

### 11.3. Finalising the Biodiversity Action Plan

<b>Prepared for:</b>	Policy Committee
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<b>Author:</b>	Rachael Brown, Senior Policy Analyst
<b>Endorsed by:</b>	Andrew Newman, Acting General Manager, Policy, Science & Strategy
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#### PURPOSE

- [1] This report seeks the Council's approval of the *Biodiversity Action Plan/ Te Mahi hei Tiaki Koiora* (the Plan), which sets out Council's intended biodiversity work programme over the next five years.

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- [2] Continued declines in indigenous biodiversity, due to pressure from human activities, degrade the natural capital and ecosystem services we depend on for our quality of life. There is an opportunity for ORC to enable improved biodiversity outcomes in Otago and to add value to existing projects, particularly on private land. While ORC undertakes many activities that contribute to biodiversity outcomes, it does not currently have a dedicated or integrated biodiversity programme - the Plan is a first step to address this gap.
- [3] The Council's first Biodiversity Strategy was finalised in June 2018, at which time the Policy Committee requested that an implementation plan be developed. A draft Biodiversity Action Plan was approved in October 2018. Feedback on the draft from Iwi and stakeholders was generally supportive, but suggested ORC should take a stronger role in active management and regional leadership in the near future rather than waiting for further information. These suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the Plan.
- [4] Work is underway to develop an integrated framework and resourcing options for ORC's new biodiversity/biosecurity strategic priority. The Plan is aligned with this strategic work, which will also enable the Plan to be implemented.

#### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

*That the Council:*

- 1) **Approve** the *Biodiversity Action Plan/ Te Mahi hei Tiaki Koiora (Attachment 1)*, which sets out the Council's intended biodiversity work programme over the next five years.
- 2) **Note** that work is underway to integrate the Council's biodiversity and biosecurity activities, and to develop business case options for resourcing these, which will inform the next Long-Term Plan process (2021-2031) and enable implementation of the *Biodiversity Action Plan*.

## BACKGROUND

### ORC's Biodiversity Strategy

- [5] In June 2018, following consultation with iwi and stakeholders, the Council finalised and published its Biodiversity Strategy, *Our Living Treasure/Tō tātou Koiora Taoka* (the Strategy).<sup>1</sup> This is an organisational, non-statutory strategy to guide ORC's work in biodiversity management. It was informed by a regional stocktake report on work already underway by groups in Otago and strategic options for future work.<sup>2</sup>
- [6] At the June 2018 meeting, the Committee requested that an implementation plan be developed and brought back for approval. In October 2018, the Committee approved a draft plan for consultation with iwi and key stakeholders. The final version of the plan has been informed by feedback received on the Plan from iwi and stakeholders - in writing, in bilateral discussions and at a regional forum.

### Consultation on the Plan

- [7] Consultation on the Plan indicated general support for the overall approach and the draft focus areas and actions. There was also a call for ORC to take a stronger role in:
- active management of biodiversity in the near future, rather than waiting for further information; and
  - strategic leadership and coordination across the region.
- [8] In September 2018, ORC staff presented on the proposed Plan at a Regional Biodiversity Forum in Dunedin convened by the Otago Conservation Board. The forum focused on halting the decline of indigenous biodiversity on private land. Chairpersons of the Council and the Policy Committee attended, as did representatives from iwi, city and district councils and the Department of Conservation. Two key actions were agreed at the forum:
- To develop a regional biodiversity strategy with shared goals, actions and accountability across partners and stakeholders; and
  - To embrace the importance of community education and storytelling, so that respect for the environment and care for biodiversity become fully integrated into everyday practice.

The Chair of the Policy Committee indicated her support for these key actions at the forum. These have been incorporated into the Plan.

### Internal work programme to build on integrate ORC's biodiversity and biosecurity activities

- [9] Biodiversity/biosecurity is one of ORC's four priority areas (along with fresh water, climate change and urban development). An internal working group has been established to build on and integrate ORC's biodiversity and biosecurity activities. The group includes key staff from across the organisation and its purpose is to develop:
- an integrated framework for biodiversity and biosecurity (Phase 1); and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.orc.govt.nz/plans-policies-reports/strategies/biodiversity-strategy>

<sup>2</sup> Wildlands (2017) *Strategic analysis of options to improve management of ecosystems and biodiversity in Otago*. Contract report # 4262.  
<https://www.orc.govt.nz/media/4026/strategic-biodiversity-options-for-orc-updated.pdf>

- business case options to resource these activities and inform the next Long-Term Plan for 2021-2031 (Phase 2).

