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Report to the Utility Services Committee
from the Landcare and Utility Services Divisions

Access to the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area

1. Purpose

To approve a policy allowing managed public access to the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area (reflecting the principles adopted at the Utility Services Committee meeting on 21 June 2000).

2. Background

In 1998, the Council approved an access policy to the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area (Report 98.296). However, following higher than normal levels of *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium* in the raw water from the Water Collection Area, implementation of the policy was deferred while a reaction tank was added to the Treatment Plant and a ranger service (to manage security) introduced.

At the 21 June 2000 meeting, the Utility Services Committee agreed in principle to restricted opening of the Wainuiomata and Orongorongo water supply catchments. Utility Services officers were asked to report back with a detailed proposal, including the principles for access also adopted by the Committee (refer **Attachment 1**, Minute to Report 00.412).

A programme for implementing managed access to the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area, developed by the Landcare and Utility Services Divisions, is **Attachment 2**.

3. The Proposed Programme

The proposed programme provides for managed access to be implemented in three phases, through to July 2003. Progress on access is to be reviewed annually.

3.1 Key Objectives

The Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area is currently managed solely for water supply purposes. The protection of public health is paramount at all times and any access programme must be developed with that in mind.

In addition to its primacy for water supply (providing some 25 percent of the Wellington metropolitan area's supply), the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area is of national importance for its ecology, being the best example of lowland podocarp forest in the lower North Island¹. A wide range of bird species is found in the Water Collection Area including the rare kakariki (native parakeet) as well as indigenous fish, in the Wainuiomata and Orongorongo Rivers. High altitude beech is found on the ridges. The area also includes heritage water supply features (Morton Dam, Lower Dam, Pipeline Tunnel, Orongorongo Weir), dated between 1840–1940.

In keeping with other 'special places' such as the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary and Kapiti Island, it is complementary to consider introducing a regime of managed access, rather than completely open access. Bearing in mind the primacy of the water supply and the important and sensitive environment, the programme for implementation has been based on:

- protecting water quality and public health i.e. recognising the primacy of the water supply over other activities
- public access which is controlled and limited
- regular monitoring and review.

Unlike the Hutt Water Collection Area, which has been open for public access since 1997, the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area does not have natural barriers to access but is close to urban areas and has water supply facilities near the main entry point (the remoteness of the Hutt Water Collection Area, coupled with restrictions on camping and vehicle access, is proving to be a barrier to anyone other than the most experienced of recreational users, and numbers entering the Area are therefore, relatively low). It is also smaller and a more unique environment than the Hutt Water Collection Area, necessitating greater controls on access.

3.2 Key Features : Phase 1, to June 2001

The proposed programme commences with guided tours for organised groups by the Landcare Ranger (maximum group size: 20; ratio of rangers to visitors, 1:10; average of one 'trip-day' per month, limited to the Wainuiomata Catchment). Because of climate factors there may be two trips in some months and none in others.

The people in the groups must be from *bona fide* clubs/organisations, as it is easier to hold these groups accountable for their actions in the Water Collection Area.

¹ Refer *Biological Resources of the Wellington Region* (compiled by WRC, Queen Elizabeth II National Trust, New Zealand Biological Resources Centre), November 1984.

The proposed programme provides for scientific, heritage or cultural research to be approved on merit (subject to conditions).

Organised hunting of deer by amateurs is most effective during the “Roar” period in April and aids security in the Water Collection Area at that time. Amateur hunters were involved in hunting deer this year during the “Roar”. It is proposed to continue this practice in 2001 and review it annually thereafter. Other members of the public will not be taken into the catchment while hunting is in progress.

The proposed programme also prohibits camping and provides for approval of vehicles only in very special circumstances (e.g. for people with limited mobility), at the discretion of the Landcare Ranger. Police/search and rescue and general security and control issues are also addressed in the programme.

There will be close liaison between the Landcare Ranger and the Plant Supervisor to ensure that for operational reasons or a plant emergency access can be stopped as required.

During *Phase 1*, a programme to train ‘tripleaders’, (similar to the programme for training members of the public to become guides at the Karori Sanctuary) will be established.

