



## RURAL SERVICES NEWSLETTER

MAY/JUNE 2008

## Helping hill country landowners

The Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee (WHCAC) first began at a public meeting in Masterton in September 2006. One of the outcomes was to “consider the formation of a Wairarapa Hill Country Liaison Group”. The public meeting was held amid concerns over the funding and resources allocated by Greater Wellington to regional sustainable land management programmes.

A slight name change, an application process and in October 2007 six hill country representatives were appointed to the committee – Peter Gawith (Chair), Jenny Boyne, Jamie Falloon, Andrew Pottinger, Michael Blundell and Emily Crofoot. The Masterton District Council’s Councillor David Holmes and Greater Wellington’s Councillor Ian Buchanan also sit on the committee.

The committee’s terms of reference reflects the importance Greater Wellington places on the committee’s formation, which is reflected in the following responsibilities:

- Make comment and recommendations to Greater Wellington’s long-term council community plan (LTCCP) and annual plan processes
- Be involved in preparing Greater Wellington’s strategic plans and policy development with relevance to the Wairarapa hill country
- Make submissions on other strategic plans and policy documents with relevance to the Wairarapa hill country
- Ensure the Wairarapa hill country landowners are informed of issues and provided with information relevant to their business
- Provide a sounding board for new initiatives or techniques that will assist in the sustainable management of the Wairarapa hill country
- Advocate for developing a monitoring and reporting framework that will ensure a non-regulatory approach to land management is maintained

“The partnership approach between Greater Wellington and the hill country communities and stakeholders is very important,”



Peter Gawith, Chair of the WHCAC

says Peter Gawith. “Many of the tasks will be ongoing, building on the successes of past work, but also ensuring that future sustainable land management will continue to be an outcome that landowners need to prioritise.”

Upcoming issues include the future of possum control without Animal Health Board funding, a submission on Greater Wellington’s Regional Policy Statement and input into the review of the Regional Pest Management Strategy. The committee will also have significant input into Greater Wellington’s LTCCP, with particular emphasis on land management, pest management, biodiversity and flood protection.

It’s early days for this committee but it has already proven to be a valuable asset, both for the region’s hill country communities and Greater Wellington’s political framework.

### New name, new look coming...

The *Rural Services Newsletter* is changing. Look out for a new name and new look in the next issue.

# Maintain the gains

A major event is planned for the Wellington region that will impact significantly on the future control of possums and other predators.

The planned rollback of the Animal Health Board's (AHB) bovine Tb vector control programme from the northern Wairarapa boundary is scheduled to commence from 2009. An initial area of approximately 20,000ha will be declared Tb free, resulting in all vector control services ceasing. The Tb free area will increase by a further 80,000ha in 2011 (including the Otaki area) and potentially expand annually thereafter.

If landowners, ratepayers and the wider regional community wish to maintain the economic and biodiversity gains provided by the AHB programme, then it's necessary to avoid delays in developing and implementing an alternative programme. Delays will result in a quick resurgence of possum/predator numbers, with the consequence that control costs will be much higher and the current gains eroded.

The Greater Wellington Key Native Ecosystem pest control programmes have identified there are significant biodiversity benefits available if regular, sustained control is implemented. Gains include native plant regeneration, improved bird and insect life, reduced disease in the wildlife and improved water quality through reduced soil erosion. The AHB programme has also led to similar gains across a large part of the region. There are other parts of the region (west of the Tararua Ranges) that have not received intensive possum control and we would like to progressively include these areas into the proposed new programme.

Greater Wellington will soon commence a survey of affected landowners/occupiers in the northern areas to determine their level of support for a new programme, how it might operate and how it could be funded.



## Protecting your patch from pests

Public submissions will be heard in May/June 2008 on Greater Wellington's *Proposed Regional Pest Management Strategy* – key for anyone with a stake in keeping pest plants and animals under control in our region.

"It's a reality that our region is constantly under threat from pest species – they have the capability to devastate livelihoods and local economies," says Cr Ian Buchanan, Chair of Greater Wellington's Catchment Management Committee.

Greater Wellington is responsible for working in partnership with the community to control pest plants and animals in the region. The strategy, developed in 1996, must be reviewed every five years to determine if Greater Wellington is on track to reach the strategy's objectives and whether changes are needed.



