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Report to the Policy & Finance Sub-Committee
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Possible Enhancement of the Key Native Ecosystems Programme

1. Purpose

To present the Committee with options for enhancing the Key Native Ecosystems (KNE) programme and to raise two other related Biosecurity matters.

2. Background

The Policy & Finance Committee accepted a recommendation at its 29 May meeting from the Rural Services & Wairarapa Committee *“that officers report to the Committee on options for utilising additional funds for enhancing the KNE programme up to \$600,000”*.

The background to this recommendation was the expected savings to the general rate as a result of the proposed new funding policy for the National Pest Management Strategy for Bovine Tb. Report 01.293 to the Rural Services & Wairarapa Committee (Attachment 1) outlined expected savings of \$606,254 to the general rate line for the 2001/02 financial year. In addition, savings of a similar or greater magnitude against the current Long Term Financial Strategy (LTFS) numbers are expected in future years.

3. Key Native Ecosystems (KNE) Programme

The KNE programme was initiated in 1996 as part of the Council's first Regional Pest Management Strategy under the Biosecurity Act. In summary the KNE programme seeks to protect and enhance native flora and fauna at

selected sites throughout the Region. Historically, sites were selected and ranked using a range of criteria, including –

- Presence of nationally or regionally significant flora and/or fauna
- Size
- Ecological vulnerability
- Protection status
- Public access

In excess of 350 potential KNE sites were identified, ranging in size from 5 to 1,600 hectares. Since 1996, around 90 sites have received pest control.

Initially the work was almost entirely possum control. However, in 2000/01 this was changed to include both pest plant and animal control. The Council's Regional Pest Management Strategy is being changed accordingly to include integrated pest management at all future sites. New KNE work will also include a representative range of indigenous ecosystem types (eg. wetlands, dunelands, coastal escarpments, lowland forests, floodplain forests, and estuaries).

Expenditure on KNE's had increased to approximately \$370,000 by 1999/2000. Significant increases in the total area receiving pest control was achieved following the development of joint funding agreements with some Local Authorities, particularly Wellington, Hutt and Porirua Cities, for KNE work on their lands.

As a result of the new biodiversity emphasis for the Council's current Long Term Financial Strategy, the funding for the annual KNE programme was increased to around \$580,000 per annum from the 2000/01 financial year. This funding is from general rates with additional financial support coming from KNE ventures on some Territorial Local Authority land.

A list is attached (Attachment 2) of the 53 KNE Management Areas. These areas contain the 90 individual KNE sites where work has been undertaken to date. Thirty of the Management Areas are located west of the Tararua – Rimutaka Ranges with the majority being within the Wellington Metropolitan areas.

4. Comment

The KNE programme has been very successful with considerable public support evident. A number of TLA's, community groups, and organisations are now actively involved in maintaining pest control at KNE sites. It is desirable that Council continues to adequately resource this community involvement, particularly as a number of the smaller KNE sites may not achieve a high ranking under the new ecological prioritisation model. Therefore community input will be necessary to ensure current benefits are not lost.

KNE sites, where pest management has occurred, have shown a marked improvement in native birdlife, including species diversity and population. Furthermore, there have been numerous new recordings of rare and endangered plant species. Monitoring indicates improvements in canopy density and forest floor regeneration.

Councillors will recall that during the development of the current LTFS there was a strong desire for new biodiversity projects to be included and existing biodiversity activities increased. An additional \$500,000 p.a. allocation to the KNE programme was initially proposed at that time. However, this suggested allocation was reduced to \$200,000 at the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee meeting on the recommendation of management.

This recommendation to limit the increase in KNE activity was based on proposing a programme that management were confident they could deliver upon given uncertainties that existed at that time. These uncertainties related to how KNE work could be included within the new Regional Pest Management Strategy because of the nature of recent amendments to the Biosecurity Act. There were also practical issues over the delivery of an increased animal and pest plant work programme given the relative lack of experienced contractors available.

At this stage the new Regional Pest Management Strategy is virtually complete and the ecologically based KNE approach has been successfully incorporated within it. Combined animal and pest plant control works are now being undertaken at some KNE sites although contract prices are generally higher than was initially expected, thus lessening the extent of work that can be undertaken.

5. Possible KNE Enhancements

At the Biodiversity Councillor Workshops in April, an overview of proposed biodiversity expenditure, using current LTFS approved funds, was provided for 2001/02-2003/04, as follows-

	<i>2001/02</i>	<i>2002/03</i>	<i>2003/04</i>
• Maintain existing KNE	\$250K	\$235K	\$185K
• New representative KNE	\$200K	\$150K	\$150K
• Mainland Island	\$ 75K	\$150K	\$150K
• Support QEII	\$ 25K	\$15K	\$15K
• Support volunteers	\$ 20K	\$20K	\$20K
• Promotions & publications	\$ 10K	\$10K	\$10K

TOTAL	\$580K	\$580K	\$530K

In future years it was envisaged that spending on KNE would reduce under a maintenance programme. Conversely, Mainland Island expenditure would increase.

Should additional funding be made available for enhancing biodiversity, then it could be used to fast track both the representative KNE programme and development of one or more Mainland Islands as explained at the workshops. Identification of possible Mainland Islands is likely to be available in late July.

