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Committee Environment Committee
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The national priorities for protecting rare and threatened native biodiversity on private land

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of the release by the Government of the Statement of National Priorities for Protecting Rare and Threatened Biodiversity on Private land and the implications for Greater Wellington.

2. Background

The New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy (2000) proposed, as one of the actions to protect indigenous habitats and ecosystems, the preparation of a National Policy Statement (NPS) for biodiversity. A draft was prepared in 2004 but this was later withdrawn in favour of a non-statutory Statement of National Priorities for biodiversity.

On 26 April 2007, the Minister of Conservation and Minister for the Environment issued the Statement of National Priorities for protecting rare and threatened native biodiversity on private land.

This statement provides local authorities, communities and private landowners with information about the types of ecosystems and habitats on private land that, from a national perspective, are most threatened and in need of protection. It is intended that the information about the national priorities can be used by local and central government agencies and landowners to co-ordinate their decisions and on-the-ground actions in relation to biodiversity.

In summary the four priorities are:

National Priority 1: To protect indigenous vegetation associated with land environments, (defined by Land Environments of New Zealand at Level IV), that have 20% or less remaining in indigenous cover.

National Priority 2: To protect indigenous vegetation associated with sand dunes and wetlands; ecosystem types that have become uncommon due to human activity.

National Priority 3: To protect indigenous vegetation associated with “originally rare” terrestrial ecosystem types not already covered by priorities 1 and 2.

National Priority 4: To protect habitats of acutely and chronically threatened indigenous species.

The brochure appended to this report provides more information on the rationale behind the priorities.

3. What does the Statement mean for GW?

As noted, the Statement of National Priorities provides non-statutory guidance only and, as such, Greater Wellington can use it at its discretion. It is worth noting, however, that there is a close alignment between the priorities and the general thrust of the council’s biodiversity programmes. Since 1999, Greater Wellington has offered a number of programmes aimed at supporting and encouraging private landowners wishing to protect, manage or restore biodiversity on their land. These programmes have had a focus on those ecosystem types identified as being significantly depleted in this region including:

- Lowland forests and streams
- Wetlands
- Lowland riparian areas
- Sand dunes and escarpments
- Estuaries

Priority 1 uses the Threatened Environment Classification Tool – a combination of three databases used to identify areas where biodiversity is in most need of protection and management. This tool was used in preparing Greater Wellington’s 2006 state of the environment report *Measuring Up*, and is being proposed as a means of assessing the effectiveness of the ecosystems section of the revised Regional Policy Statement. It is also likely to be a key assessment tool proposed in the regional Biodiversity Implementation Plan currently being prepared.

In summary, there is nothing in the Statement of National Priorities that will cause Greater Wellington to reconsider its current biodiversity priorities. For other organisations, such as some territorial authorities, it may provide useful guidance.

4. Communication

As this report is essentially a summary for Councillors of the Statement of National Priorities for Biodiversity, no immediate public communication of its contents is considered necessary. However, we will ensure that the close relationship between the report, priorities and GW’s work is highlighted as we continue to deliver our work programme.

5. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. ***Receives the report; and***
2. ***Notes the contents.***

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Attachment 1: Protecting our Places