

# Biodiversity Department Operational Plan 2014-17



greater WELLINGTON  
REGIONAL COUNCIL  
Te Pane Matua Taiao





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# 1. Introduction

Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) has responsibilities to manage biodiversity under the Resource Management Act 1991. Various council programmes that contribute to the management of biodiversity are consolidated in the Biodiversity department. The department is guided by the Regional Policy Statement, regional plans, and GWRC's Biodiversity Strategy.

The Biodiversity department has two core functions:

- To protect or restore indigenous biodiversity in priority areas
- To provide advice on matters relating to indigenous biodiversity and ecosystems and advocate for their protection and sound management

This Operational Plan explains the department's functions and management structure, sets out the associated work programmes and describes the nature and scope of its activities.

## 1.1 About biodiversity management

The term 'biodiversity' describes the variety of all living things on land, in water and in the sea. Biodiversity is an important part of the environment. It is crucial for the functioning of ecosystems that provide us with products and services that we could not live without. Natural ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity also form an important part of our shared heritage, and contribute to our cultural, spiritual, and mental wellbeing.

Protection of indigenous biodiversity is consistently identified as important by the general public. Much of New Zealand's biodiversity has evolved here and is not found in other places around the world. The protection of our unique natural heritage is important for ecological, cultural, recreational and aesthetic reasons.

New Zealand's indigenous biodiversity continues to decline nationally, and in the Wellington region. This is because many native plants and animals are preyed on or outcompeted by invasive pests. In addition, ecosystems and habitats are lost or degraded through human resource use and development.

To protect indigenous biodiversity many areas need active management to control threats to their values. Common management methods include the control of ecological weeds and pest animals, fencing farm stock out of sensitive areas, restoration planting, and gaining legal protection for areas for conservation purposes.

## 1.2 About biodiversity at Greater Wellington Regional Council

Regional councils have a responsibility to maintain and enhance indigenous biodiversity, as well as to protect significant vegetation and habitats of threatened species, under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). For the Wellington region, this responsibility is reflected in the objectives, policies and methods of the Regional Policy Statement. Some of the pest plants and animals that are controlled to protect native biodiversity are outlined in the Regional Pest Management Strategy.

GWRC has various programmes in place to manage biodiversity. The allocation of resources and objectives for biodiversity management are set out in the Long Term Plan, Annual Plans and GWRC's Biodiversity Strategy 2011-21. The Biodiversity department's activities and work programmes are tailored to be in line with these national and regional policy documents.

The Biodiversity department works with other GWRC departments and other organisations whose actions contribute to the overall health of regional ecosystems. Other GWRC departments working towards improved protection and management of biodiversity include Biosecurity, Land Management, Environmental Science, Parks, Environmental Regulation, and Environmental Policy.

GWRC's Biodiversity Strategy 2011-21 provides a common focus across departments, and guides activities relating to biodiversity (see textbox below).

## 1.3 About this Operational Plan

This document is the Operational Plan for the Biodiversity department, covering operations for the next three financial years (2014/15-2016/17). It explains the department's objectives, functions, structure and associated budget. It also describes the nature and scope of its work programmes and the activities the department intends to undertake in line with the wider responsibilities and mandate of GWRC.

The three-year Operational Plan will be updated on an annual basis to include the budget and project information for each upcoming financial year.

## The Greater Wellington Biodiversity Strategy 2011-21

Activities to manage biodiversity across the organisation are guided by the Greater Wellington Biodiversity Strategy 2011-21 (the Strategy). It was adopted by Council in June 2011. The Strategy outlines the legislative, policy and scientific context, and the mandates within which Greater Wellington Regional Council manages biodiversity.

The Strategy provides a framework to guide GWRC's activities to protect and manage indigenous biodiversity in the Wellington region for the ten years ending 2021. It sets out a vision for biodiversity in the region, and three goals for the organisation:

*"The Wellington region contains a full range of naturally occurring habitats and ecosystems that are in a healthy functioning state and supporting indigenous biodiversity"*

- GWRC demonstrates leadership in biodiversity management
- High value biodiversity areas are protected
- Regional ecosystem functions are maintained and restored

Key actions are identified to achieve these goals. The Biodiversity department is responsible for implementing most of the key actions set out in the Strategy, but not all. The implementation of the Strategy across GWRC's departments is assessed by the Biodiversity department and reported to the Executive Leadership Team annually.

## 2. About the Biodiversity department

This section briefly describes the Biodiversity department's functions and objectives and sets out the budget for each work programme. Sections 3, 4 and 5 describe each work programme in greater detail and outline the activities for the three years covered in this Operational Plan.