The current review of the strategy began in 2006 when Greater Wellington consulted with the community on changes to the strategy – these are all contained within the proposed strategy. The main changes are:

- A new surveillance category to obtain information on species that Greater Wellington believes could become major environmental, economic and health threats in our region if they establish
- The removal of some pests from the eradication to containment categories, such as sweet pea shrub. Some species are more widespread than was thought when the strategy was last reviewed
- Two new categories:
  1. "Human health" – in recognition of increasing numbers of complaints from the public about specific pest plants and animals
  2. "Biodiversity" – for protecting areas that aren't a designated Key Native Ecosystem but have strong biodiversity values

Download a copy from [www.gw.govt.nz/rpms](http://www.gw.govt.nz/rpms) or phone 0800 496 734.

For more information:

- Cr Ian Buchanan (Chair, Catchment Management Committee), 027 282 2833 or [ian.buchanan@gw.govt.nz](mailto:ian.buchanan@gw.govt.nz)
- Wayne O'Donnell (Manager, Biosecurity at Greater Wellington), T 06 378 2484, 027 449 9989 or [wayne.o'donnell@gw.govt.nz](mailto:wayne.o'donnell@gw.govt.nz)

# 10-year flood protection vision

A 10-year flood protection Improvement Programme in the lower Wairarapa is underway at an estimated cost of \$7.8 million. Run by the Lower Wairarapa Valley Development Scheme, the first year has a \$870,000 budget and, with the dry weather so far, has progressed at a rapid rate.

The main works are:

## Shifting of the Mahaki stopbank

- 350m of stopbank has been constructed further inland as the first stage of shifting the stopbank – it was at risk of being undermined by the river
- Removing the existing stopbank and lowering the berm next year after the new stopbank has consolidated



Stopbank construction at Mahaki

## Butchers rock berm construction at West Pukio

- Progressively extending a gravel and rock berm at the toe of the stopbank each year to add stability and erosion protection to a steep river bank and stopbank on the outside of a bend on the Ruamahanga River



Debris fence construction in front of the Hikinui sill

## Macland farm and Humes property

- Providing stone rip-rap protection to prevent wave erosion of the stopbanks on the Ruamahanga River just upstream of Lake Onoke

## Devenport property

- Adding boulder groynes to protect the riverbank on the Ruamahanga River downstream of West Pukio Road

## Lower Tauherenikau River

- Clearing trees and vegetation back from the stopbanks
- Upgrading the stopbanks and removing gravel from the riverbed to maintain the channel's flood capacity and prevent stopbank failure

## Hikinui sill upgrade

- Strengthening of the Hikinui sill (badly damaged in July 2006 flood) by adding a geotextile reinforced grass matt to prevent scouring
- Adding five large debris fences to catch driftwood before it flows over the sill to prevent damage to the sill and farm fences

## LWVDS rates review

A hearings committee comprising Greater Wellington Councillors Ian Buchanan (Chair) and Rex Kirton, and Mark Lovett (Chair of the Lower Wairarapa Valley Development Scheme, LWVDS) has considered a number of submissions on the proposed new rating classification for the LWVDS. The committee has recommended to the Council that the proposed new rating classification be adopted with minor amendments to the one originally notified. The new rating classification will be in place for the 2008/09 financial year.

For more information, contact the LWVDS scheme manager and engineer Ranjan Cyril on 06 370 5660

# Passion for land wins Supreme Award

A multi-generational passion for farming and the environment has earned a Martinborough family a top environmental award.

John and Yvonne Harvey and their eldest daughter Rebecca Madden were named Supreme Award winners of the 2008 Wellington Ballance Farm Environment Awards at a special ceremony on 27 March 2008.

Described by judges as a family that is passionate in their dedication to farming and the environment, the Harvey's run Daisybank – a 1,017ha sheep, beef and forestry unit just southeast of Martinborough.

John's grandfather purchased the original 166ha block in 1923 and the judges said the award recognises the family's "multi-generational commitment to and understanding of their unique area".

Situated in the Dyerville district where the average rainfall is about 700mm, Daisybank is considered a challenging farm. The prevailing north-westerly wind causes as much trouble as the lack of rainfall most years, says John, so shelter and the lie of the land must always be considered with stock placement and welfare.

