage
- Improvements to the retail area and public parking

These improvements will be carried out over the next year.

4.1.2 Catchment Scheme Reviews

Two of the six Catchment Schemes administered by Land Management are due for review this year. The Homewood Scheme south of Riversdale, and the Mataikona/Whakataki Scheme north of Castlepoint are due for their respective five-year reviews.

Progress over the last five years and the proposed programme for the next five years is presented for approval by the Catchment Scheme Advisory Committee. Members also consider annual rate increases and the status of the storm damage reserves. At the time of each review a review of the asset management plan is also undertaken and any issues with the maintenance or replacement of assets are included in the new plan.

4.1.3 Wellington Regional Erosion Control Initiative

The Wellington Regional Erosion Control Initiative (WRECI) is progressing very well. A further 15 new WRECI Plans are currently under preparation bringing the total number of Plans in the programme to 40. Half of the new Plans are being prepared 'in-house' mostly as part of a training initiative for new staff, but also to enable cost savings that can be used for additions to the planting programme. Numbers of poles planted are ahead of budget and the area of land permanently retired from grazing is also well above projections.

Three properties that have been inactive for many years have joined the programme this year and it is hoped that others will follow. A key part of these previously inactive properties coming into the programme has been the personal approach from Land Management Officers, the value of the resource information contained in the Plan, and the increased grant rate.

As yet there is no indication from MAF as to the result of the funding review. At this point there is an expectation that a decision will be out by the end of March 2012.

4.2 Biosecurity

4.2.1 Biosecurity Department restructuring

Biosecurity has successfully finalised internal restructuring with the BioWorks team now an integral part of the department.

As a result of the restructuring the contract delivering Bovine Tb vector management services to the Animal Health Board was terminated on 1 December 2011.

4.2.2 Nature Central - collaborative natural resource management project

The Department of Conservation, Horizons, Hawke's Bay and Greater Wellington Regional Councils are taking part in a collaborative project to assess and improve the management of natural resources in the lower North Island. The project has been separated into four work streams; Natural Resources, Recreation/Historic, Community Engagement and Statutory and non-Statutory alignment. The Biosecurity Department is contributing two staff towards the project, compiling current work in the region and looking for opportunities to cooperate and work more effectively together in pest management. Greater Wellington staff from the Biodiversity and Parks Departments are also involved. The 'Nature Central' project has been endorsed by the Chief Executives of each organisation, and if successful may act as a pilot scheme for similar arrangements across New Zealand.

4.2.3 Wellington Peninsula Goat Eradication Project

Wellington City Council has gained funding to undertake a goat eradication project on the coastal and rural lands to the south-west of Wellington City. A coordinator has been assigned to manage the three year project, and a hunting contractor selected to undertake the work. The first phase of aerial and ground control is due to start in May 2012.

Biosecurity staff have met with the coordinator and contractor to discuss ongoing possum control in the area, and manage secondary poisoning risks for the goat hunting dogs. In the first year the project will target goats on the fringe of the urban areas. The unmanaged goats have long been a threat to regenerating reserves and key native ecosystems that have had long-term control for possums and other predators.

4.2.4 Rabbit prone survey

The annual rabbit prone survey of the Tauherenikau Riverbed and adjacent properties has been completed. The assessment result was graded as negligible to low and rabbit numbers are possibly the lowest since Greater Wellington started the survey work. The free draining soils within and adjacent to the riverbed covered in gorse, scrub and lupins has been used as a rabbit density 'barometer' since the 1940s. It was always classified as a 'hot spot' for rabbits. Spasmodic cycling of rabbit calicivirus disease has had a pronounced effect as has the unusually wet summer and incredible grass growth on the neighbouring farm land.

4.2.5 Information exchange

Biosecurity staff based at Upper Hutt recently hosted a group of staff from the Environmental Protection Agency and MAF NZ Food Safety Group. The visitors viewed the office and vertebrate toxic agent storage facilities at Upper Hutt, were given a presentation on the work the team does and then undertook a field inspection of some current control sites.

Palmerston North City Council (PNCC) staff were hosted with a visit to the Wainuiomata Mainland Island. PNCC has a similar forest restoration site in a water supply catchment and has offered to host a visit in return.