The department's role is to help protect and restore the biodiversity values of the Wellington region in line with GWRC's statutory responsibilities and strategic direction for biodiversity.

To do this the Biodiversity department has two core functions, each with an overall objective. These are:

### **Biodiversity Management**

Objective: Protect or restore indigenous biodiversity in priority areas by undertaking pest plant and animal control, fencing, and other restoration activities, and by supporting legal protection.

### **Biodiversity Advice and Advocacy**

Objective: Improve resource management by advising on matters relating to indigenous biodiversity and ecosystems and by advocating for their protection and sound management.

### 2.1 Department structure, work programmes and budget

To achieve its objectives, the department's structure and work programmes are organised into two teams with work programmes that align with the core functions. The work programmes contribute to the implementation of non-regulatory methods set out in GWRC's Regional Policy Statement and regional plans, and to delivery of key actions in the Biodiversity Strategy.

The Biodiversity Management team is operational, and coordinates the deployment of most of the department

budget to pay for front-line activities that help protect sites of high biodiversity value. Under programmes targeted at supporting a range of habitat types, staff are actively engaged in planning for priority sites, coordinating delivery of management activities, and liaising with partners and stakeholders.

The Strategy and Advice team implements programmes under the Biodiversity Advice and Advocacy core function. This team provides and coordinates advice for a range of parties, develops and maintains department publications, coordinates or supports events and delivers GWRC's contributions to multi-agency restoration projects.

Department Support is also provided by the Strategy and Advice team through the Strategy and Systems work programme, which includes strategic planning and administrative and systems support.

The total budget for the Biodiversity department's work programmes is \$3,454,000. Indicative budget figures for these work programmes are provided in Table 1, below. The components of these programmes and associated activities are described in sections 3, 4, and 5.

The main activities of the Biodiversity department are the planning, coordination and delivery of long-running work programmes. Some of the projects within these programmes are more discrete pieces of work defined in approved project plans. The number of individual projects within each work programme is expected to vary depending on the nature of the work, changing environmental circumstances, and the priorities set each year.

In working towards the department's objectives, some of the work programmes are implemented across ecosystem types and habitats (land-based, freshwater, estuarine, coastal and marine), while others focus on priority sites based on biodiversity values.

**Table 1. Summary of the Biodiversity department's work programmes and budgets for the financial years 2014/15-2016/17**  
 Figures include staff, contractor and material costs. Budgets for the 2015/16 and 2016/17 years are subject to confirmation through the GWRC Long Term Plan 2015-25.

Department function	Work programmes	Budget		
		2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Biodiversity Management	Key Native Ecosystem	2,190,000	2,190,000	2,190,000
	QEII Covenant Support	109,500	109,500	109,500
	Fish Passage Restoration	64,500	64,500	64,500
	Wetland Protection Support	79,000	79,000	79,000
Biodiversity Advice and Advocacy	Biodiversity Advice	149,000	149,000	149,000
	Biodiversity Advocacy	174,000	174,000	174,000
	Collaborative Restoration Projects	*503,500	503,500	503,500
	Enviroschools	120,000	120,000	120,000
Department Support	Strategy and Systems	64,500	64,500	64,500
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,454,000</b>	<b>3,454,000</b>	<b>3,454,000</b>

\*Includes \$100,000 towards the Fresh Start for Freshwater project as part of the Wairarapa Moana project

### 3. Core function 1: Biodiversity Management

The Biodiversity department has developed several work programmes to give effect to statutory and Council direction to protect or restore sites with high biodiversity value.

The work programmes under the Biodiversity Management core function are:

- Key Native Ecosystem
- QEII Covenant Support
- Fish Passage Restoration
- Wetland Protection Support

The first of these aims to protect and restore a representative set of ecosystems across the Wellington region, while the other three provide support for landowners who want to protect or restore areas with native biodiversity on their land. A common link between them is that they involve the provision of technical management and restoration advice to landowners and stakeholders, when appropriate to programme aims. Advice that is not linked to these programmes is provided under the Biodiversity Advice programme (see Section 4).

Much of the work planned for by the Biodiversity department is carried out by other departments or contractors. For example, the Biosecurity department carries out ecological weed and pest animal control to achieve objectives set in biodiversity management plans developed under each programme.

These Biodiversity Management programmes are explained in further detail in the sections below and the components and activities are summarised in Table 2.

#### 3.1 Key Native Ecosystem Programme

The Key Native Ecosystem (KNE) programme is the department's most prominent programme, in regards to effort and expenditure. Its objective is to protect and enhance indigenous biodiversity values at the best remaining examples of ecosystem types in the Wellington region. This is delivered through three main components: preparing management plans for sites, coordinating active management, and ensuring that progress at sites is monitored and reported appropriately.

