

Te Pane Matua Taiao Annual Biodiversity Report 2021/22

1. Report purpose and scope

This is the first Greater Wellington Regional Council (GW) Annual Biodiversity Report. The purpose of this report is threefold:

1. To summarise, with examples, GW's progress against the new Long Term Plan performance measure for biodiversity,
2. To highlight key strategic shifts within GW and at the national level for biodiversity conservation, and
3. To identify opportunities where we can improve our approach to achieving positive outcomes for regional biodiversity.

2. Context: GW's biodiversity mandate and strategic approach

Biodiversity conservation and restoration in our region is one of GW's core functions. Our mandate comes from international, national, and regional drivers and is interdependent with the responsibilities of mana whenua, central government, and territorial authorities. This shared responsibility means that much of GW's biodiversity work extends beyond a purely compliance-based approach to one that is collaborative, relationships focused and location-specific.

Many GW teams carry out a range of core functions that contribute to improving regional biodiversity protection and restoration. The Greater Wellington Regional Council Biodiversity Strategy 2016¹ ("the Strategy") describes the vision, principles, goals and objectives we are collectively working towards. Appendix 1 summarises the Strategy Framework.

3. GW's 2021/22 biodiversity performance

In 2022, we updated the biodiversity performance measure in the Long-Term Plan (LTP) Performance Framework. This change was made to better reflect the wide-ranging work that teams across GW carry out for biodiversity. Our new LTP performance measure is: "Biodiversity Strategy objectives are being actively progressed by Greater Wellington." We worked with teams across GW to assess each objective and defined "Actively progressed" as meaning that there are work programmes under way that are delivering on the objective.

We can report that in 2021/22, all 15 objectives of the Greater Wellington Regional Council Biodiversity Strategy 2016 were being actively progressed. Amongst a wide range of actions being taken, we have highlighted below a selection of notable GW programmes and workstreams that are contributing towards achieving the Strategy's 15 objectives. These are summarised under the three overarching Strategy goals. For the full list of objectives, please refer to the Biodiversity Strategy Framework in Appendix 1.

¹ The Greater Wellington Regional Council Biodiversity Strategy 2016: <https://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/council-publications/Biodiversity-Strategy-2016.pdf>

Goal 1: Areas of high biodiversity value are protected or restored

Wetland Programme: We are working with 65 landowners to protect and enhance 90 wetland sites across the region. Strong demand for the programme means we already have an additional 25 wetland sites on the programme waitlist for 2022/23.

Valuing marine ecosystems: We are working to map and describe high value marine seabed sites within the region.

Key Native Ecosystem Programme: This programme aims to protect some of the best examples of native ecosystems in the Wellington region. We added a 58th site to the programme in 2021/22. This site contains braided river habitat, the only ecosystem of its kind in the programme.



Goal 2: Ecosystem functions are maintained or restored across the landscape.



Predator Free Wellington: This year we observed exceptional native bird population increases on Miramar Peninsular, following introduced predator control operations as part of this project.

Crown-funded projects: To better support our ability to deliver on Crown-funded projects for biodiversity, a new Biodiversity Projects team was established at GW. This team delivers on three Crown-funded projects, which are Wairarapa Moana Wetlands, One Billion Trees, and Improving Fish Passage.

Effects management guidance: The first of its kind to be released by a regional council, this guidance provides direction to resource consent applicants on how best to manage the effects of development on the region's indigenous biodiversity.

Goal 3: People understand and value biodiversity and ecosystems.

Community events: This year, a COVID-modified Restoration Day provided upskilling and networking opportunities for the community-led environmental restoration sector. The Taputeranga Marine Reserve community snorkeling day and Wairarapa Moana kākahi count gave our communities the opportunity to get up close to underwater life.

Enviroschools: Regional leadership and coordination of Enviroschools was brought in-house. This will support increased connection and skill sharing between the Enviroschools team and GW staff across all areas of sustainability, including biodiversity.