- [10] In March this year, the ORC working group visited Hawkes Bay and Taranaki Regional Councils to find out about the operational aspects of their biodiversity and biosecurity work programmes. Large scale predator control, extensive planting programmes and supporting land users to protect biodiversity were key elements of these programmes.
- [11] A project to map Otago's biodiversity is also underway, which includes terrestrial, fresh water and coastal/marine ecosystems. This mapping will inform priority setting and future research programmes as described in Action 3.1 of the Plan (Attachment 1).

### **Changes to the draft plan in response to feedback and working group initiatives**

- [12] Based on the working groups visit to other regional councils, and in response to feedback from our partners and stakeholders, additional actions in relation to regional leadership and collaboration and active management have been added to the Plan (i.e. Actions 1.2 and 1.3). Actions from ORC's intended biosecurity work programme that will benefit biodiversity have been described more fully (i.e. Action 1.1) There is also a greater emphasis in the Plan on regional leadership, with a programme leader role to facilitate this and a commitment to work with partners to scope a regional biodiversity strategy (Action 3.4).

### **ISSUE**

- [13] There is an opportunity for ORC to enable improved biodiversity outcomes in Otago and to add value to existing biodiversity projects. ORC has an important role to play in protecting and enhancing our remaining biodiversity. While the Department of Conservation is primarily responsible for protecting threatened species and biodiversity values on Crown land,<sup>3</sup> ORC is in a unique position to lead initiatives that support land managers to maintain and enhance biodiversity on private land. Currently, ORC undertakes many activities that benefit biodiversity, for example setting minimum flows and contaminant limits in rivers, however, we do not currently have a dedicated or integrated biodiversity programme. The Plan is a first step to address this gap.
- [14] Despite the best efforts of many agencies, groups and individuals across Aotearoa, declines in biodiversity are continuing.<sup>4</sup> Drivers of biodiversity loss include introduced predators, plants and diseases, land-use intensification for production and urban development, pollution in freshwater and coastal habitats, use of natural resources (e.g. fishing) and increasingly, climate change.<sup>5</sup>
- [15] Losing biodiversity depletes natural capital, which reduces the ecosystem services we all benefit from, for example nutrient cycling, carbon sequestration, water retention and a sense of identity. Provisioning ecosystem services (i.e. growing fuel, food and fibre) have increased at the expense of regulating and cultural services, which are

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<sup>3</sup> Land and Information New Zealand (LINZ) is responsible for Crown land in its management rather than DoC's.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry for the Environment & Stats NZ (2019). *Environment Aotearoa 2019*.  
<https://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/environmental-reporting/environment-aotearoa-2019>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

undervalued by markets.<sup>6</sup> Without a change in current management practices and incentives, these losses will erode regional resilience and the quality of life for current and future generations.

## DISCUSSION

[16] The overarching vision of this Plan is an integrated approach to biodiversity management across Otago, which is informed by robust research and engagement with iwi, other agencies and NGOs, communities and land users.

[17] The Plan has three key objectives:

- The full range of Otago's indigenous ecosystems are maintained in a healthy and fully functioning state, from the mountains to the ocean depths and from protected areas to productive landscapes.
- Agencies, community groups and individuals work collaboratively in partnership, taking an integrated, efficient and cost-effective approach that is based on sound science.
- People living in Otago value and better understand biodiversity so that we can all enjoy and share in its benefits, as the foundation of a sustainable economy and society.

[18] It identifies five focus areas to improve biodiversity outcomes:

1. Active management
2. Regional leadership, coordination and accountability
3. Better information for better management
4. Education and community engagement
5. Rules and regulation.

[19] These focus areas and the actions within them are based on advice to regional Bio-managers<sup>7</sup> across the country on how regional councils can best add value to biodiversity management.<sup>8</sup> The five areas are also the foundation of an integrated approach to biodiversity and biosecurity management, which the working group is currently developing.