Two staff visited the DoC sponsored predator control programme near the Mount Holdsworth visitor centre and assisted the volunteer group with servicing the control sites. This interaction allows the gaining of experience and discussion about promoting best practice.

4.2.6 Regional Possum Predator Control Programme (RPPCP)

Control for the 2011/12 year will concentrate on the areas (strata) where higher numbers of possums were caught during pre-monitoring. Five strata have received control for the year. The remaining seven strata will not receive control but all bait stations will be checked to be ready for the next year service.

Strata Name	Strata hectares	2011/12 pre-monitoring		2011/12 Control programme
		RTC result	+/-	
McLays	352	0.7	1.3	Control complete
Pukaha Buffer	1688	0.0	0.0	Control not required
West Rd - North Rd	1286	12.0	15.8	Control complete
Hastwell	2308	5.3	7.8	Control complete
Mangamahoe Central	1500	1.4	6.8	Control complete
Dryers Rock	1711	0.0	0.0	Control not required
Clelands Rd	1233	2.7	3.9	Control complete
Wairiri	1717	0.0	0.0	Control not required
Waimapu	1359	1.7	2.3	Control not required
Te Awa	2483	0.0	0.0	Control not required
Castlehill MR1	1522	0.0	0.0	Control not required
Castlehill JNL	992	1.7	6.7	Control not required

4.2.7 Total Control and Containment pest plants

Staff and contractors continue to work on programmed control and inspection activities. Very flexible scheduling is required due to the continuing wet summer. Annual inspections of Total Control and Containment species are progressing well with a higher proportion of sites with no pest plants found. The Key Native Ecosystem (KNE) spray contracts are behind schedule, due to unfavourable weather.

4.2.8 Hornwort

A briefing paper on hornwort control options for the Lake Wairarapa area was presented at the Wairarapa Moana Management Committee and Co-ordinating Group. The paper was intended to inform discussions on restoring the lake and surrounding wetlands. The paper outlined control options, strategic considerations and costs estimated to treat infested water bodies. The Management Committee suggested a small area be selected to do detailed assessment and develop site considerations to support control method selection. The water bodies in the Lake Reserve area are likely to be targeted. Work has commenced on site mapping and inspections, as well as discussions with Consent staff to review current

monitoring requirements. Based on preliminary discussions and past control performance at Boggy Pond, it is likely that monitoring costs may be significantly lower than originally budgeted.

4.2.9 **Biological Control**

GW hosted the National Biocontrol Collective meeting and an inaugural meeting with biocontrol stakeholders to establish a steering group focused on aquatic pest plants biocontrol. The impact of aquatic pest plants on conservation agencies, power generators, Land Information NZ, Environmental Protection Authority and regional councils was assessed to be millions of dollars per year through lost electricity production and cost of control. Biocontrol as a control tool has high potential to reduce these costs. The steering group will bring together stakeholders, seek funding and provide guidance to advance biocontrol research.

Landcare Research has moved to mass rearing of *Tradescantia* agents. GW has received four releases of the leaf beetle (*Neolema ogloblini*) and awaits a release of the stem-boring beetle (*Lema basicostata*). The tip-feeding (*Neolema abbreviata*) beetles are still in mass rearing. The leaf beetles are already showing noticeable impact on leaves even at this early stage, less than three months after release at sites in our region.

Broom gall mites have successfully established at release sites in the region. This mite has the ability to significantly reduce flowering and foliage volume once it builds up in numbers. This allows the already established leaf and seed feeding broom biocontrol agents to have a bigger impact on the plant. Staff are moving gall mite infested broom cuttings to the new sites.

Buddleia leaf weevil is well established at release sites around the region. This species does not disperse far by natural means each season. Staff are actively moving juveniles onto fresh plants at 10 sites this season.

Green thistle beetle has established well, allowing harvesting of beetles for release at new sites.

Ragwort has had a resurgence this season due to the unusually wet summer. Staff responded to public enquiries and complaints by harvesting and releasing biocontrol agent from well established areas. Team members travelled to a Horizons site at Woodville to collect three releases of Ragwort plume moth.

4.2.10 **Manchurian wild rice**

The control programme in the wetland on the Kapiti Coast, funded by MAF, has reached a stage very close to eradication, the first in the country. The infestation requires an intense search for remaining fragments of plant rhizomes, pegging and recording fragment locations with GPS. Traditional control for this species using Galant spray does not seem to be effective at low level infestations as lack of the foliar mass prevents enough chemical from being absorbed by the underground rhizome to ensure full control. In addition, the wetland

water table level has increased during the last three years now that drain maintenance has ceased to allow the wetland to regain its natural balance. To achieve eradication, alternative control techniques may be required.

