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Committee Council
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Wairarapa Moana update

1. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to update the Council on Greater Wellington's (GW) involvement in Wairarapa Moana (includes Lake Onoke).

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

3.1 Introduction

Greater Wellington is a partner in an interagency development programme at Wairarapa Moana. The common focus is the establishment of a wetland park that will be managed as a single entity, with an emphasis on conservation, heritage and recreation.

The development of the existing vision for Lake Wairarapa wetlands was prompted by the Department of Conservation (DoC) in 1989 when it produced a discussion document on the management of Lake Wairarapa wetlands as a step towards developing a comprehensive management plan for the entire wetland complex associated with Lake Wairarapa. DoC considered that the Lake Wairarapa wetlands should be managed as a single unit to:

- (1) Bring a unified and balanced approach to management that takes into account the needs of the various users of the wetlands or adjoining lands.
- (2) Protect and enhance the importance of the wetland for wildlife conservation.
- (3) Co-ordinate the development of the wetland as a recreational, educational and scientific resource.

To facilitate this happening, DoC formed the Lake Wairarapa Co-ordinating Committee to represent the various parties with an interest in the management of the Lake Wairarapa wetlands. The Co-ordinating Committee comprised organisations with statutory responsibilities for the management of the wetlands (including Wellington Regional Council), landowners, iwi, user groups and scientific advisors.

In 1991 the Lake Wairarapa Co-ordinating Committee prepared the *Lake Wairarapa Wetlands Management Guidelines*. The management guidelines provide the basis of the co-ordinated management of various functions and values of Lake Wairarapa. It was anticipated that, if the guidelines were successfully implemented, the quality of the wetlands should be maintained or even improved for the benefit of future generations of wildlife and people.

The guidelines were formally adopted by GW in August 1992, with GW also resolving to liaise with other relevant agencies to co-ordinate the implementation of the guidelines.

In 2000, after extensive public consultation, DoC released the *Lake Wairarapa Wetlands Action Plan*. The action plan sets out the management direction for the land administered by DoC at the lake for the following 10 years (2000 to 2010). The plan was developed to help DoC implement the goals and objectives of the Co-ordinating Committee's guidelines, as well as complying with the Wellington Conservation Management Strategy.

3.2 The area in question

Attachment 4 shows the area of publicly held land and water bodies within that would form the basis of the park. The area encompasses Lake Wairarapa, Lake Onoke and their associated wetland margins. It is not anticipated that any privately held land be purchased for inclusion in the management area but the management agency would be working with the various landowners to promote the goals and objectives of the wetland park.

3.3 Integrated management

Because of the complex wetland system and competing land uses, it was seen by GW and DoC that no area within the wetland area can be treated in isolation. As such, it is beneficial if the management of all the publicly held land is granted to one single management agency that represented the interests of the lake users, owners, neighbours and others that have a vested interest in its protection and development.

It is acknowledged by GW and DoC that, while there are plans in place to be followed to achieve a future goal (*Lake Wairarapa Wetlands Management Guidelines* and *Lake Wairarapa Wetlands Action Plan*), the plans largely have sat idle awaiting a level of investment that is sufficient to properly implement them. Until such a time arrives, weeds and pests continue to threaten the wetland environment of Lake Wairarapa. If any real progress is to be made, the management agency will have to have some real resourcing. With that in mind, this Council took the mantle of lead agency and incorporated Lake

Wairarapa Wetlands into its 1999 Long-Term Financial Strategy (LTFS) and funded the implementation of the guidelines accordingly.

3.4 Governance structure

GW and DoC, after considerable discussion, devised a governance structure, with the emphasis on an integrated management approach, and shared governance and management structures. This has evolved to include key stakeholders such as South Wairarapa District Council (SWDC) and both Wairarapa iwi.

3.5 Land ownership

The main difficulty delaying the completion of a formal governance arrangement at the moment is being able to create a structure that allows the governing agency to formally make decisions that bind the parties. This is caused by the way the lakes and associated land are legally held.

The largest blocks of lands around Lake Wairarapa (and the lake itself) are held as *Stewardships*, which are administered under the Conservation Act. Parties other than DoC cannot legally manage these areas as there is no mechanism to allow for this under the Conservation Act. Other lands around the lakes are held as *Government Purpose - Wildlife Management Reserves* and as *Scenic* or *Recreation Reserves*. All lands managed by GW or other territorial authorities are held as reserves, as there is legislation within the Reserves Act that allows for this. Complicating this is also the potential for the lakes to be included in any Treaty of Waitangi settlement by Wairarapa iwi. There are also lands owned by GW that are used for flood protection purposes, e.g., floodway.

