

## 6. DRAFT INDIGENOUS BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

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The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee that a Draft Biodiversity Strategy is in preparation and will be ready for release following input from tangata whenua. The Committee's approval is sought for the bulk of the document which has now been prepared (copies will be provided prior to the meeting). The additional tangata whenua input will be brought to the Committee for its sign-off, prior to release of the draft strategy for public consultation. Support is also sought for a draft five year budget for implementing the Biodiversity Strategy.

The reason the draft strategy is being brought to the Committee at this stage is to gain support for the associated budget now that the bulk of the draft strategy has been prepared.

Please note that the Biodiversity Strategy focuses primarily on indigenous biodiversity, and in particular on the plants, animals and ecosystems that occur naturally in Christchurch.

### BACKGROUND

The Biodiversity Strategy is being prepared in response to recent policy changes and initiatives at a national level, and also to better co-ordinate the many aspects of Council work that benefit indigenous biodiversity. Recent changes to legislation include an amendment to the Resource Management Act 1991 (Sec. 31) which expands the functions of territorial authorities to specifically include:

*"the control of any actual or potential effects of the use, development, or protections of land, including for the purpose of - .....*  
*(iii) the maintenance of indigenous biological diversity (Sec.31).*

The draft strategy has been prepared by a team of staff in partnership with Councillors Anderton, Williams and Evans (Carole). The team first reported to the Parks, Gardens and Waterways Committee in September 2002 to advise on the process to be undertaken in developing a Biodiversity Strategy for Christchurch. A Councillor seminar was held in July 2003 to outline the direction of the strategy, and the Committee received an update on the work programme in November 2003.

To allow more time for consultation, both internally and with Ngai Tahu, this work programme has been amended slightly with this draft being brought to the committee a month later than initially planned. Following inclusion of input from Ngai Tahu, the completed draft will be brought to the Committee for sign-off prior to public consultation beginning.

### THE DRAFT STRATEGY

The draft strategy provides a framework for the Council to work with local communities to protect, restore and celebrate the plants, animals and ecosystems that occur naturally in Christchurch. It explains what is meant by biodiversity, why biodiversity is important, and what can be done to enhance biodiversity in Christchurch. Community involvement is recognised as an important component in achieving the six goals of the strategy, which can be summarised as follows:

1. Retain and protect Christchurch's indigenous biodiversity
2. Restore habitats and ecosystems
3. Raise awareness
4. Increase understanding
5. Encourage participation
6. Research and monitor

The document provides an overview of the different ecosystems found in Christchurch, their various components, including plants, birds, fish and invertebrates, and the threats they face, particularly from weeds and animal pests. It also sets out a vision for the ecosystems of the coast, waterways and wetlands, Port Hills, dry plains and suburbs of Christchurch. Building on the existing matrix of natural areas around the city, the strategy recognises 25 priority sites for their enhancement potential and /or need for protection.

In addition to protecting and enhancing areas of high ecological value, the strategy aims to raise awareness and improve ecological functioning across the entire fabric of the city. This means improving water quality in the city's waterways, controlling weed species and preventing the establishment of new invaders, improving connections and corridors between ecological refuges, and reducing the distance from one patch of vegetation to the next, thus improving habitat quality across the city, not just for plants and animals, but also providing a healthier environment for people.

An extensive list of actions, required to achieve the goals of the draft strategy, are set out in an Action Plan which forms the latter part of the document. By its nature, this Action Plan will be a working document and will provide an important tool in co-ordinating implementation of the strategy. While there are still gaps in some areas, in particular, working with tangata whenua, other work is already underway eg preparation of a communication plan for raising awareness of biodiversity issues.

### **CONSULTATION AND PROCESS**

The draft has been developed following five community workshops, several meetings with key stakeholders, and internal consultation within the Council. Due to unforeseen circumstances, consultation with tangata whenua has been limited. This is now being resolved with an undertaking from Ngai Tahu to provide input to the strategy before it is released for public consultation and submissions. Once the draft has been finalised and approved by the Parks, Gardens and Waterways Committee, copies will be prepared for public consultation. A timeframe is yet to be confirmed in consultation with Ngai Tahu and should be available for the Committee's meeting on 10 March. It is hoped that public consultation will begin in April, with submissions closing in June.

During the consultation period meetings will be held with the public, key stakeholders, and Community Boards. It is planned that submissions will be analysed and the strategy amended and brought back to this Committee by September 2004.

### **FUNDING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

A draft budget, and explanatory notes, have been prepared as an indication of the funding required to implement the strategy (attached). This budget is based on the Draft Greenspace 5 Year Budget: 2004-2009, extending it to include priority actions identified in the strategy. Specific projects and activities in the Greenspace budget which provide significant biodiversity benefits have been identified and make up approximately 75% of the Proposed Biodiversity Strategy budget.

New items focus on the protection and restoration of priority sites, planning and community involvement, weed and pest management, and new initiatives to provide a focal point for the city's biodiversity at the Botanic Gardens.

Establishing the position of Biodiversity Co-ordinator is seen as being particularly important in co-ordinating the actions identified in the Action Plan and providing an ongoing focus and driver for the strategy. It is expected that this position can be funded from the reorganisation of existing staff budgets in the Greenspace Unit and Planning Unit.

The Biodiversity Strategy aims to re-focus and strengthen ongoing work by the Council to provide greater biodiversity benefits. While the proposed budget concentrates on the Greenspace Unit, full implementation of the strategy will affect units across the Council. The strategy aims to improve awareness and co-ordination of efforts both within the Council and in the wider community, with public participation being a crucial part of the strategy.

Funding and resources are specifically required:

- to protect important sites
- to preserve rare and threatened species,
- for timely weed and pest control (in many cases pest populations are nearing a threshold level
- by acting now we can avoid much less manageable problems in the future)
- to enable people to understand the issues and to participate in local projects.

## CONCLUSION

The Biodiversity Strategy aims to improve the ecological health of Christchurch's ecosystems, and to reduce the risk of future loss, thereby providing significant benefits for the plants, animals and people who live here. This is both a practical task and an exercise in raising awareness. It will require active participation and involves partnerships with other agencies, community groups and individuals, as well as greater collaboration within the Council. It will also require significant funding, particularly in the short term. It is possible that some costs will decrease with time as ecosystems are protected, weeds and pests controlled, and communities take on guardianship roles. The strategy provides for local action on commitments made at a national level under both New Zealand's Biodiversity Strategy and specifically to provide a range of options for dealing with issues at a land use level pursuant to the provisions of the Resource Management Amendment Act 2003.

Protecting Christchurch's biodiversity will contribute to a more sustainable city, by providing many components of the ecosystem services we depend on, such as air purification, flood water retention, healthy soils and climate regulation. The Convention on Biological Diversity emphasises the need to conserve biodiversity in its natural surroundings. If we are not prepared to look after the species and ecosystems special to Christchurch it is unlikely anyone else will, even if this was an option.

The cost to some of our most important ecosystems of not intensifying protection and enhancement efforts is to accept increasing degradation and likely loss of plants, animals and ecosystems that are special in Christchurch.

### Staff

- Recommendation:**
1. That the Parks, Gardens and Waterways Committee approve the contents of the Draft Biodiversity Strategy presented at this meeting.
  2. That the Draft Biodiversity Strategy be amended to include input from Ngai Tahu and then brought back to the Parks, Gardens and Waterways Committee for sign-off, prior to release for public consultation.
  3. That the Committee support funding of the "New Items" in the Proposed Biodiversity Strategy Budget.

### Chairman's

- Recommendation:** That the above recommendation be adopted.