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# BIODIVERSITY ON PRIVATE LAND

WAITAKERE CITY'S GREEN NETWORK PROGRAMME.

*Shared interest - neighbours get together with Council to discuss local stream.*

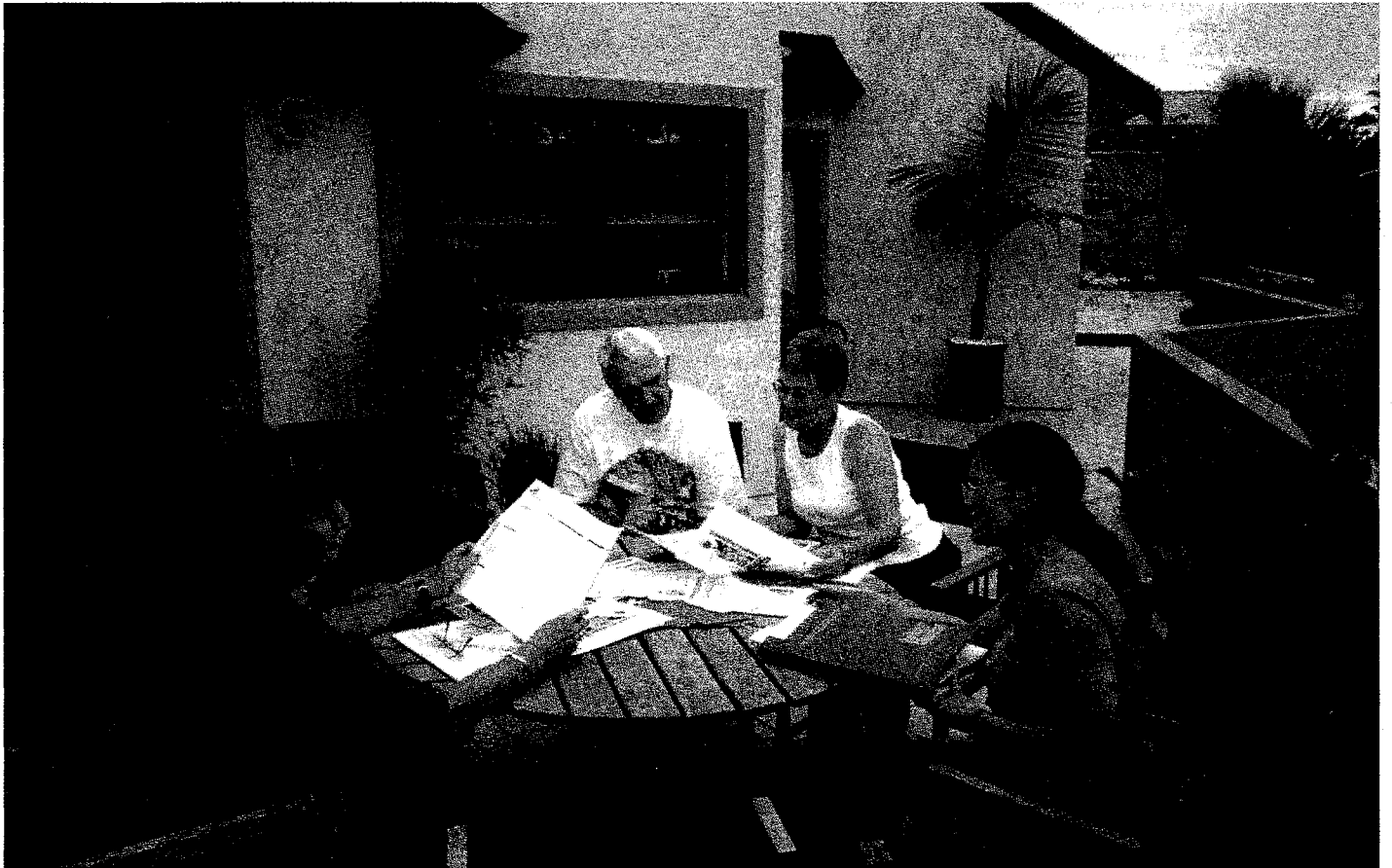
With the development of the National Policy Statement on Biodiversity, local authorities will receive strong direction to find practical ways to support landowner and community efforts to protect and enhance biodiversity on private land. There are a number of approaches that can be taken to by local government to promote biodiversity on private land including education, motivation, advice, provision of direct assistance, subsidising the preparation of covenants and rates relief.

Whilst a number of local authorities have had successful programmes in place for a number of years, promoting biodiversity on private land has particular challenges. Discussing what has worked and what hasn't worked in different areas will assist local authorities in developing successful approaches to biodiversity on private land. This paper discusses the development of

Waitakere City Council's Green Network Community Assistance Programme.

## WAITAKERE CITY COUNCIL AND THE GREEN NETWORK

Waitakere City covers an area of 37,000 hectares that encompasses urbanised lowlands, semi-rural foothills, the forested Waitakere Ranges and the west coast beaches. It is New Zealand's fifth largest city and currently has 170,000 residents. Consistent with the national picture, the city's lowlands have suffered the greatest biodiversity loss. The lowlands are also under-represented in public land. Whilst Regional Parkland covers most of the Waitakere Ranges, over 80% of the remaining lowland forest (that is forest growing below 300m altitude) is held in private title.





*Left: Flood plain revegetation including kahikatea - there has been recent removal of weeds.*

Since 1996, the Green Network - protecting and enhancing the remaining native plant and animal life of the City - has been one of Council's key strategic platforms. Waitakere City is lucky to have an extensive network of un piped streams. These form an important part of the Green Network as ecological corridors linking the forested Waitakere Ranges to the Waitamata Harbour. The Green Network is implemented in part by Council's own expenditure on Council reserves and on stormwater management. However, the Green Network cannot be implemented without community involvement and increasing levels of public participation are vital.

