



**ADVISORY COMMITTEE
for the Waikato
REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

**Minutes of the
Advisory Committee for Regional Environment (ACRE)
held at Waikato Regional Council, Level 1 Tui/Kowhai Rooms, 160 Ward Street, Hamilton
on Wednesday 28 March 2024
3:00- 5:00pm**

ATTENDEES

Anna Casey-Cox (Chair)
Bruce Clarkson (Councillor, WRC)
Shepherd Isaac
Neville Williams
John Badham
Keri Thompson (Teams online)
Rachel Thompson (Teams online)
Krtistel Van Houte (Teams online)
Haven Walsh (Corporate Planning Manager, WRC)
Delwyn Dellow (Minutes)

APOLOGIES

Craig Solomon
Malcom Green
Kelvin Mouritson

1. OPENING OF MEETING and INTRODUCTIONS

The meeting was opened by Shepherd Isaac with a karakia.
Following the karakia the ACRE members introduced themselves.

2. LONG TERM PLAN (LTP) PRESENTATION

Councillor Clarkson spoke to a powerpoint presentation (attached) regarding the LTP.
The following points were explained during the presentation with questions raised:

• **Snapshot of the impact on rates**

Haven Walsh advised that an oversight had occurred in the graph's legend which should have read *total rates increase* rather than targeted rates revenue increase.

Q: Are Waikato Regional Council's rates one of the highest in the country?

A: This is incorrect. The highest rating region is



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Region		Dollar value
Bay of Plenty Regional Council	Regional	\$ 478.69
Environment Canterbury	Regional	Refused – no distinction between non-residential and [...]
Environment Southland	Regional	\$ 274.00
Great Wellington Regional Council	Regional	\$ 570.06
Hawkes Bay Regional Council	Regional	\$ 482.87
Horizons Regional Council	Regional	Not provided
Northland Regional Council	Regional	\$ 424.00
Otago Regional Council	District	\$ 225.89
Taranaki Regional Council	Regional	\$ \$256.56
Waikato Regional Council	Regional	\$ 419.29
West Coast Regional Council	Regional	\$ 361.67

- **Investing more in our region's biodiversity**

- The funds established to support conservation projects in the Waikato region have not kept pace with demand or the rate of inflation.
- New Zealanders are now supporting conservation-related projects and are looking increasingly for philanthropic and government investment which is reflected in the increased number of applications Waikato Regional Council has received to its three contestable funds, as part of the council's Natural Heritage Partnership Programme.
- The per property natural heritage rate of \$5.80 was first introduced in 2005 but has not kept pace, resulting in Council not being able to support the growing number of community programmes or take into account increased costs of the work.
- Increasing the rate to \$8.68 per property brings it in line with inflation since the programme was established. Council is keen to test support for further accelerating this work with an increase in this rate to \$15 – providing an additional \$1.403 million (incl. GST) per annum – will help achieve biodiversity goals sooner.

Q: Whose preference/s were taken into account for the three options and how was this decided?

A: Council staff were asked what their preferences were. Councillors were keen to test if an increased payment to \$15 might be acceptable. Option 2 would be selected if that is what the community wants and is supportive of this increase. Testing options assists council to determine what to do.



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Information is gained via individual submissions together with a summary of those submissions which Councillors receive. Hearings also assist in gaining information.

- **Simplifying public transport investment**

Waikato Regional Council only rates for public transport services in Hamilton, Thames-Coromandel and Matamata-Piako. Outside of these areas the district council rates for these services. The proposal is to have a region-wide public transport rate. Further discussion to be held during the next annual plan.

- **Regional economic development funding (RDF)**

The fund was created by council investing accrued funds which supported the RDF. The funds currently held in the bank are now decreasing and, with only three grants approved in eight years council has decided to disestablish the fund. Unallocated funds post-closure will be redirected to strategic priorities.

Discussion regarding the RDF included:

- Te Waka's purpose does not strongly align with ACRE's objectives apart from the wind farm renewable energy project. ACRE might consider supporting Te Waka if they showed increased support for renewable energy.

- **Investment and affordability**

- The council aims to balance funding changes with the work and services needed while considering affordability for ratepayers.
- A new rate increase of 0.3% will be used to 'tweak' the general rate and targeted rate to properties of 20+ hectares.

Q: Are farm plans still required currently?

A: Yes.

- **Other work we're [council] is prioritising**

Councillor Clarkson briefly spoke to each bullet pointed item.

- **Improving Whangamarino Wetland and Lake Waikare**
 - Peat and lakes are degrading.

The council plans to develop a multi-stakeholder agreement on a catchment action plan to reverse degrading trends and support long-term rehabilitation.

The implementation of the plan will be considered and budgeted for through the 2027-2037 Long Term Plan. \$400,000 has been allocated from the previous year surplus to complete this work.



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- **A strategy for water security**

Rainfall levels are reducing which means groundwater and surface water levels are reducing. There is a need to maintain current water levels whilst protecting the region from flood events through a multi-stakeholder plan to ensure wellbeing and resilience within defined environmental limits for the next 30 years.