The bulk of the contour is easy hill, with some flats and steeper gullies. Much of the soil is clay, with some limestone and stony soils. The Dry River runs through part of the property, aptly named because part of it disappears underground each year.

Last year the farm wintered 6,921 sheep and 507 cattle. Before John left school he identified a need to establish a Romney flock that could withstand the conditions and he convinced his father to begin keeping some ram lambs. In 1972 they began recording the flock that is now the Daisybank Recorded Romney flock.

Cattle on the property are bred and managed to a successful formula, using a mix of Murray Grey, Charolais and Friesian genetics.

The judges commended production on Daisybank, describing the family as good, experienced farmers who know where they're going. They farm difficult country, but the farm reflects all the hard work they've put into it.

The Harveys have also been quick to spot opportunities. Rising demand for grape growing land in the 1990s saw them sell off 32ha of light, stony land in four blocks – a move that allowed them to clear their mortgages and develop the property into the profitable business it is today.



Charolais cattle on the Harvey's farm



John, Yvonne and daughter Rebecca have plenty to smile about after being named Supreme Award winners of the 2008 Wellington Ballance Farm Environment Awards

“The main thing is we wanted to keep it flexible but workable, enabling us to try to treat all the family fairly,” says John.

Another family company owns the pine trees and a forestry right protects the land they are on. John says it’s possible the proceeds of the forestry venture can be used to help the children who don’t come home to the farm.

He’s grateful for the life Daisybank has afforded him and those he loves. “If you want to be the richest corpse in the cemetery, don’t go farming,” he says. “But if you want a really good life there’s nothing better.”

The Harveys were also named winners of the PPCS Livestock Farm Award and the Markhams Business Planning Award.

Central to the farm’s development, said the judges, has been the awareness by all involved of the unique set of environmental factors.

Any gorse-infested land too steep to work has gone straight into pines (about 100ha in total). Alternative stock water, reticulated through troughs, is being established, and shade and shelter for stock has been provided. Waterways and dams have been fenced off and planted in natives, and pole planting has been undertaken to stabilise erosion-prone country. This work to future-proof farming on the land is on a vast scale and ongoing.

But the truly mammoth task has been the battle to turn dense, steep areas of gorse into productive farmland. “We thought it could be beaten,” says John “It was just a matter of time and keeping at it.”

John admits that in some parts of the farm the cost of converting to pasture was more than the land purchase. The key, he says, has been the “very impressive, very skilled” bulldozer and tractor operators who’ve worked over difficult ground to prepare it for cropping and pasture establishment.

In keeping with the history of the place, ownership and responsibility is flexible and innovative. Acting on what John says “turned out to be very good advice” from his accountant and lawyer, John set up a family trust when he and Yvonne, who have four children, married.



Last year the farm wintered 6,921 sheep

For more information on the Ballance Farm Environment Awards, contact David Natzke, General Manager, New Zealand Farm Environment Award Trust, on 07 834 0400, [david.natzke@nzfeatrust.org.nz](mailto:david.natzke@nzfeatrust.org.nz) or see [www.bfea.org.nz](http://www.bfea.org.nz)

For more information on Supreme and category award winners in the 2008 Wellington Ballance Farm Environment Awards, contact Pip Dalgliesh, Wellington regional coordinator, on 06 378 8008 or [wellington@bfea.org.nz](mailto:wellington@bfea.org.nz)

# Driest year since 1973

By the end of January the Waipoua River (upstream of the Paierau Road Bridge) had dried up into a series of pools

Despite some recent rain (welcomed by Wairarapa farmers), rainfall for 2008 to date remains well below average in many parts of the Wellington region.

For the four months from November 2007 to the end of February 2008, the Wairarapa plains received only about one-third of average rainfall – and this followed on from below-average rainfall during autumn and spring 2007.

As shown in Figure 1, the overall trend since the beginning of 2007 has been low rainfall in the Wairarapa. Our long-term rainfall monitoring at a site near Featherston shows that the 12-month period from February 2007 was the driest since 1972-73. The low rainfall during summer and autumn this year is a result of La Nina, whereas the last year's autumn dry spell occurred during El Nino conditions.

## Low river flows and groundwater levels

Wairarapa farmers are acutely aware of the effects of the current drought. River flows have been low, particularly in the Ruamahanga River and its eastern tributaries. During February the Ruamahanga River experienced its lowest flow since the summer of 1985.

