



Otago
Regional
Council

Single Cone, The Remarkables

Te Mātāpuna | The Source

YOUR SOURCE OF OTAGO REGIONAL COUNCIL COMMUNITY NEWS | *Winter 2025*

Kia ora and welcome to our winter issue

2025 is a busy year at ORC, not least of which because it's an election year for local government.

Local government elections don't attract as much attention as national ones, but they are just as important — because local councils make decisions which affect local people.

Now is the time to think about standing — or nominating someone who would make an excellent candidate.

We've put info about what a regional council does, the role of a councillor, how much they get paid, how many meetings they need to attend, how much reading is required and anything else you might need to know on our elections page:

orc.govt.nz/vote25

Why stand?

In the next triennium (three-year term), Council will make decisions which support outcomes for our community in environmental management, natural resource management, public transport, preparing for and responding to emergencies and natural disasters as well as contributing to the overall wellbeing of the region — and you can be a key part of that.

By standing for election to ORC, you'll be a part of Otago's democracy. Being an elected member of local government can be a rewarding role, as you advocate for your communities and work with our partners to achieve the best outcomes for this region we love.

The Otago Regional Council is made up of 12 councillors elected from four constituencies.

After a representation review, this year there are changes to the number of councillors in the Dunedin and Dunstan wards. These constituencies are now Dunedin (five councillors), Dunstan (four councillors), Molyneux (two councillors)

Richard Saunders,
ORC Chief Executive

and Moeraki
(one councillor).

Also changed this year is the way the region will cast their vote for ORC's elections. This year all of Otago moves to Single Transferable Vote (STV) for the ORC. Not sure what this change means? You can brush up your understanding of STV on our elections page, too.

Get involved by checking you're enrolled to vote, and when the candidates are announced, do your homework so you can choose the candidate(s) who will best represent you around the council table. We're all in this together and every vote counts towards shaping our region's future.

**Thank you,
Richard**



Stand for Otago.



We welcome your feedback and story ideas: comms@orc.govt.nz



Before and after: Environmental Implementation team members Kirk (left) and Steve out in the field observing spartina in the wild.

Picture tells a story

Kirk holds a reference picture showing dense cover of Spartina before control measures — a strong contrast to the present-day landscape behind them.

Spartina is an invasive exotic grass that was planted in estuaries a long time ago when trying to turn them into pasture. It smothers



Invasive exotic grass, Spartina

NZ native plants and degrades natural estuary ecosystems.

ORC is trying to progressively contain it through spraying, but, even better, we may be able to eradicate it from Otago.

Air quality — is it getting better?

Last winter ORC recorded 28 breaches of national air quality standards, 11 more than in 2023, and they mostly occurred in Alexandra and Arrowtown.

Long-term data analysis shows that air quality in many Otago towns is slowly improving; however, the number of exceedances will fluctuate due to Otago's geography and winter climate as well as natural inversion layers that trap pollution close to the ground.

Exceedances are caused by high levels of fine particles, largely from home heating using wood fires. ORC continuously monitors air quality and is expanding its efforts through more studies and upgraded equipment to better track and reduce harmful emissions.

Only in Otago

Meet the locals you won't find anywhere else!

Otago is home to some of the world's most exclusive species — so loyal to the region, they aren't found naturally anywhere else.

These 'regionally endemic' species have evolved to thrive in Otago's diverse geography, including alpine peaks, river valleys, and salty inland spots.

Take the Cromwell chafer beetle, for example — this flightless beetle lives in just one sandy patch of Central Otago, with its own reserve.

Or the grand and Otago skinks — some of New Zealand's largest and most striking lizards. The Otago skink can grow up to 30 cm long, and the grand skink is close behind at 23 cm.

These lizards are dressed to impress: grand skinks wear a pattern of vibrant gold, yellow, yellow-



Photo: Emma Curtin (Naturalist)

The Cromwell chafer beetle

green, or cream flecks on a black background, while Otago skinks sport blotches of grey, green, or yellow on a typically black background, making both species blend perfectly into schist rock landscapes.

More than 350 species call Otago their one-and-only home, from glimmering galaxiids to mysterious mosses. These species are woven into Otago's identity — protecting them is protecting what makes this region unique.

Learn more at:
orc.govt.nz/onlyinotago

Are rabbits a problem on your property?

It's time to act!

In Otago, it's the responsibility of the land occupier to manage rabbits on their land.

Winter is an ideal time to tackle rabbits — limited food supply means they're more likely to take bait and burrows are easier to find.

Ideal habitats for rabbits include gardens and lawns with short grass, garden sheds, wood piles or dense vegetation that provide cover.

You can help give them the boot by:

- removing any piles of wood, rubbish or old vegetation heaps that offer rabbits protection from the weather and predators
- pruning the bottom of shrubs and hedges so they don't provide a



Feral rabbits can quickly become a problem if not managed properly

suitable shelter for rabbits

- ensuring that any gaps under buildings and sheds are blocked to prevent rabbits from burrowing underneath
- fumigating and closing any burrows you find
- installing a good rabbit-netted fence to keep them off your property.

Engaging the services of a rabbit contractor may be more effective, if rabbit numbers are high.

For more information visit:
orc.govt.nz/rabbitmanagement



A recent planting day at
Te Hākapupu / Pleasant River

Hope flows in Te Hākapupu thanks to local mahi

Rain or shine, four years of hard mahi by the community has paid off for Toitū Te Hākapupu.