3.3 **Key Features : Phase 2, July 2001 to June 2002**

During *Phase 2*, registered tripleaders could take limited numbers of trips through the Orongorongo Catchment (they will have to have taken trips through the Wainuiomata Catchment before taking groups through the Orongorongo Catchment and will be required to hold a current first-aid certificate and be tested for typhoid). Using tripleaders will free up rangers to take another group at the same time or to do other work. Tripleaders will be especially useful for taking groups through the Orongorongo Catchment, which is expected to take a full day. The trileader programme also has potential ‘community connection’ benefits for the Council. It is envisaged that approved tripleaders will be considered for ‘honorary ranger’ status.

During *Phase 2* it is proposed that the maximum number of people in the Water Collection Area on any one ‘trip-day’ will go up to 40.

3.4 **Key Features : Phase 3, July 2002 Onwards**

Developing a policy for concessionaires in the Water Collection Area has been deferred until *Phase 3* when the impacts of access during *Phases 1 and 2* will have been monitored and assessed. Any applications received during *Phases 1 and 2* will be referred to the Utility Services Committee for consideration.

During *Phase 3*, consideration may be given to allowing individual members of the public (as opposed to organised groups) to go into a ballot for places on tours reserved for that purpose. The limits on numbers in the Water Collection Area could also be reviewed during *Phase 3* if considered appropriate.

3.5 Medical Officer of Health

The Regional Council has a policy of achieving an 'A' grading for water treatment plants, where it is practical to do so (refer Report 00.412). Officers do not consider that the proposed programme for access will impact on this objective.

The definition of a 'protected catchment' is outlined in the *Guidelines for Drinking Water Management in New Zealand*:

'A catchment which has major points of access fenced and is controlled so that there is only strictly controlled human access and limited feral animals.'

The Medical Officer of Health² has specified a preference for the catchment to meet the definition of 'protected' and for the area to be managed and controlled in such a way as to protect the native forest against adverse effects, which would impact on the overall water quality from the catchment.

4. Resourcing

Funding for the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area ranger service is currently split between the Water Levy (70 percent) and General Rates (30 percent).

It is proposed to fund the access programme within the existing Rates budget. The 30 percent (Rates budget) equates to approximately 17 hours a week to deal with access issues in addition to administration and functions associated with the Wainuiomata Waterworks Recreation Area, already undertaken by the Ranger. The Wainuiomata Waterworks Recreation Area continues to be a popular recreational area, particularly for swimming and picnics during the summer months.

Officers consider that *Phase 1* of the proposed access programme is achievable with existing resources. However, if demands on ranger time to deal with access issues increase significantly during *Phases 2 and 3*, it may become necessary to review the level of funding.

5. The Next Step

Should the Council approve the access programme, Landcare officers will begin implementation. This will involve planning the 'trip-days' and sending letters to those organisations and individuals who made submissions on the Annual Plan on the access issue. We will utilise newspapers and the Council's web site to inform the public of the policy. The date nominated for the first 'trip-day' is likely to be mid-November. Depending on demand, it may be necessary to use a ballot system to allocate days for groups, once applications are received. Each programme will be approved by the Water Group to ensure there are no conflicts with water supply activities.

² Letter of 13 June 2000 from Dr Stephen Palmer, Medical Officer of Health to Murray Kennedy, WRC Water Group

6. Communication

Subject to the Council's restrictions, Parks and Forests officers, in conjunction with the Water Group and Corporate Communications, will prepare a press release to publicise the Council's commitment to allowing managed public access to the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area.

7. Recommendations

That the Utility Services Committee recommends to the Policy & Finance Committee that the Council:

- (1) Approve managed public access to the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area.*
- (2) Rescind the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Access Plan 1998 (refer Report 98.296).*
- (3) Endorse the attached implementation programme for access into the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area (**Attachment 2**).*
- (4) Note the phased approach to implementing the programme, which specifies annual review periods for reporting-back on progress, to the Utility Services Committee.*
- (5) Note that implementation will start in due course with the first groups expected later this year.*

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Attachment 1 : Minute to Report 00.412

Attachment 2 : Implementation Programme : Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area Access, 2000