The \$388,000 investment proposed for this project will be funded from prior year surplus funds held by the council.

- **For peat's sake**

- There are costs for farming on current peat soils.
- What opportunities are there to retire some peat soils which shouldn't be farmed?
- There are peat soils below sea level on the east coast.
- Key players have met to take a coordinated approach to understand peat soils which - Waikato Regional Council needs to participate in and assist with funding of \$2.3m over five years via general rates.

- **Wharekawa Coast 2120**

- Reacting to sea level and climate change.
- A non-regulatory plan has been developed with Waikato and Hauraki districts and iwi.
- A funding model (the community will fund) will appear in the next annual plan following consultation and agreement.

- **Regional spatial planning**

- \$1m during the next four years (most from prior year surpluses from general rates \$500k bi-annually) will be used to create and upgrade the council's regional spatial plans which will be of significant benefit to multi-layer, multi agencies. Waikato Regional Council is leading this project and is a GIS-type scenario.
- Neville advised of the Wellington City Council "Digital Twin" project designed to replicate the environment at location and at a macro view by digital modelling. This work is an iterative process. In the future, sensors will be added to monitor the environment for carbon, etc and will strengthen long term planning. At some point the Waikato spatial planning project may evolve along similar lines.
- The project is being funded by council at present however, as stakeholders begin to realise the benefits of this work it is anticipated that they too will come onboard.

- **Te Huia: passenger rail service**

- This service will only continue on the contingency of a central government subsidy. If this subsidy is not made available, the rail service will be unable to continue as Waikato Regional Council is unable to solely fund this transport option.
- Rolling stock has a finite life span.
A consortium approach for purchase of rolling stock could allow this to continue.



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- **WORK WE'RE NOT DOING**

- **Eco Retrofit**

This project has now been withdrawn. WRC consulted on this project during the 2021 LTP. The financial market has changed and banks are now offering the same service but at better rates than council is able to offer.

- **On the house**

This programme was being run in conjunction with South Waikato District Council (SWDC) which provided subsidies to replace wood burners with heat pumps. SWDC administered this project. New homeowners taking up this subsidy have reduced significantly therefore the programme is being stopped. A new NES will require a new approach therefore this programme will be reviewed during the next two years.

- **ADDITIONAL FUNDING QUERIES/DISCUSSION ITEMS**

The formal LTP document for submissions will be issued on 2 April 2024. Councillor Clarkson encouraged people to make submissions which are not solely restricted to the LTP.

- Education: Waikato Regional Council currently assists in funding an enviro schools programme alongside the district councils. The funds Waikato Regional Council contributes sends people out to schools to talk with pupils about the environment [Enviroschools | Waikato Regional Council](#) This project will be maintained at the current rate.
- Kura Waiti Kura Waita has proven to be extremely successful. This programme has been developed to advance Mātauranga Māori in environmental education at Te Reo kaupapa schools. The programme has been developed by Te Toki Voyaging Trust and is funded (\$100,000) by Waikato Regional Council. Waka are used and students do their work along or on the river to aid in better understanding of the live system of rivers, their connection with the ocean. Due to its success Kura Waiti Kura Waita will be put forward for a national award. Requests from schools region-wide are so many that this programme is at capacity. The meeting agreed that connection with future generations and the environment is very important. [Kura Waiti Ki Kura Waita | Waikato Regional Council](#)
- Shepherd indicated that funding is not always easy to come by to support groups and people are no longer volunteering and professionals are needing to be paid.

Action: Clarification required in terms of how the question from Malcolm Green relates to the Waikato Regional Council? *What effects will "these programmes" have on TCDC's \$1m funding programme?*

- **Johnston Mill Nature Preserve.** A question was raised by the meeting if there had been any discussion regarding funding for the nature preserve project. The scale of funding was significant however a gap has now been created by central Government. [Johnston Mill Nature Preserve Trails - Great Outdoor Provision Company](#)
- **Plant Pass:** New Zealand Plant Producers Incorporated (NZPPI) are wanting uniform standards for native plant growing and is suggesting that all horticultural nurseries register



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- for Plant Pass which is a voluntary certification scheme for all New Zealand plant producers that recognises good biosecurity practices and provides assurances for plant buying customers. [Who — Plant Pass](#) and [Plant Pass](#).
If biodiversity is being considered could the Heritage Fund allow people to learn ways of growing special plants rather than typical plants such as restoring natives throughout Waikato and be respectful of diversity and restoration needed.

This would need to be a planned process to improve planting across the region.

Action: consider improved planting across the region. If a regional approach is a good idea, then Waikato Regional Council should do something about this.

2. Conflicts of interest

There were no changes from the previous meeting.

3. Current workplan

John Badham updated the committee on a recent meeting with the Waikato Conservation Board. The committee discussed a submission on the Fast Track Consenting Bill.

Action: Anna Casey-Cox to follow up regarding ACRE delegation to Waikato Regional Council.

Shepherd Isaac closed the meeting with a karakia.

MEETING CONCLUDED AT: 5.00PM