4. Changes impacting GW's biodiversity work

Strategic change within GW

- Mauri Tūhono ki te Upoko o te Ika is a collaborative group, supported by Greater Wellington to develop a framework for te taiao in the region. It focuses on resetting relationships between agencies, mana whenua and communities, and improving the relationships between people and te taiao. It will provide a vision and a set of ideas that help people see how they contribute to a bigger picture, support different ways of approaching our mahi in te taiao and propose seven shifts that are needed to realise the vision. This represents a strategic shift for Greater Wellington's biodiversity mahi. What we have learned through working in partnership to develop the framework is already influencing our biodiversity work. We are spending more time strengthening our relationships, improving our understanding of how to work within different knowledge systems and world views and being more flexible in our approach.
- Fit for the Future and the development of our Intergenerational Environment Strategy will mean Biodiversity is no longer a GW "department", but an outcome that we are seeking through all our work alongside freshwater, climate action and broader community wellbeing outcomes.

Imminent changes in national direction

- Resource Management Reform will have major implications for GW's role and responsibilities for regional biodiversity conservation. The new resource management system is set to change regional plan making and governance processes, as well as some accountabilities for implementation.



Left: An image of the newest Key Native Ecosystem Site, and first braided river habitat to be included in the KNE Programme. Lower Opouawe/White Rock. Photo Credit: Cooper French



Right: We are working with DOC and VUW to map and describe deep (>30m) reef communities off the west coast of the region. In this picture we see sponges, hydroids and a brittle star in a deep reef south of Mana Island. Photo Credit: Dr Megan Oliver

- The National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity is planned for gazettal by the government this calendar year 2022. This will provide more clarity on the role of regional councils in biodiversity conservation and is likely to require significant implementation resource.

Long-term changes

- Conservation law reform is planned via a phased approach over the next of 5 years.
- Future of Local Government review is underway and findings will be presented to the Minister for Local Government in June 2023.

5. Looking ahead: Improving partnerships and evaluation for biodiversity outcomes

Our biggest opportunities for growth are our partnerships with mana whenua and to improve our ability to measure our impact across the biodiversity system. Improving partnerships with mana whenua around te taiao will help us work together better to achieve biodiversity and broader social and environmental outcomes. We are seeing evidence of this through our partnership with Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira to co-manage the Te Awarua o Porirua Community Environment Fund, with a direct result of better alignment with climate change objectives and improved support for community groups. Mauri Tūhono and Te Whāriki, Greater Wellington's Māori Outcomes Framework, provide us with foundations to support stronger partnerships and will help us focus our efforts in the years ahead.