As an interim measure, a Wairarapa Moana Establishment Group (WMEG) has been formed to oversee the development of the project, working on a “handshake” basis of “compliance by co-operation”. A formal Memorandum of Understanding for the WMEG is being developed to set formal expectations between the parties about how we will all work together.

4. Policy challenges

Despite the scale of this project, this joint project offers the first real opportunity to start to make a difference. Policies are needed within the narrow confines of Wairarapa Moana but will eventually involve the whole of the Ruamahanga River catchment. A total catchment approach in the end will be fundamental to improving the condition of the Wairarapa Moana.

Agricultural practises and demands resulting from the development of the Lower Wairarapa Valley Development Scheme (LWVDS) have and still profoundly affect Wairarapa Moana. Policy in the initial stages needs to include educating and involving the local agricultural community. To date the management in the LWVDS has focused on benefits to farming. A significant challenge of this project is to balance the agronomic drivers of the past with an

approach that recognises the need for sustainable land that is sensitive to its wetland neighbour.

There are a range of other policy priorities that relate to the management of the entity. Many of these will be developed to respond to longstanding unresolved issues of which the Wairarapa Moana has its fair share. These include drainage, Canada geese and illegal fishing.

5. Wairarapa Moana - towards integrated catchment management

The Wairarapa Moana itself and all matters and issues pertaining to it are large. Anyway you look at them, the wetlands of the lower Wairarapa valley are challenging in their sheer scale and complexity. They are a nationally important and significant multi-dimensional entity. Their geology, ecology, intertidal relationship, history, cultural association and economic value all contribute to their importance. Regarded as dynamic and dangerous to human use and settlement, the lakes and wetlands comprising Wairarapa Moana have been radically reduced and modified, with some 3,000 hectares of Lake Wairarapa drained for dairy farming since the 1980s. The LWVDS has also significantly contributed to the modification of the wetlands, substantially reducing the ability of the lakes to flush themselves through the annual boom and bust cycle of flooding. The Ruamahanga now empties itself solely into Lake Onoke, which has had an adverse effect on the environment as a result.

Relationships with mana whenua have also shifted, with the likelihood of lake ownership being restored to Wairarapa Maori. Mana whenua ownership and attendant values are likely to drive a post-settlement partnership approach to management.

Whilst widely regarded as a best practice environmental management model, integrated catchment management poses significant challenges. Although change may be deemed desirable, indeed imperative, such a fundamental shift in practice cannot be based on theory alone. In order to shift from our current practice model to one based on the principles of integrated catchment (whole organisation input, knowledge sharing, outcome focused, multi-disciplinary team approach), we need projects that require the full suite of ecological management disciplines and resources. Wairarapa Moana is just such a project. Its sheer scale and complexity has the potential to intimidate planning processes into remaining paper based exercises, condemn worthy but isolated activity as a tiny drop in a very large bucket and devour resources wholesale. Wairarapa Moana demands a collaborative approach; not just from GW, but from all agencies that are accountable for the community, ecology and economy of the Ruamahanga catchment.

To date, we are achieving this collaborative approach and can evidence the benefits through stronger interagency relationships and an increased willingness to get involved. There is an emerging sense that as we improve our understanding of the practice of integrated management as a work style that we do have the ability to improve the ecology of Wairarapa Moana through the

establishment of policy, community education and increased compliance. One example of this is the establishment of an interagency monitoring and compliance group that aims to enhance monitoring by collaboration, the development of monitoring tools (see attachments 3 and 4) and information sharing. Collaboration is only happening because we are taking a deliberately inclusive approach, essentially learning to work in partnership as we go. This approach has been most important in ensuring that iwi and hapū are able to participate. The equitable partnership of half Crown and local government agencies and half mana whenua groupings is a first for a major ecological restoration project in our Region and predicts a co-governance, co-management approach to post settlement ownership by iwi.

6. Progress to date

The past 18 months has seen significant progress made towards development of a governance and management structure that can respond to the significant ecological and community liaison challenges posed by the scale and complex nature of the lakes and the issues that affect them.