Irrigation takes from Wairarapa rivers were restricted for much of the summer, but the Kapiti Coast's rivers didn't suffer quite so badly due to significant rain in early January. However, by March the rivers were reaching low levels forcing the Kapiti Coast District Council to switch its public water supply source from the Waikanae River to bore supply.

The extended period of low rainfall and river flows has caused groundwater levels to drop in all the Wellington region's major aquifers. Our monitoring data shows that by early autumn 2008 some of the lowest levels on record were being experienced at

some locations. Greater Wellington has received reports of some shallow bores on the Wairarapa plains drying up.

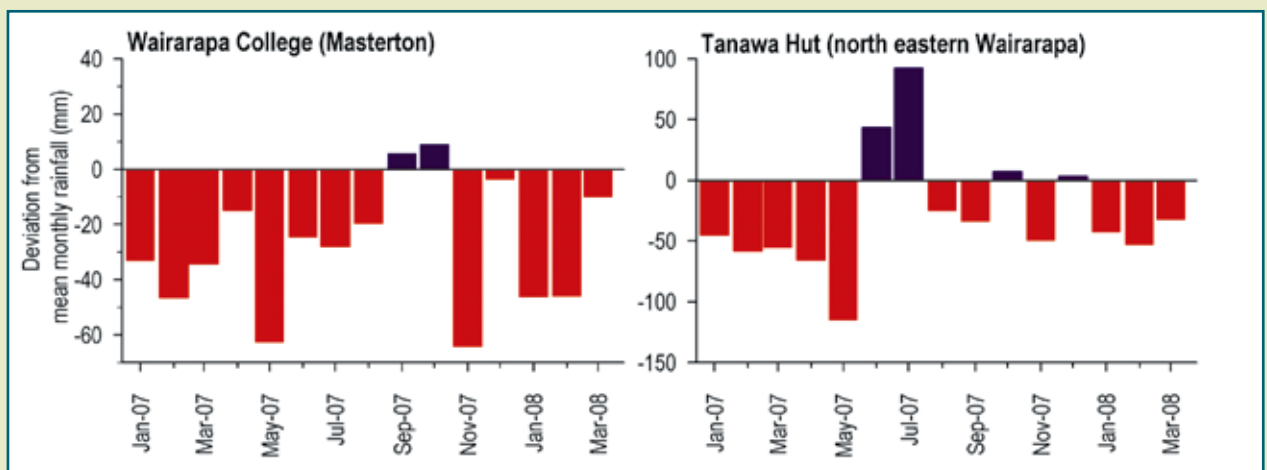
## Soil moisture deficits

Significant soil moisture deficits have persisted since November 2007. As shown in Figure 2, the soil moisture deficit on the Wairarapa plains has been well above average throughout the 2007-08 irrigation season, and was particularly significant compared to the November and early December average.

Though there is no single definition of "drought", it is commonly accepted that during soil moisture deficits of 130mm or more (shown as a dotted red line on Figure 2), agricultural drought conditions exist. The soil water balance modelling (of an average soil type) indicates that the Wairarapa experienced soil moisture deficits more than 130mm for most of January and February 2008. Though rainfall in late March and early April has boosted soil moisture, a significant soil moisture deficit remains.

For more information, see [www.gw.govt.nz/monitoring](http://www.gw.govt.nz/monitoring) to view up-to-date graphs of river levels, rainfall, groundwater levels and soil moisture at Greater Wellington's monitoring sites, and read our monthly hydrological summaries

Figure 1



Monthly rainfall since January 2007, shown as a deviation from long-term average at two of Greater Wellington's monitoring sites in the Wairarapa. Blue bars indicate above-average rainfall and red bars indicate below-average rainfall

## Drought committee to assist farmers

With the current Wairarapa drought being the worst since the early 1970s, a Wairarapa Drought Committee has been created to assist farmers during this difficult time.

Chaired by Anders Crofoot, the committee consists of Fran Wilde, Garry Daniell, Richmond Beetham, Jenny Boyne, John Hayes, Neil McLaren, Wes ten Hove, Andrew Day, Bruce Watkins and David Baker.

