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## **Report 02.39**

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Report to Environment Committee  
from Tim Porteous, Biodiversity Co-ordinator

## **Biodiversity Protection on Private Land**

### **1. Purpose**

To inform the Committee of the gains made in legally protecting regionally significant biodiversity on private land in partnership with Queen Elizabeth II National Trust (the National Trust).

### **2. Background**

Landowners seeking to permanently protect areas of biodiversity on their land can do so by way of a covenant with the National Trust. The covenant is typically in perpetuity and is registered against the title ensuring subsequent landowners adhere to the conditions of the covenant.

National Trust covenants have proven to be a popular and robust method of protecting private land. Over 1,500 have been registered nationally, protecting some 56,000 hectares since the inception of the scheme twenty years ago. In the Wellington region during this period 110 covenants protecting approximately 4,000 hectares have been secured. Many of these, particularly in Eastern Wairarapa, were financially supported by the Council as part of soil conservation initiatives (although this programme ceased in the mid 1990's.)

### **3. QEII Covenant Programme**

Recognising the contribution private land protection can make to biodiversity in the Region, the Council made funding available in the current Long Term Financial Strategy (LTFS) to assist landowners entering into a National Trust covenant. Establishing a covenant incurs costs related to fencing (to exclude stock), surveying (to enable registration against the land title) and legal matters. Normally the fencing costs are shared equally between the National Trust and the individual landowner. The

Council's financial support reduces (but does not eliminate) the cost to the landowner by sharing the fencing costs, and reduces the cost to the National Trust by sharing the cost of survey.

The result of the Council's contribution is to increase the number of voluntary private land protection initiatives that can be achieved and within a relatively modest budget. The Council's contribution was \$30,000 in the first year (2000/01) and in the current year is \$50,000.

Details of the covenants supported to date are given in Appendix 1 of this report. It should be noted that this year's budget was fully committed by the end of December 2001.

#### 4. **Selected Highlights**

Every covenant is different, both in terms of the landowner's reasons for wanting to voluntarily protect an area (at some cost to themselves) and the types of habitats involved. Three examples from the twenty-two assisted by the Council illustrate these points:

##### **Waddington**

These landowners have decided to forego considerable potential income from subdivision in order to protect 22.5 hectares of beech/kamahi forest remnant and a small kahikatea wetland in Stokes Valley. For a number of years they have controlled animal pests on the block to a very high standard from their own resources. Some assistance will be provided by the Regional Council to assist with the control of relatively minor plant pest invasions from surrounding private gardens.

Significant wildlife recorded in the block includes tui, kereru (both breeding well), bellbird and long-tailed shining cuckoo. Local iwi have had access to limited amounts of keikei for weaving purposes for a number of years and this arrangement has been formalised in the covenant agreement.

##### **Wellington Natural Heritage Trust**

Local conservationists have sought the protection of Long Gully for some years and it was finally made possible by an anonymous \$200,000 donation. The Wellington Natural Heritage Trust was formed to take title to the land. The Trust recognised that the land needed formal legal protection, amongst other reasons, to give surety when seeking additional funding for the maintenance and development of the land.

The block of 60.5 hectares is almost adjacent to the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary and contains a range of vegetation from early regeneration through gorse to mature specimens of miro (very rare locally), rata, nikau, rewarewa, pigeonwood and kamahi. It is intended to develop tracks through the area to allow full public access.

## **Doyle**

Indigenous forest remnants are rare on many parts of the Wairarapa's East Coast. This block of 10 hectares of karaka/ngaio forest at Tora less than 1 kilometre from the coast is, not surprisingly, of considerable ecological and landscape value. The bush forms part of the very popular commercial Tora Walk. It contains the native tree wharangi and rengarenga lily – both unusual in the Wairarapa. The landowner's motivation was to see the area protected in perpetuity while retaining management control over the area.

## **5. Communication**

The Council, in entering in this joint programme with QEII National Trust, has reserved the right to have its contribution duly acknowledged. As covenants are registered every opportunity will be taken to highlight the success of this programme through *Elements*, field days etc.

## **6. Recommendation**

*That the report be received and its contents noted.*

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