Sites with the highest biodiversity values have been identified and prioritised for management. These sites are managed as Key Native Ecosystem (KNE) sites to maintain or enhance the biodiversity values present and the budget is allocated accordingly. Operations in KNE sites are implemented in accordance with three-year KNE plans prepared for each site in collaboration with the landowners and other stakeholders. These plans outline the sites' ecological values and threats and set out the operational actions and budget required to meet site-specific objectives.

The total budget available for the KNE programme dictates how many high value sites can be managed as part of this programme. Active management of KNE sites can involve:

- control of ecological weeds and pest animals;
- fencing to protect areas by excluding stock, vehicles, or people;
- restoration planting; and
- assisting land owners to gain legal protection for areas.

Under this programme, Biodiversity staff also work with landowners and volunteer community groups involved in protection or restoration of KNE sites.

### 3.2 QEII Covenant Support Programme

Under this programme, GWRC provides significant support to landowners wishing to protect areas of indigenous ecosystems on their land. This is done by means of a Queen Elizabeth II National Trust (QEII) open space covenant. The Biodiversity department partners with QEII to further the common goals of the two organisations by protecting and restoring significant sites for biodiversity and the community in perpetuity.

QEII undertakes site visits to assess the ecological value of potential sites, while GWRC offers advice and logistical support to landowners. Those putting a covenant in place may be eligible for financial help towards fencing and other management initiatives.

The costs associated with establishing a new covenant are shared by the three parties involved: GWRC, QEII and the landowner. For fencing costs GWRC contributes 40%. GWRC may also contribute towards the costs of an initial “knockdown” of ecological weeds and pest animals and may provide ongoing support to selected registered covenants for pest management activities.

### 3.3 Fish Passage Restoration Programme

This programme seeks to maintain and improve fish passage in the region’s waterways by raising awareness among landowners and removing barriers created as part of historic resource management decisions. In-stream structures such as flood gates, dams, weirs, fords, pipes and culverts can act as barriers to migrations of freshwater fish, resulting in population declines and reduced distribution of native species.

This programme has been developed as a non-regulatory response to provide support and guidance for restoring fish passage. It works toward Objective 13 of the Regional Policy Statement for which it is anticipated that there are no new barriers to fish passage and the number of existing impediments is reduced.

There are three components to the programme, involving the development of information resources, the provision of training for key stakeholders, and the undertaking of remedial works to restore fish passage in priority areas.

**Table 2. Work programmes under the Biodiversity Management core function**

Work programme	Programme components	Activities 2014-17
<b>Key Native Ecosystem</b>	Coordinating management of KNE sites	Coordination of active management and engagement with partners and stakeholders at 64 KNE sites Review of management activities to achieve best outcomes and efficiencies
	Preparing KNE management plans	Preparation of three-year plans for all KNE sites, with priority given to those sites owned/managed by GWRC or TAs Consultation and collaboration on the development of plans with landowners, management partners and other stakeholders
	Monitoring and reporting the results of management	Development and application of site assessment tools to monitor the results of management
<b>QEII Covenant Support</b>	Supporting the establishment of QEII covenants on private land	Provision of financial support for landowners entering into covenants on their land
	Providing ongoing covenant support	Provision of advice and logistical support for landowners to maintain and improve the ecological condition of covenanted areas
<b>Fish Passage Restoration</b>	Developing and disseminating information on fish passage	Review and development of published resources, including GIS layers, to increase stakeholder awareness of the importance of maintaining fish passage
	Providing training and up-skilling opportunities to landowners and managers	Facilitation and delivery of presentations and training courses to key stakeholders and partners Provision of technical advice for landowners
	Restoring fish passage in priority areas	Restoration of fish passage at high priority sites, to be achieved on GWRC land initially and then other lands as opportunities arise
<b>Wetland Protection Support</b>	Developing and disseminating information on wetland protection	Review and development of published resources to increase stakeholder awareness of the importance of protecting and restoring wetlands
	Providing technical wetland advice	Provision of advice to landowners on techniques and management options for the protection and restoration of wetlands
	Providing support to protect significant wetlands	Preparation of wetland restoration plans for eligible landowners (approximately five per year) Provision of financial assistance to eligible landowners towards implementing prepared restoration plans

KNE = Key Native Ecosystem, TAs = territorial authorities, QEII = Queen Elizabeth II National Trust

### **3.4 Wetland Protection Support Programme**

As part of this programme GWRC supports the protection, management, and restoration of wetlands with significant biodiversity values in the Wellington region. In particular, it seeks to support landowners in their efforts to protect wetlands on their land that are not already managed as part of the KNE programme (see above).