## OPTIONS

[20] The Council has three options, it can:

- a. approve the Plan to be published and implemented;
- b. not approve the Plan and delay its finalisation until the working group project on integrating and resourcing biodiversity and biosecurity is complete;
- c. not approve the plan and continue with business as usual.

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<sup>6</sup> Maseyk et al. (2017) Conservation Letters, 10(2).

<sup>7</sup> The Bio-managers Special Interest Group (SIG)

<sup>8</sup> Willis, G. (2017). *Addressing New Zealand's Biodiversity Challenge. A Regional Council thinkpiece on the future of biodiversity management in New Zealand.* Enfocus, Auckland.

- [21] Option (a) is *recommended* because it means that work to implement the Plan can continue to progress with a clear sense of direction. In addition, partners and stakeholders have contributed to developing the Plan and are expecting it to be finalised.
- [22] Option (b) is *not* recommended. The Plan has already been delayed while work to integrate biodiversity and biosecurity activities has been scoped. Waiting for the integrated framework and business case options would mean a further delay, which is unnecessary as the Plan is aligned with the integrated work programme.
- [23] Option C is *not* recommended due to the risks outlined in paragraph 29 below.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Policy Considerations**

- [24] The Plan aligns with, and will enable, the following policy initiatives. It will:
- give effect to relevant provisions in the operative *Otago Regional Policy Statement*, which has objectives and policies in relation to biodiversity protection and pest management, and the proposed provisions in the proposed RPS.
  - set a course of action to implement the *Biodiversity Strategy* and ORC's strategic priority of biodiversity/biosecurity;
  - complement the objectives and actions in the *Regional Pest Management Plan*; and
  - place ORC on the front foot in implementing an upcoming National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (NPSIB).<sup>9</sup>

### **Financial Considerations**

- [25] Given that biodiversity/biosecurity is a strategic priority for ORC, additional resourcing will be required to implement the Plan and realise improved outcomes. While the financial implications have not yet been determined, the development of business case options for an integrated biodiversity and biosecurity programme means that a range of possibilities, costs and timeframes for implementation will be considered. These will be discussed with Council early in 2020.

### **Significance and Engagement**

- [26] Discussions with iwi and stakeholders took place during the development of both the Biodiversity Strategy and the Plan, however, to date these have not included financial implications, engagement on which will take place within the wider LTP process.

### **Legislative Considerations**

- [27] Implementing the Plan will enable ORC to give effect to legislative requirements under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), the Biosecurity Act 1993 and the upcoming

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<sup>9</sup> MfE and DoC are currently developing a draft NPSIB to be released for public consultation in October 2019.

NPSIB.<sup>10</sup> Under the RMA, regional councils (along with city and district councils) are responsible for the establishment, implementation and review of objectives, policies, and methods for maintaining indigenous biological diversity.<sup>11</sup>

### **Risk Considerations**

- [28] There is a potential risk for ORC in approving the Plan that expectations will be raised and not subsequently delivered on. This risk will be mitigated by the work underway to develop, sequence and resource an integrated biodiversity/biosecurity work programme. Sufficient resources allocated through the LTP process will be required to action the Plan.
- [29] A greater risk for the region is likely to exist if we continue with 'business as usual' and ORC does not step up its leadership and support for active management in the biodiversity and biosecurity space. This could well lead to the continued loss of species and ecosystems, which will degrade regional resilience over time and lead to an associated loss of natural capital and ecosystem services.

### **NEXT STEPS**

- [30] The next step is to publish the Plan (on ORC's website) and to progress with implementation. Important initial tasks are to:
- recruit a Biodiversity Programme Leader;
  - engage on plan implementation with iwi, other agencies, land users and NGOs;
  - complete the mapping and prioritisation of ecosystems across the region;
  - set up and develop terms of reference for collaborative governance and working groups on biodiversity and biosecurity;
  - develop an integrated framework for biodiversity and biosecurity and associated business plan to inform resourcing options for the LTP.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. ORC Biodiversity Action Plan 4 June 2019 V 5 [**11.3.1 - 19 pages**]

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<sup>10</sup> MfE and DoC are currently developing a draft NPSIB to be released for public consultation in October 2019.

<sup>11</sup> RMA 1991, Section 30 (ga)