When formulating the new District Plan it was recognised that regulation alone could not achieve the aims of the Green Network on private land. For example, 'existing uses' under s(10) of the RMA allow the lawful continuation of environmentally damaging activities such as the grazing of forest remnants. In addition, areas were identified in the District Plan in which voluntary actions such as weed control and replanting were considered necessary. Council decided to adopt a non-regulatory approach to the following voluntary actions:

- legal protection of areas of high quality native vegetation;
- fencing of native vegetation and streams from stock;
- weed and pest control, and
- replanting in identified ecological linkage areas, stream banks and the coastal margin.

A non-regulatory approach in these areas was also considered crucial in encouraging support of the regulatory provisions of the plan.

## THE GREEN NETWORK COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

All willing and interested residents in Waitakere qualify for some form of support under this programme, with the exact level of assistance provided dependent on the natural values of their property. Assistance is offered in the following areas:

- Information and Advice. Brochures, phone advice, on site advice, preparation of management plans;
- Weed Control. Jumbo bins for weed removal, free disposal of ginger at the transfer station and of smaller amounts in kerbside rubbish collection, free herbicide, subsidised professional weed control.
- Revegetation. Provision of up to 200 ecosourced plants
- Fencing. Half cost fencing for fencing off streams and bush remnants.
- Legal protection. Financial assistance with covenanting. Rate relief provided for covenanted sites.

Promotion of the programme is low key, and most landowners learn of its existence through word of mouth. Interested landowners contact Council's Call Centre in the first instance who provide general information on the programme and send out information packs. These contain details of the assistance available as part of the Green Network Community Assistance Programme plus simple application forms. The current staff allocation to the administration and running of the programme is 1.5 Full Time Equivalents.

As well as offering assistance to individual landowners, working with community groups is an important part of the Green Network Community Assistance Programme. There are

currently over 25 groups in Waitakere City that have a focus on weed control and restoration. Many of the groups have arisen over the last two years and they tend to have a neighbourhood focus. In addition to receiving the sorts of assistance offered to individual landowners, Council provides workshops to train leaders of community groups about biodiversity management, such as on the effective strategies for weed control.

Furthermore, one community group, the WeedFree Waitakere Trust has become involved in the implementation of the programme by administering and delivering some of the weed-based incentives. As staff time is a major constraint on the programme, involving community groups in its delivery greatly increases the number of people the programme can reach. In addition, organisations that are at "arms length" from Council may work more effectively in some communities than Council staff.

Currently over 500 requests for assistance under the Green Network Community assistance programme are received each year. In terms of uptake, assistance with weed control has been the most popular (41%), followed by phone advice (31%). By comparison, assistance with fencing and legal protection has had a low uptake. Without further work assessing why those targeted have not participated in the programme (e.g. those landowners with streams that have declined fencing assistance) it is difficult to guess at the reasons for the low uptake. It is possible that there is a lack of awareness of the values of these actions compared to weed control and replanting. This suggests that before offering incentives it may be worth assessing potential uptake. In some cases, awareness raising may need to come before offering incentives. In cases where the level of uptake of an incentive is uncertain, it is prudent to allocate a small budget



Right: Rural green network - closer up.

with the flexibility to increase it over time.


Efforts to encourage legal protection of high quality sites have been hamstrung by the large amount of time and effort that has gone into developing a standard covenant under the Reserves Act. Another alternative is to work with the Queen Elizabeth Trust and increase their funding so that they can increase the number of covenants they establish in the city. This is an approach that has been used successfully in other parts of the country, and could be investigated for adoption at Waitakere.

As well as looking at levels of uptake of particular incentives, annual review of the programme includes phone interviews to assess participants' satisfaction and focus groups to seek

feedback on potential improvements to the programme. A challenge is to find a meaningful way of measuring the environmental benefits of the programme, as to date, only a fraction of the weed control incentives are monitored.

## CONCLUSION

Since its inception in 1997, the Green Network Community Assistance Programme has continued to develop and grow. It's strength lies in the fact that it is not an isolated programme as it represents only part of what is undertaken to implement the Green Network. Therefore it sits alongside an approach to public reserve management, stormwater management, and regulation that

recognises the importance of the enhancing Waitakere City's biodiversity. 

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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*Melanie Dixon previously worked at Waitakere City as the landscape planning co-ordinator.*

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definition of ecotourism incorporating an "affirmative" response to the environment by both the operator and the ecotourist;

- Regular monitoring of the impacts on the environment including the following:
  - (i) the impacts of an ecotourism operation on the carrying capacity of an area;
  - (ii) the impact of the scale of the operation on the natural environment;
  - (iii) the impact of any cumulative effects resulting from multiple ecotourism activities;
  - (iv) an assessment of social and economic effects on local communities;
 and
  - (v) the development of techniques for determining limits of acceptable change:
    - The development of ethical marketing principles;
    - The development of an education and interpretation component based, at least in part, on enhancing the ecotourist's knowledge and understanding of the environment; and
    - A commitment to environmental principles (including regulatory requirements as set down in the Resource Management Act 1991 and the Conservation Act 1987).

## CONCLUSIONS

The future of the New Zealand ecotourism industry is at a crossroads. The industry is still young enough to foster enthusiasm and optimism about its ability to develop a brand of tourism that can deliver positive environmental outcomes. Yet, it is has matured enough for us to expect to see these desired outcomes emerging from within the industry. It may be that it is the management decisions made over the next decade which will seal the fate of ecotourism.

*References available on request*