Of the original extent of freshwater wetlands in the Wellington region, only a small percentage remains. Despite their ecological, cultural and functional values, wetlands continue to be threatened by land use and hydrological changes, pollution, pests and farm stock, and loss of connectivity to the wider landscape.

This programme is a non-regulatory response to the acutely threatened status of wetlands in the region and works towards Objective 16 of the Regional Policy Statement which directs the identification and protection of ecosystems and habitats with significant indigenous biodiversity values.

The objectives of this programme are around promoting understanding of wetland values, giving guidance to landowners and providing incentives for the management, protection and restoration of wetland ecosystems with significant indigenous biodiversity values. These will be achieved through the dissemination of information and technical advice, coordination of the development of site restoration plans, and the provision of financial assistance for wetland fencing and planting and control of pests.

## **4. Core function 2: Biodiversity Advice and Advocacy**

This function brings together the department's efforts to advise, communicate, promote and collaborate on matters that involve and affect the Wellington region's biodiversity. Ensuring consideration of biodiversity in statutory and operational planning, and fostering the wider understanding of the importance of protecting native biodiversity are critical components for achieving GWRC's vision for regional biodiversity.

The three work programmes under the Biodiversity Advice and Advocacy core function are:

- Biodiversity Advice
- Biodiversity Advocacy
- Collaborative Restoration Projects

Key to the success of these work programmes are consistent and constructive communication and advice, the development and maintenance of internal and external relationships and effective engagement with the community. The programmes are explained in further detail in the sections below and their components and associated activities are summarised in Table 3.

### **4.1 Biodiversity Advice Programme**

This programme harnesses the expertise of staff in both the Strategy and Advice team and the Biodiversity Management team to support GWRC departments and other parties through the provision of advice on biodiversity planning, policy, management and restoration. Advice is provided on request and to help fulfil GWRC's responsibilities and interest in maintaining and enhancing the biodiversity of the Wellington region.

There are two types of advice provided as part of this programme: support for internal or external policy and planning, and technical biodiversity management and restoration advice. The first of these focuses on the development of statutory and non-statutory policies and plans and the provision of advice and assistance to other parties who are undertaking this work. It also involves helping to ensure the adequate application of regional policy and statutory processes that provide for recognition and protection of biodiversity and the management of ecological effects.

The second component involves the coordination and provision of ecological advice and support to assist others with effective practical management and restoration of biodiversity. This includes advice on best practice for management of ecological effects as well as techniques for restoring biodiversity, irrespective of land tenure.

Those requesting advice can include other GWRC departments, territorial authorities and other agencies, landowners, community groups and the wider regional community. Generally advice is provided on behalf of the Biodiversity department or GWRC as a whole where appropriate, though in some particular cases staff may also be representing local government, working groups, or other joint initiatives.

### **4.2 Biodiversity Advocacy Programme**

The overall aim of this programme is to promote the importance, protection and sound management of indigenous biodiversity in the Wellington region and the work GWRC does to support biodiversity. It recognises the role of GWRC to communicate the importance of biodiversity protection and restoration to the public.

This programme consolidates the variety of advocacy, promotion and communication functions already undertaken by the department into a single programme of work. It provides a framework under which additional advocacy initiatives can be developed and implemented.

The GWRC publications and webpages that relate to biodiversity are maintained under this programme and relevant events and initiatives are organised or supported. Systems to support and coordinate advocacy functions are also developed and maintained. Key advocacy messages developed under the department's projects and programmes are collated and aligned through this programme and will



be incorporated into the coordination of events and development of associated publications.

Enviroschools is also funded through the Biodiversity Advocacy programme, with school engagement and projects developed and delivered by dedicated staff. Schools that participate in the Enviroschools programme have the support of a facilitator, become part of a network of other schools and can draw on a set of resources that pull together ideas on sustainability and environmental stewardship.

### 4.3 Collaborative Restoration Projects Programme

This programme seeks to support multi-agency efforts to restore the biodiversity values of defined areas of the Wellington region. The overall objective of the programme is to coordinate and deliver GWRC contributions to large restoration projects that involve multiple landowners, agencies, iwi and other significant stakeholders.

Protection and restoration of native biodiversity values often spans several land parcels and the responsibilities of more than one agency. Larger scale projects require a collaborative approach to help maintain or enhance ecological areas. Activities undertaken as part of these projects include supporting or leading administration and planning; advocating for projects;

providing community support, advice and funding; and coordinating and implementing biodiversity management actions.