With 92,000 native plants established, 39 km of fencing installed, five fish passage barriers improved, and 10 sediment traps installed — which have already trapped 1082 cubic metres of sediment (that's 7220 bathtubs full!) — the Pleasant River Catchment Restoration Project finished on a high.

These achievements have all helped the goal of improving water quality in Te Hākapupu now and into the future. Project partner Kāti Huirapa Rūnaka ki

Puketeraki, key collaborator East Otago Catchment and a number of passionate locals have created a Catchment Action Plan — a living document that reflects the aspirations of the community for the next 40–50 years.

Driven past one of the project's signs just north of Waikouaiti on State Highway 1 and wondered what it's all about?

Find out more about this fantastic collaboration at:
orc.govt.nz/toitutehākapupu



Oil spill exercise

Preparing for the worst to protect our waters from oil spills! Together with FENZ, Port Otago and local oil operators, our Harbourmaster team led a joint exercise recently in the Otago Harbour, simulating a 3,000-litre diesel spill emergency.

Maritime NZ supplies the equipment we use, paid for from shipping levies, and provides training. These exercises are a great chance to get the gear out

and run through the steps involved in first containing a spill, then minimising it.

The booms deflect and protect areas where the oil might otherwise spread, and the skimmers work to recover the oil and allow removal.

It's hands-on, heavy work involving skill and finesse - all in the name of protecting what we love.

What the tech?!

You've heard of DNA — but what about eDNA?



Environmental DNA, or eDNA, is an emerging monitoring tool that allows us to identify species in habitats without having to locate or catch them — cost-effective and less time-consuming.

By filtering just a few cups of water to capture genetic material shed by organisms, we can identify thousands of species of fish, macroinvertebrates, birds, mammals, reptiles, plants, and other organisms in Otago.

The information has a range of potential applications, including:

- understanding species distributions
- monitoring for biosecurity threats
- understanding ecosystem health.

Another effective tool in our toolbox when it comes to protecting our environment.

Big news for Otago's environment

Local community action just got a big boost — with 28 community-led environment projects across Otago receiving over \$1 million in combined funding through our ECO Fund!

Projects include:

- sycamore and willow control
- predator and rabbit management
- weed clearance and native planting
- volunteer training for trapping and monitoring
- restoration projects by schools.

If you're dreaming up an environmental project, now's the time to start planning for next year!

Check out all successful ECO Fund recipients for 2025:
orc.govt.nz/ecofund2025





Lexie Davidson, our new EnviroSchools Regional Coordinator in Central

Nau mai, haere mai to Lexie

Lexie joins the Ōtākou EnviroSchools tīma where her role is supporting our facilitators in all the mahi that they do in schools.

With Leisa de Klerk, the EnviroSchools Regional Coordinator Lead, we've got the wider Otago region well covered!

Regional coordinators are an important part of the EnviroSchools Kaupapa, providing the link between Regional Councils and the National EnviroSchools team to the facilitators and their partners in district and city councils, as well as schools and community groups.

We're so happy to have Lexie start with us!

Who do we love?

Hikaroroa / Mt Watkin Conservation Group

This group aims to suppress the possum population around Hikaroroa / Mt Watkin mauka, on the boundary of Waitaki and Dunedin districts.

This area contains the best remaining examples of the forest that covered the Coastal Otago hills before European settlement, and Hikaroroa / Mt Watkin is the mauka tīpuna for Kāti Huirapa ki Puketeraki.



Martin (Marty) changes the battery of an automatic possum trap

Jamie radioing the volunteer field team to coordinate workplans



The significant biodiversity includes remnant podocarp and kōwhai forest, naturally rare volcanic boulder field ecosystems, and at least 17 native species classified as at risk or threatened.

The group has worked to develop a coordinated approach, involving landowners, local runaka, councils, and the local community.

A trap network of automatically resetting possum traps has been installed and is being serviced with the help of local farmers and volunteers.

Are you subscribed to our monthly e-newsletter On Stream? Would you like to be? Get ORC's monthly news fresh to your inbox: orc.govt.nz/on-stream



Burn dry firewood this winter

ORC's annual Burn Dry, Breathe Easy campaign highlights ways to ensure your firewood is dry for burning in winter and the effects that burning wet wood and other items can have on air quality and the environment.

Always make sure the wood you are burning is dry. It's better for you, your home, and the environment.

orc.govt.nz/burndry



Burn Dry, Breathe Easy tips:

- **Stack your firewood off the ground** and out of the rain — anywhere you'd put your washing out to dry.
- **Use a wood moisture meter** to check if your firewood is dry enough to burn. Less than 25% moisture means more heat and reduced smoke.
- **A well-built fire** of crunched-up paper or firelighters, dry kindling and firewood ensures a well-heated home and less smoke.
- **Don't burn wet or green firewood**, treated wood or household rubbish, as they can release harmful toxins into the air.
- **To reduce smoke overnight**, make sure you can still see flames when you turn your fire down.
- **Plan ahead — stock up on firewood before Christmas** to allow it to dry out before the following winter.

Contact your ORC councillors

Dunedin

Alan.Somerville@orc.govt.nz

Andrew.Noone@orc.govt.nz

Elliot.Weir@orc.govt.nz

Gretchen.Robertson@orc.govt.nz

Tim.Mephram@orc.govt.nz

Dunstan

Alexa.Forbes@orc.govt.nz

Gary.Kelliher@orc.govt.nz

Michael.Laws@orc.govt.nz

Moeraki

Kevin.Malcolm@orc.govt.nz

Molyneux

Kate.Wilson@orc.govt.nz

Lloyd.McCall@orc.govt.nz



Printed on paper from a sustainable and ethically managed source.