4.2.11 Mangatarere Catchment

An aquatic pest plant survey is underway in the catchment to provide information required to assess impacts and potential effects on the current poor water quality in the stream. The survey is half completed and to date no new pest species have been found. Most infestations of common pest species are in low flow feeder streams or ponds and drains.

4.2.12 Rimutaka Range and Puketatu aerial projects

Planning is well underway for the taka Range Aerial Project (RRAP), a joint aerial 1080 operation in the Rimutaka Ranges between Animal Health Board (AHB) and Greater Wellington. A second project, the AHB Puketatu (Otaki) aerial 1080 project is also advancing. Consultation with user groups has been completed and additional interested parties (schools, vets, medical centres, etc) have been identified so operational notifications can be provided. Staff are currently working on statutory approvals for the aerial applications required from the Medical Officer of Health, Department of Conservation and Greater Wellington. Ground control works associated with both projects have commenced.

BioWorks staff are also concentrating on a possum survey contract currently underway in the Mt Bruce Waipoua area. This should be completed by April. Staff are using the new AHB process of recording all data for trap sites and captures on personal digital assistants (PDAs).

4.3 Biodiversity

4.3.1 Restructuring

The restructuring process to establish the Biodiversity department in its new form continues. The review of the current *Take Action* and *Take Care* programmes is nearing completion, resulting in the refocusing of resources on new programmes. The Biodiversity Department's draft Operational Plan 2012 – 2015 describing all of the new programmes will be the subject of an Environmental Wellbeing Committee workshop on 17 April.

4.3.2 Porirua Harbour and Catchment Strategy and Action Plan

The multi-agency *Porirua Harbour and Catchment Strategy and Action Plan* has now been endorsed by the four major parties involved in its formation - namely Greater Wellington, Porirua City Council, Wellington City Council and Te Runanga O Toa Rangatira. A public launch of the strategy is planned for late April. A number of the key actions identified in the document are already underway with others commencing in the new financial year.

4.3.3 Wairarapa Moana shorebird survey

A survey of the shorebirds along the Eastern shoreline of Lake Wairarapa was carried out last month. A team of six people led by Nikki McArthur, Biodiversity Monitoring Advisor, surveyed 18km of shoreline from Abbott's Creek in the north to Allsop's Bay in the south. Twenty-four species of shore and wetland bird species totalling 6,929 individuals were counted.

The highlight of the day was finding five gull-billed terns - three birds were seen between the Tauherenikau Delta and the Oporua Spillway, and another two birds between the spillway and Willow/Jury Island. Gull-billed Terns are usually an extremely rare vagrant to New Zealand (the nearest breeding population is in Australia); however, in June last year there was an "invasion" of several dozen of these terns into New Zealand, with flocks of up to a dozen birds seen at estuaries around the country. These terns have been spotted in recent months at the Manawatu, Ohau and Waikanae estuaries; this appears to be the first confirmed record for this species from Lake Wairarapa.

Other highlights included two sharp-tailed and two pectoral sandpipers (relatively rare Arctic-breeding waders), one black-fronted tern and 90 royal spoonbills (the largest number of spoonbills recorded at Lake Wairarapa so far).

The survey was done in conjunction with DoC and used a number of volunteers.

5 Development

5.1 Forestry

During February, 6,134 tonnes were harvested from the plantation forests at an average price of \$35 per tonne. Although demand remains firm, the average price for March is expected to decrease by about \$10 a tonne. Approximately 80% of this reduction is related to shipping costs.

Greater Wellington allows the public to collect firewood from the residuals of the plantation forestry operations. Permits are required for this and there is a small payment. As a result of an incident elsewhere in the country regarding a small stack of logs, the hazard list sheet that is handed out with each permit is being amended to reinforce that cutting up reject logs can be dangerous if not handled properly.

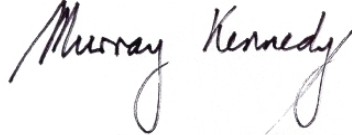

4. Recommendations

That the Committee

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

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