

**Report**

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**Committee**

**Rural Services and Wairarapa**

**Author**

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## **The Freshwater Ecosystems Programme: Progress and Direction**

### **1. Purpose**

To inform the Committee of progress on the Freshwater Ecosystems Programme over the last three years and its direction for the next three years.

### **2. Background**

Greater Wellington began a Freshwater Ecosystem Programme at the beginning of the last triennium. It has several goals:

- To identify ways that the Council can improve the health and functioning of freshwater ecosystems.
- To increase community interest and awareness of freshwater ecosystems.
- To enhance freshwater ecosystems through restoration.

The need for the Programme stems from our range of responsibilities for freshwater. Greater Wellington is the primary agency with statutory responsibility under the Resource Management Act 1991 for freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity. We own and manage a lot of land under, or beside, freshwater. Greater Wellington does more work in rivers and lakes than anyone else because of our flood protection role. We also supply the Wellington metropolitan area with water.

Progress on the Programme is usually reported to the Environment Committee. In recognition that a lot of the work is particularly relevant to the Wairarapa, this report seeks to inform Councillors and appointed members on the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee about progress and future direction of the Programme. It is closely linked with work on our Riparian Strategy and our Wetland Action Plan.

### **3. What's happened so far**

The following work has been completed over the last three years.

### **3.1 Ecosystem health and functioning**

- a “think piece” on the functions and processes of freshwater ecosystems in the Region;
- workshops with Council’s “operational” staff on how freshwater ecosystems “work”; and
- classification of rivers in the Region using the national “river environment class” system.

### **3.2 Freshwater fisheries**

- a review of existing information about freshwater fish in the Region;
- surveys of freshwater fish at 120 sites across the Region’s rivers;
- an easily accessible GIS database of fish records in the Region;
- surveys of Inanga (whitebait) spawning sites at 36 sites around the Region;
- a model that identifies expected freshwater fish in all rivers of the Region; and
- compilation of information on each freshwater fish species present in the Region (general biology, critical habitat requirements, food, life history, climbing ability, etc.).

### **3.3 Structures in Rivers**

- an inventory of 150 structures affecting fish passage across the Region.

### **3.4 Public Awareness**

- a public lecture by Bob McDowall *“Hidden treasures exposed: discovering our freshwater fish fauna”*;
- talks to rotary clubs, environmental groups, and care groups; and
- an information sheet for landowners *“Fish friendly culverts and rock ramps in small streams”*.

### **3.5 Restoration**

- mitigation of structures on our own land for fish passage (Orongorongo Weir, Rimutaka Incline Track, Whakatikei River); and
- restoration of whitebait spawning habitat on the Kakaho Stream.

### **3.6 Development of Point, Click, Fish**

- computer based mapping/information that links river sites with the freshwater ecosystem present.

## **4. Future direction**

Over the next year we will build on the work completed so far, by:

- preparing information sheets that make freshwater ecosystems more understandable;
- mitigating fish passage over selected structures;
- preparing guidelines for building structures that are fish friendly;
- restoring inanga spawning habitat;
- developing “Point, Click, Fish” for use by staff processing resource consents; and
- developing “Point, Click, Fish” for public use.

## **5. Communications**

A lot of the work from the programme has applications across a number of Greater Wellington’s Divisions. For example, all the operational divisions of the Council are interested in better fish passage over structures that they are responsible for. The feedback from staff using material from the programme is helping develop its future direction.

Six publications from the programme are now available to the community and are on our website. We are also promoting material and providing it to people through care groups and interested organisations.

## **6. Recommendations**

*It is recommended that the Committee:*

1. *receive the report; and*
2. *note the contents.*

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