Three areas of Council land in contention include –

- East Harbour Regional Park (includes Hutt City and private land)
- Wainuiomata – Orongorongo catchments
- Hutt River catchments

The East Harbour area is particularly unique as it contains the only mountain to sea sequence, with a range of ecosystems present, including indigenous forest, coastal escarpments, lakes/wetlands, pastoral land and marine. Management of pest plants and animals has already commenced in the indigenous forest section. Additional funds could be utilised to extend the initial work or, alternatively, fast track work in any area selected as a Mainland Island. An additional \$120,000 could be effectively utilised in 2001/02, with \$120,000 and \$170,000 in the following two years.

Encouraging volunteers should become a major future focus as a number of the smaller existing KNE areas are unlikely to meet the new ecological selection criteria for ongoing maintenance work. It is therefore suggested that an additional \$50,000 p.a. could be included in the budget, split evenly between support for QEII covenants and local volunteer groups.

A new area that would benefit substantially from possum control is the Akatarawa Valley. At approximately 6,100 hectares, this area serves as a natural wildlife corridor. The area contains considerable native flora and fauna. Unfortunately, it also serves as a continual source of possum re-invasion for Council lands to the north, west and east. Possum control has occurred on all surrounding Council land, but constant re-invasion is causing increased maintenance costs. Promoting landowner self help control for sustained maintenance could be achievable if possum densities were lowered. A budget provision of \$185,000 could be allocated in 2001/02 with \$140,000 and \$95,000 in the following two years.

In summary, the three suggested items for enhancing the KNE programme are as follows:

	<i>2001/02</i>	<i>2002/03</i>	<i>2003/04</i>
• Additional KNE/Mainland Island work	\$120K	\$120K	\$170K
• Additional QEII/Volunteers	\$50K	\$ 50K	\$ 50K
• New Akatarawa KNE	\$185K	\$140K	\$ 95K

Should Council agree to the three suggested increases, then the following table outlines the revised expenditure totals –

	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
• Maintain existing KNE	\$250K	\$375K	\$280K
• New representative KNE	\$385K	\$150K	\$150K
• Mainland Islands	\$195K	\$270K	\$320K
• Support QEII	\$ 50K	\$ 40K	\$ 40K
• Support volunteers	\$ 45K	\$ 45K	\$ 45K
• Promotions & publications	\$ 10K	\$ 10K	\$ 10K
TOTALS	\$935K	\$890K	\$845K
<i>Compared to current LTFS</i>	<i>+\$355K</i>	<i>+\$310K</i>	<i>+\$315K</i>

The table indicates that additional biodiversity works in 2001/02 will need to be maintained. However, expenditure totals will slowly reduce over time as the need for maintenance declines.

6. Regional Pest Management Strategy

A separate, but related matter is resourcing for the new Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS) which has arisen since the preparation of the Proposed Annual Plan and LTFS update. A substantial review of the RPMS is nearing completion and submissions on the Proposed Strategy have closed. Hearings are scheduled for mid June. Submissions received to date do not indicate any significant opposition to the Proposed Strategy. Conversely, a number of submissions request the inclusion of additional species as regional pests.

The proposed RPMS envisages a 20 year term with 5 yearly review periods. The longer term has been chosen to adequately reflect timeframes necessary to achieve successful eradication and/or containment of pest species.

If the proposal to include eradication objectives is supported in the final document, then some additional resourcing will be necessary to adequately deliver on the new RPMS. The proposed RPMS indicates that Council will be responsible for service delivery for a new eradication category for certain pest plant species. An increase in activity will therefore be needed as 12 plants are proposed in this category, including the addition of two plants to the comprehensive and ongoing Wellington City programme.

In addition, there is a need for increased monitoring of various aspects of the Strategy to ensure that the desired outputs are being achieved. An increase in the total RPMS budget of \$110,000 p.a. is required to adequately fund the Proposed RPMS. This is an issue that has not yet been addressed by the RPMS sub-committee, but it is being raised now because of the time limits to complete the Annual Plan and LTFS update.

7. Council Land Policy

On 12 December 1996, the Council, on the recommendation of the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee, resolved “*that the undertaking of Key Native Ecosystem Enhancement Programmes on Council land during the Term of the Regional Annual Pest Management Strategy is not appropriate*”. The reasoning was that those Departments responsible for managing Council land should make sufficient provision in their budgets for pest control.

This issue was raised at the recent Biodiversity Workshops, as it would be appropriate to have this policy changed if Council wishes to maximise biodiversity outcomes in the region. Council manages a range of significant ecosystems on behalf of the community and integrated pest management is essential if the biodiversity of these areas is to be enhanced.

8. Recommendation

That the Policy & Finance Committee Recommends that Council:

1. *Allocate an additional \$355,000 in 2001/02, \$310,000 in 2002/03, and \$315,000 in 2003/04 for KNE enhancement projects as proposed in this report.*
2. *Allocate an additional \$110,000 per annum for implementation of the new Regional Pest Management Strategy 2001-21.*
3. *Revoke the policy decision of 12 December 1996 and approve the use of KNE funds for expenditure on Regional Council owned land as well as private property and Territorial Authority land.*

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