

Report to the Collaborative Stakeholder Group – for Agreement and Approval

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To: Collaborative Stakeholder Group
From: Emma Reed, Policy workstream
Subject: **Recommendations to support Plan Change 1 – final sign off**
Section **For Agreement and Approval**

Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by Waikato Regional Council staff for the use of Collaborative Stakeholder Group Healthy Rivers: Wai Ora Project as a reference document and as such does not constitute Council's policy.

1 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide the Collaborative Stakeholder Group (CSG) with text to accompany Plan Change 1 and s32 when delivering recommendations to the Healthy Rivers Wai Ora Committee and Waikato Regional Council.

Recommendation:

1. That the report '**Recommendations to support Plan Change 1 – final sign off**' (Doc # 6522013 dated 2 June 2016) be received, and
2. That the Collaborative Stakeholder Group:
 - a) Agree to recommendations on the topics listed below as accompanying messages to the Healthy Rivers Wai Ora Committee and Waikato Regional Council, when delivering Plan Change 1 and the s32 document:
 - Ensuring there is confidence that the long term water quality goals will be achieved,
 - Working with others to achieve the Vision and Strategy,
 - Promoting community dialogue and involvement,
 - Working with urban communities,
 - Promotion of wetland development, biodiversity enhancement and recognition of ecosystem services,
 - Funding, and
 - Working with sectors post-notification of Plan Change 1,with the wording for each topic as per the report.
 - b) As raised at CSG#28, discuss if CSG wish to ask Waikato River Authority to consider including the water quality limits, intergenerational timeframe and staged approach that are contained in Plan Change 1 into the Vision and Strategy.

Note: Plain text was presented at CSG28 on 30-31 May and agreed by CSG, tracked changes have been added by staff since then based on CSG instructions.

1. Ensuring there is confidence that the long term water quality goals will be achieved

The Collaborative Stakeholder Group has chosen an 80 year timeframe to achieve the water quality aspects of the Vision and Strategy. The intergenerational timeframe reflects the aspirational goals of the Vision and Strategy, and the costly and difficult changes required to reduce discharges to meet these goals.

Because of the extent of change required to restore water quality in an 80 year timeframe, a staged approach has been adopted. The first stage is to put in place and implement the range of actions required in Plan Change 1 over a 10 year period, which will ultimately achieve a 10% improvement in water quality from current state towards the ultimate goal for the water quality aspects of the Vision and Strategy.

The staged approach means the reductions in nitrogen, phosphorus, sediment and E. coli required under Plan Change 1 will need to be followed by further reductions in subsequent regional plans.

The Resource Management Act 1991 includes a 10 year lifespan for planning documents such as regional plans. While the current plan is unable to directly bind the contents of future plans or future decision makers, the intergenerational timeframe to achieve the Vision and Strategy needs to be clearly signalled as the intended direction of travel. It is imperative that subsequent plan changes occur, and that reductions required in Plan Change 1 are carried through and expanded upon in subsequent regional plans.

Waikato Regional Council should work with others, including river iwi partners and the Waikato River Authority, to investigate options of how to secure the intergenerational pathway towards the Vision and Strategy, which is started in Plan Change 1.

2. Working with others to achieve the Vision and Strategy

The scope of the Healthy Rivers: Plan for Change/ Wai Ora: He Rautaki Whakapaipai project is focussed on nitrogen, phosphorus, sediment and E.coli. The work outlined in Plan Change 1 to address these contaminants is extensive, and will require a partnership approach. Furthermore, the Vision and Strategy is broader than these four contaminants, ~~and~~ requires implementation by a number of agencies and the need to take an integrated approach in order to achieve the range of values. Waikato Regional Council should work with others, including river iwi partners, Waikato River Authority, central and local government and Waikato communities, to promote the Vision and Strategy and work towards achieving all of its objectives.

Given the long timeframe that will be needed to achieve the Vision and Strategy, Waikato Regional Council should take every opportunity to enhance the relationship of communities with the rivers throughout the catchments, but particularly in the lower Waikato where contact recreation standards will not be achieved for some time. This should facilitate short term benefits (such as enhancing near-river recreational opportunities), whilst working towards achieving the long term goals of improved water quality in the Waikato and Waipa Rivers. This should also include taking action now to facilitate short term benefits, whilst working towards achieving the long term goals of improved water quality in the Waikato and Waipa Rivers.