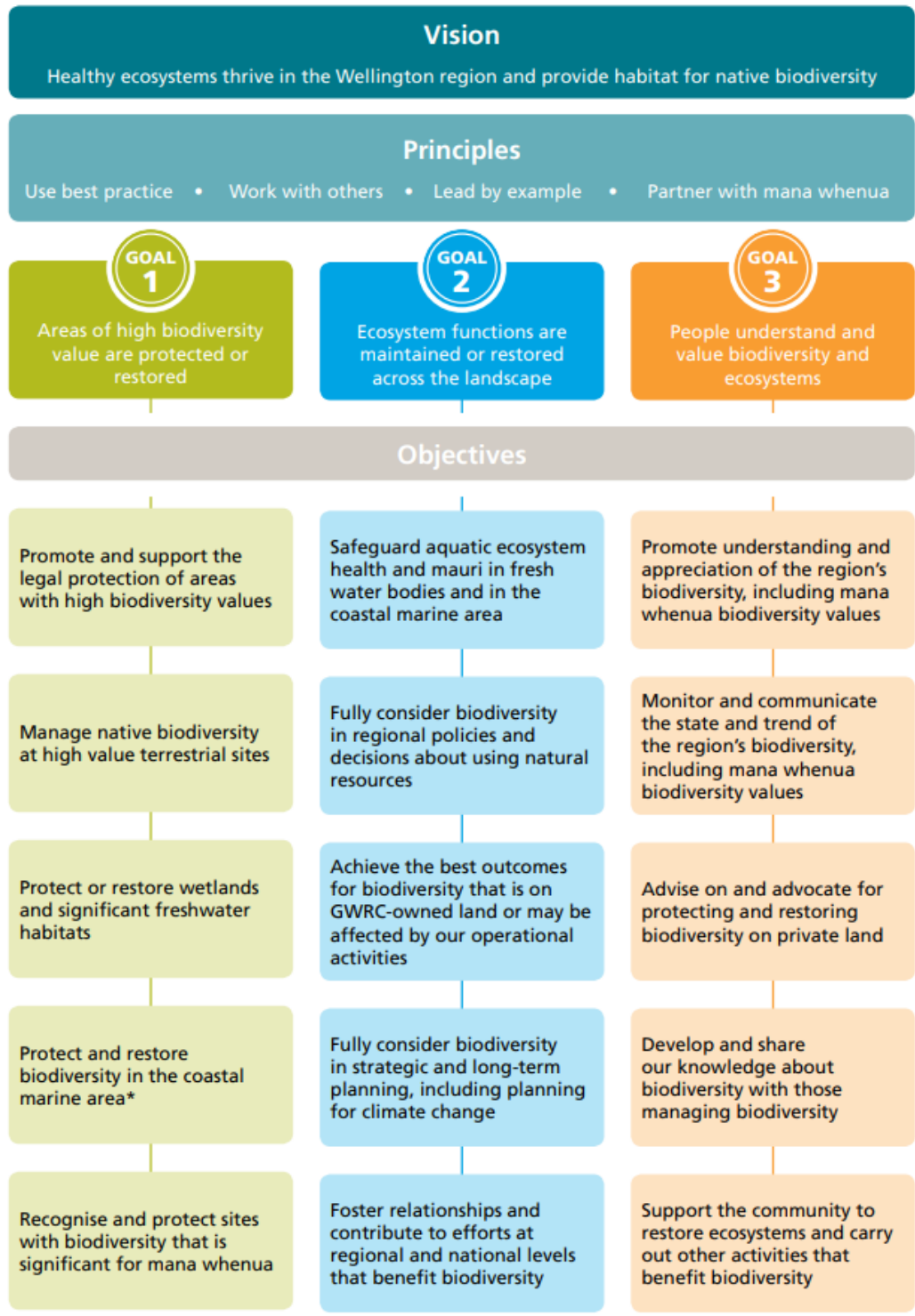
The LTP performance measure we are reporting on provides an insight into where we have focused our efforts, but we currently don't have a way of evaluating the material impact on biodiversity of all our mahi across GW. At the individual site scale, we do measure our impact and have seen evidence of success. We also measure the state and trend of 10 Key Native Ecosystem sites each year and can conclude that biodiversity is being maintained or enhanced at all sites measured this year. As mentioned above, we've seen increases in native bird populations on the Miramar Peninsula.

We have an opportunity to consider how we monitor our impact and how we respond and adapt based on that monitoring across our work programmes. For biodiversity, like many other aspects of our work, this is challenging both because our responsibilities and activities overlap with other agencies and organisations and because environmental indicators can take a long time to respond. While we are capturing regional biodiversity trends over time with our State of the Environment monitoring² that doesn't necessarily provide us with specific feedback about our efforts. We think there is an opportunity to explore methods that support us to assess our impact at the scale of the wider biodiversity system.

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² We monitor the region's air, land, freshwater and coasts to understand the state of our environment: [Greater Wellington Regional Council — Environmental data and information \(gw.govt.nz\)](https://www.gw.govt.nz/environmental-data-and-information/)

Appendix 1: GW's Biodiversity Strategy Framework.



* The RMA defines the coastal marine area as being the foreshore, seabed and air space above the water of which the seaward boundary is the outer limits of the territorial sea [12 nautical miles from the shore] and the landward boundary is the line of mean high water springs (except in the case of rivers where it extends further inland).