“Farmers need to look at what has worked for others,” says Anders Crofoot, Federated Farmers’ Wairarapa President. “And a significant part of the job of the committee will be to let farmers know where they can find details of

best practice.” The committee will also seek out and collate information on available assistance, and look at holding local meetings for farmers.

The following assistance is currently available:

- Advice and a free food budgeting kit. Phone Neil McLaren on 06 370 1865
- Climate data and background information on droughts – see [www.gw.govt.nz/drought](http://www.gw.govt.nz/drought)
- Financial support, counselling services and taxation. Phone the East Coast Rural Support Trust on 06 378 6898

The committee is happy to field queries and provide advice on request.

For more information:

- Fran Wilde, Chair, Greater Wellington Regional Council, 021 888 075
- Anders Crofoot, Federated Farmers’ Wairarapa President, 027 426 5324

## Councillors tour the Wairarapa

Greater Wellington Councillors toured the Wairarapa on 6 and 7 April following a full Council meeting at the Masterton District Council – the first outside Wellington city.

The Councillors were welcomed by Tangata Whenua at Te Ore Ore Marae where presentations from local iwi on the environment, including an understanding of Maori ecological perspectives, were well received. The Councillors then visited a dairy and a hill country farm to discuss a range of management

issues. Day 1 concluded with a presentation from the Wairarapa Irrigation Trust on the irrigation project’s progress.

Day 2 began with a visit to the Stoney Creek conservation forest at Tukurumuri to see progress with the rehabilitation works. The Councillors then travelled to the Lower Wairarapa Valley Development River Scheme area where Ngati Hinewaka kuia, Niniwa Munro talked to Councillors on the significance of the Wairarapa lakes to local Maori.

Wairarapa Councillor Ian Buchanan, who has had a 30-year involvement with the area, was on hand to “provide the new councillors and anybody with an interest with a feel for what Lake Wairarapa has to offer ecologically and as a regional park”.



Greater Wellington Councillors and staff

Figure 2



Soil water deficit in Masterton for an average soil type (available water capacity of 150mm, of which about half is readily available). Data from the NIWA National Climate Database for the East Taratahi monitoring site

# Akura nursery opens for winter

The Akura Conservation Centre will soon reopen to the public for its annual winter trading – 3 June to 26 September



Akura is operated by the Greater Wellington Regional Council as a nursery for poplars and willows, and a trading enterprise selling a range of trees and plants (native and exotic), chemicals and planting aids. A range of eco-sourced native plants is also available.

Located on Akura Road, 1.5km from Masterton, it covers 25ha and is supported by the 11ha Mangapakeha nursery on the Masterton/Castlepoint road about 30km from Masterton.

The current mix of the nursery's species is 60:40 poplar to willow, reflecting the strong influence of poplars in soil conservation programmes. Poplars and willows have some desirable characteristics that make them ideally suited to their primary role as soil conservation and river control species. The most desirable being their ability to strike from a pole, providing an easy method of planting and in most Wairarapa summers a good establishment

rate. Other benefits are the rapid development of strong and extensive root systems, their deciduousness, and resistance to disease and possum browse.

Functionally, poplars and willow are true "multiple-use" trees with many benefits, particularly in agro-forestry. They can be used for:

- Soil conservation (maintaining the productivity of pastoral soils and protecting riverbanks)
- Shelter and shade for livestock
- Supplemental fodder for livestock, particularly during droughts
- Potential timber/fibre/biofuel sources
- Removal of contaminants from sites, eg, nutrient stripping

The Akura nursery was established in 1984 to meet the poplar and willow needs of the soil conservation and river control programmes and, perhaps more importantly, to centralise the operations onto high-quality land. It's a highly mechanised operation, producing up to 35,000 poles per annum.



## Akura hours

3 June to 26 September

Monday to Friday 8am-4.30pm

Saturday 9am-11am

For more information:

- Paul Henderson, Akura Nursery Manager, T 06 370 5614 or [akura@gw.govt.nz](mailto:akura@gw.govt.nz)
- For a catalogue of available plants and products, see [www.gw.govt.nz](http://www.gw.govt.nz) (select "Information & services", "Land management" and "Akura Conservation Centre")

For more information, contact Greater Wellington:

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34 Chapel Street  
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T 06 378 2484  
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Publication date May 2008  
GW/WAI-G-08/63

[www.gw.govt.nz](http://www.gw.govt.nz)