Two large projects, Porirua Harbour and Wairarapa Moana, are coordinated under this programme and support is also provided to smaller projects such as Project Aorangi. Some information about the two largest projects is given below.

Porirua Harbour is one of the most significant coastal sites in the region. Because the primary threats to the biodiversity in the estuary come from land-based activities, a whole-of-catchment approach is necessary to restore this vulnerable receiving environment. GWRC is a signatory to the Porirua Harbour and Catchment Strategy and Action Plan (PHCSAP), which was developed in collaboration with Wellington and Porirua City Councils, Te Runanga O Toa Rangatira, and a range of other stakeholders. The Biodiversity department represents GWRC on the PHCSAP Strategy Implementation Team and is also responsible for implementing some actions listed in the PHCSAP. These include efforts to improve the estuary's health, engage the community and implement land management practices that reduce sediment.

**Table 3. Work programmes under the Biodiversity Advice and Advocacy core function**

Work programme	Programme components	Activities 2014-17
<b>Biodiversity Advice</b>	Supporting internal and external biodiversity policy and planning	Provision of advice on policy or planning matters at national, regional and local levels, including input into GWRC submissions, resource consenting and hearing processes
		Provision of support and advice for other departments on biodiversity policy and management matters
	Providing technical biodiversity management and restoration advice for sites	Provision of advice on best practice techniques for biodiversity management or restoration, including the review of restoration plans
<b>Biodiversity Advocacy</b>	Supporting and organising biodiversity events and initiatives	Development, delivery and support for events and initiatives in line with the GWRC Biodiversity Strategy and overall mandate
	Developing and maintaining GWRC publications and webpages relating to biodiversity	Review, update and development of GWRC biodiversity publications and online material
	Supporting Enviroschools in the region	Provision of financial and logistical support for regional Enviroschools coordinator
<b>Collaborative Restoration Projects*</b>	Supporting or leading administration and planning for projects	Strategic planning, project development and administration in collaboration with project partners and stakeholders
	Advocating for the biodiversity values related to project areas	Development and delivery of information and resources to the community
		Development, delivery or support for events and initiatives
	Supporting community in restoration efforts	Provision of advice on best practice techniques for biodiversity management or restoration
		Provision of operational and financial support for restoration groups, schools and the wider community to achieve biodiversity outcomes in line with project goals
Coordinating and implementing biodiversity management actions	Coordination, delivery and/or support for biodiversity management activities, as agreed with project partners	

\*Specific actions for the range of collaborative restoration projects vary depending on the level of involvement and on agreements reached with project partners and stakeholders

Wairarapa Moana is the largest remaining wetland complex in the region. Many threats to the lake and wetlands come from the surrounding land use and so a broader landscape approach is needed to restore their health. To address this issue, interagency governance and management structures have been created that include GWRC, the Department of Conservation, South Wairarapa District Council, Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa and Rangitane o Wairarapa. The Biodiversity department coordinates the project's governance and management structures as well as engaging the local community in restoration activities.

## 5. Department Support

The Biodiversity department, as every other, is supported by systems and administrative effort. Much of this work is ongoing, with effort directed towards supporting staff and the functioning of the department, and providing administrative support to the department's other programmes.

Department Support work is brought together under the Strategy and Systems programme.

This programme seeks to support the department's functions through planning and reporting, maintaining strategic relationships and the development and upkeep of its systems and processes. Much of this is focused internally, including the production and compilation of plans and reports, and the development and maintenance of systems such as for health and safety.

Some external relationships are also maintained through this programme, such as through the development of memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and participation in and support for collaborative projects with operational partners, other departments and community stakeholders.

The work programme is set out in Table 4.

**Table 4. Work programme under the Department Support function**

Work programme	Programme components	Activities 2014-17
<b>Strategy and Systems</b>	Strategic and operational planning and reporting	Development, review and reporting on the GWRC Biodiversity Strategy, the Biodiversity department Operational Plan, and department work programmes
		Collation and development of Biodiversity department contributions to council reports
		Provision of advice on the department's direction
	Engaging with stakeholders and maintaining strategic relationships	Development of memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with other departments and organisations
		Active participation in relevant groups, projects and processes involving operational partners and stakeholders
	Developing and maintaining systems and processes	Development and maintenance of health and safety systems and processes
		Development and maintenance of document and data systems
		Development and maintenance of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and policies



The Greater Wellington Regional Council promotes **Quality for Life** by ensuring our environment is protected while meeting the economic, social and cultural needs of the community

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