3. Promoting community dialogue and involvement

An important part of Plan Change 1 is the sub-catchment planning process. Sub-catchment planning should be done at an appropriate scale and build on, and integrate with, existing

catchment planning processes carried out by Waikato Regional Council and partners. This should include providing information on water quality state and trends, sources of contaminants and promoting community dialogue about possible solutions. The aim is to increase awareness and ownership of the Vision and Strategy and be able to develop local solutions. For example, Waikato Regional Council could link the Waikato River Authority report card project to sub-catchment planning processes, when investigating sub-catchment critical source areas of contaminants and possible solutions.

4. Working with urban communities

Some of the sub-catchments in the Waikato and Waipa contain areas which are predominately urban. These areas have different sources of contaminants and solutions to water quality issues than rural areas, and also contain higher populations. Some of these urban sub-catchments are in the top priority areas which will be investigated first. When undertaking sub-catchment planning in a predominately urban environment Waikato Regional Council should provide information and advice on what communities in urban areas can do to help improve water quality, as well as working with territorial authorities in their role in urban development.

5. Promotion of wetland development, biodiversity enhancement and the recognition of ecosystem services

Understanding is increasing about mitigations to reduce discharges of contaminants, and the value of biodiversity and ecosystem services in our catchments is increasing.

Wetlands are a mitigation ~~which provides~~providing reductions in all four contaminants, with secondary benefits for biodiversity. The Waikato and Waipa catchments historically featured large areas of wetlands, which over time have been drained. Wetland restoration is already occurring, and further areas of wWetlands areas could be re-developed back to their natural state. There are also areas where constructed wetlands could be built. Larger wetlands can be placed in the landscape which cross property boundaries, or service multiple properties in the catchment area of the wetland. These larger scale wetlands have the opportunity to provide water quality benefits, but their construction and location needs to be planned, coordinated with landowners, and funded. Waikato Regional Council should ensure wetland development is a key focus of sub-catchment planning, and has appropriate funding.

Similarly, the works provided for by Plan Change 1 create further opportunities to enhance biodiversity in the catchments of the rivers. For example, stock exclusion and riparian buffers will be required by Plan Change 1, and create a key opportunity to enhance terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity.

Therefore, when carrying out farm planning and sub-catchment planning, it is recommended that encouragement and incentives be provided to enhance biodiversity and wetland values, and that further research be undertaken to highlight the benefits of these and other ecosystem services produced through catchment management.

6. Funding

Rates can be set under the Local Government (Rating) Act 2002, and go through a public process, including consultation. Waikato Regional Council should consider setting rates through annual planning processes to support the implementation of Plan Change 1. CSG recommend the distribution of costs should be as follows:

- On-farm mitigation of effects which are regulatory requirements, and associated administration costs of consents or compliance, should be funded by the landholder.
- A catchment-wide rate, specific to the Waikato and Waipa catchments, should be established and used for certain projects, which include actions which are at the broader scale or are part of a coordinated sub-catchment planning process. Examples of such actions include constructed wetlands, lakes restoration or land retirement.

- A region-wide rate should be established and used for the costs of processes needed to implement Plan Change 1. This includes collecting baseline data, establishing a Farm Environment Plan accreditation system, and council resource needs.

The reasons for these funding principles ~~is~~are to share the costs of better water quality between polluter and beneficiary, to acknowledge that the state of water quality includes a legacy of past actions over a long period (and therefore it would be inequitable to require current dischargers to bear the full cost of mitigating the effects of historic actions), and to speed up action on the ground for broad-scale projects.

7. Working with sectors post-notification of Plan Change 1

The CSG was established by Waikato Regional Council to work on the specific task of developing a change to the Waikato Regional Plan, and as per the CSG's terms of reference there is a clear expectation of a finite process, due to finish when CSG makes its recommendations to council and river iwi decision makers. The plan change development process has involved a large commitment of time and effort by all the CSG members. Plan Change 1 solutions rely on council and others working together, to ensure the successful implementation of the provisions. CSG members consider it important for council to continue to work with sectors post-notification of Plan Change 1, throughout the finalisation of the plan and its implementation, and ongoing monitoring of how well it is achieving its objectives.

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