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**Report 02.201**

10 June 2002

File: ENV/5/1/13

Report to ENV 02.201.MD.sw

Report to the Environment Committee  
from Melanie Dixon, Policy Advisor

**Draft Wetland Action Plan 2002-2006**

1. **Purpose**

For the Committee to consider the Draft Wetland Action Plan 2002-2006. The Draft Wetland Action Plan is enclosed as a separate document.

2. **Background**

Wetlands are valuable because of the rich diversity of life they support, the role they play in cleansing and storing water, the recreational opportunities they provide and because they have become increasingly rare.

Like much of New Zealand, the Wellington Region has lost a large proportion (about 90%) of the wetlands that existed in the early 1800s. Wetlands continue to be threatened by a range of activities including urban encroachment, drainage, grazing, and weed invasion. A proactive approach is needed to reverse this trend and to protect the unique plant and animal species that depend on our remaining wetlands. The Council has made this commitment through its support of the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy and its own Biodiversity Programme.

The Council is already undertaking work to manage and protect wetlands. Under the Council's Biodiversity Programme, advice is given to landowners on wetland management, funding is provided for community groups through the *Take Care* programme, and work has commenced on the restoration of a number of wetlands on Council land. In addition, the use and development of wetlands is regulated through the Regional Freshwater Plan. However, there has been no overall strategy or direction for this work and it was always intended that a guiding document would be prepared to provide this. This is the role of the Action Plan.

This Action Plan outlines priorities and actions proposed to reverse wetland decline over the next four years. The recommended process for adoption gives groups a chance to comment on what is proposed before the plan is finalised. The Action Plan has been prepared and supported by staff in the Landcare, Environment, and Wairarapa Divisions (the Wetland Ecosystem Group).

This draft Wetland Action Plan was presented to the Landcare Committee at its meeting on 23 April 2002.

### 3. **What does the Action Plan Propose?**

The options the Council has to support wetlands in the Region are:

- Investing in wetlands on Regional Council land;
- Encouraging wetland restoration on private land by providing advice and incentives; and
- Regulating activities that effect wetlands.

The draft Action Plan proposes using all of the above methods (although on private land there is a stronger emphasis on encouraging rather than regulating). The key actions proposed under the Action Plan are:

- (1) Develop a prioritised inventory of wetlands in the Wellington Region;
- (2) Increase our knowledge of wetlands, and in particular wetland hydrology;
- (3) Protect and restore wetlands on land owned or managed by the Regional Council;
- (4) Work in partnership with other agencies to improve Lake Wairarapa;
- (5) Protect the very best wetlands on private land under the Key Native Ecosystem Programme;
- (6) Provide practical advice and assistance to encourage wetland restoration on private land;
- (7) Provide an effective regulatory bottom line for wetlands; and
- (8) Monitor our progress towards achieving our vision.

### 4. **What will it cost?**

In 2000 the Council made funds available for the care and protection of wetlands. These funds largely provide for the actions outlined in the Draft Wetland Action Plan. However, there are additional costs involved in implementing some parts of the Plan. This amounts to about \$70,000 per year over the period 2002-2006 and is outlined in Appendix 2. The additional funding will need to be considered through the development of the Long Term Financial Strategy (LTFS) and the Annual Plan process.

### 5. **What happens next?**

We will talk with the following groups and seek their feedback about the plan:

- Iwi;
- Landowners;

- Territorial Authorities;
- Interested groups;
- Wellington Fish and Game Council; and
- Department of Conservation.

A final Wetland Action Plan will then be presented to the Landcare and Environment committees for approval next financial year in time for decisions to be made through Council's long term planning process.

## 6. **Communications**

Staff will talk directly to Iwi, landowners, territorial authorities, farmers, interest groups, Wellington Fish and Game Council, and the Department of Conservation. The plan will be widely distributed and submissions invited.

## 7. **Recommendations**

*That the Environment Committee:*

- 1) *receives the report.*
- 2) *notes the contents of the report.*
- 3) *recommends to the Policy and Finance Committee that the draft Wetland Action Plan 2002-2006 be released for public consultation.*

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