Milestones achieved to date include:

- A Wairarapa Moana Establishment Board (WMEG) is in place (see attachment 2) made up of: DoC (2), GW (2), Kahungunu ki Wairarapa (2), Rangitāne o Wairarapa (2), South Wairarapa District Council (1) and a representative of local hapū (1). Terms of reference for the WMEG is in place and a more formal Memorandum of Understanding is being developed.
- A Wairarapa Moana Management Team (WMMT) to advise the WMEG and implement work programmes is operational (see attachment 2). The WMMT is made up of senior (officer) representatives from the parties to this project.
- Resources supporting iwi and hapū participation have been secured through the 2009/10 LTCCP.
- A draft vision for the project is nearing completion
- A “Compliance and Monitoring network” has been established to ensure that compliance activities and powers are co-ordinated (refer attachment 3)
- A communication plan for engaging the general public in the project has been completed. Specialised communications plans for engaging iwi and neighbouring landowners are currently being developed.
- “Portfolio Groups”, which will execute work programmes and provide technical advice on issues, have been formed (see attachment 2). An induction of these groups is to be held in October.
- Land tenure and Treaty of Waitangi claim issues are being investigated to allow the formal development of a governance entity and structure for the wetland park.

Lake plantings have been undertaken and so far have been well supported by the community.

7. The next phase of work

Continued development and improvement of the highly degraded Wairarapa Moana is contingent on continuing to progress and build on the establishment of the WMEG and its supporting structures.

The WMEG has identified that restoration is a very long-term project. The WMEG acknowledges this by taking a “small steps” approach addressing the priority objectives that need to be completed whether the Wairarapa Moana becomes a park and irrespective of ownership. Whilst this approach appears to be working, there remains the issue of how the emerging development is resourced.

The WMMT has identified that achievement of prioritised activity at Wairarapa Moana will be via Portfolio Groups (refer attachment). The groups are made up of staff that have existing responsibilities or vested interests at the lake.

Immediate objectives deriving from this include:

- An official launch of the project and its vision, and the organisations that are involved in it
- Developing a comprehensive set of management plans and operating plans (including budget implications) that will provide a roadmap for achieving the project’s vision
- Progressing the legal issues surrounding land ownerships and designations that will enable governance by a single (independent) entity, including its ability to apply for and receive funding
- Implementing the communication strategy(ies)
- Developing a grazing policy for the lake
- Developing baseline reports that identify the current “status” of Wairarapa Moana (predominantly surrounding the health of its ecology) for future benchmarking of progress
- Establishment of protection mechanisms, including taiapure, mataitai, and Ramsar status (convention on wetlands)
- Complete the establishment and induction of the Portfolio Groups so that all parties can start work on Wairarapa Moana projects equitably and in earnest
- Reviewing key project documents, such as the *Wildlands Ecological Restoration Report*, *Wairarapa Moana Recreation Plan* and DoC’s *Wairarapa Wetlands Management Plan*

8. Resource implications

This Council has agreed that it will take the lead role in this project and provide ongoing “baseline” funding to allow the project to “exist”. By this, Council means that its funding will provide the “bare bones”, i.e., administration support, some expertise and enough funding to get some projects done every year. However, the Council has made it clear that it will not be the sole source of funding. The other parties and other private or public sources of either funding or in kind need to be sourced if this project is ever to reach its goal.

Now that this project is operational, we are starting to realise the resource implications associated with a project this size and of this level of complexity. While the operating budget can be considered modest, the time and effort needed by officers to tackle the planning, co-ordination, administration and implementation associated with it could easily become onerous if not controlled.

At this time it is too difficult to meaningfully estimate what impost the project will have on staff time. However, the expectation surrounding the delivery of work programmes associated with the project already outweighs the ability of the officers to deliver it.

9. Recommendations

That Council:

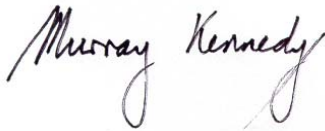
- (1) *Receives the report.*
- (2) *Notes the critical role that Greater Wellington Regional Council plays as a partner in the Wairarapa Moana project.*

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Attachments:

- 1 What is Wairarapa Moana
- 2 Wairarapa Moana structure
- 3 Compliance and monitoring issues
- 4 Lake Wairarapa Wetlands