

Manawatū River Source to Sea/ENM Submission

Horizons 2021 - 2031 Longterm Plan:

About Manawatū River Source to Sea

Manawatū River Source to Sea is a community-led and catchment-wide initiative, from the headwaters of the Manawatū River in the Ruahine Ranges, through to the confluence at Manawatū Estuary at Foxton in Horowhenua, focused on providing positive outcomes for biodiversity, freshwater and our communities.

The positive outcomes include:

- Providing a network/forum for environmental groups to share information, learning and support, collective planning and action;
- Articulating the challenges of individual groups and raising awareness about pests on a large landscape basis: e.g., *Phragmites karka*
- Enhancing biodiversity, both flora and fauna, e.g., the Southern Ruahine Kiwi Habitat Restoration Project will benefit at least another 19 species as it takes an ecosystem approach;
- Building awareness and capability through Citizen Science (e.g., Palmy's Plastic Pollution Challenge) which is nationally recognised and contributes to the development of a nation-wide stream litter data methodology;
- Supporting and encouraging more nature-based experiences;
- Developing social enterprises contributing to economic wellbeing;
- Increased social and cultural wellbeing.

Manawatū River Source to Sea, therefore, is a strategic alliance of environmental organisations that collaborate to increase collective impact on a large landscape scale - city, district, or catchment-wide. This community-led initiative has been developed by a subset of around 30 Environment Network Manawatu (ENM) member groups with a particular interest in biodiversity and freshwater:

<https://www.enm.org.nz/Manawatū-River-Source-to-Sea>. ENM has more than 60 member groups in total.

Manawatū River Source to Sea would like to speak to the submission.

SUBMISSION

Manawatū River Source to Sea support the new high-level outcomes (p.8) that Horizons has set in the Draft Long Term Plan 2021-2031 and would like to work more closely with Horizons to ensure “Our region’s communities are vibrant and empowered”. Beyond the value that member groups of Source to Sea create in their localities and through their individual kaupapa, Manawatū River Source to Sea enables collective environmental action and impact on a large landscape/catchment-wide scale across council boundaries.

Community Engagement:

We are very pleased to see guaranteed funding for iconic places such as Te Āpiti, Mount Bruce Pukāhā, Bushy Park, etc.

We are also pleased to see an increase of contestable community funding to \$260,000 for biodiversity and \$50,000 for climate-change related projects. We hope that this will include allocations to much needed coordinator time to further mobilise volunteers and ensure safe delivery of on-the-ground action.

We propose that Horizons:

- Considers non-contestable funding to allow Manawatū River Source to Sea to continue building capacity and impact for the collective good, which ultimately will contribute to Horizons achieving its stated goals;
- Considers multiple-year funding for projects that need to go through a complete cycle e.g., eco-sourcing seeds, growing plants, planting and maintenance;

In addition, we propose that Horizons allocates planned budget over and above the contestable fund for co-funding to allow large landscape community projects engaging multiple organisations to successfully apply for funding with the likes of Predator Free 2050, as well as philanthropic organisations.

We see a closer collaboration between Horizons and Manawatū River Source to Sea to be complementary and win/win.

Biodiversity and biosecurity:

Awahuri Forest Kitchener Park Trust joined ENM/ Manawatū River Source to Sea because they need support in raising the alarm about a plant pest: *Phragmites karka*, (a close relation to *Phragmites australis*:- one of the 9 NZ nationally listed eradication plants rated by NIWA in 2020 as the biggest threat to aquatic habitats across the whole of NZ), and its threat to waterways, swampland, lowland farmlands, and river estuaries in its proliferation. This weed is already well established in the Whangaehu and Rangitikei catchments and their estuaries. It is also being found in small pockets throughout the Horowhenua region. Now it is in the Mangakino stream and has already spread from there into the Ōroua catchment and is migrating downstream toward the Manawatū River. Its proliferation has significant impacts on River Management, riparian land habitats etc., which will result in higher cost to the community if not addressed upfront. This weed hasn't flowered in the Manawatū and can only be spread by water flow or human activity. As we move more earth moving equipment, and river shingles around the country, more weeds are likely to migrate. We are surprised that *Phragmites karka* has never been formally assessed, and has been classified by Horizons as low risk given the recent invasion of Alligator Weed in the Mangaone Stream.

We ask Horizons to reconsider their risk assessment and join in the lobby to have this plant added to the national pest register.

Freshwater:

Manawatū River Source to Sea fully supports Horizons' focus on implementing the National Freshwater Policy. At the same time, we are concerned that the burden of engagement in stand-alone strands of consultations around "Our Freshwater Futures", "Climate Change", "Nature Calls" (Palmerston North City), etc. is stretching the community of volunteers too thinly. We expect a more holistic approach to community engagement addressing the wellbeing of our awa, putting big decisions into an all of catchment context, e.g., through the Manawatū River Leaders' Forum Action Planning process. Horizons should have the information to help build up the bigger picture sub-catchment by sub-catchment to help address the right issues in the context of the total catchment and under different climate change scenarios.

We are delighted to see Horizons' work on removing fish barriers and opening up more streams for native fish migration. And it is sad, to hear from active members that the current water quality is not good enough to support a healthy trout fishery. And while we acknowledge that trout is an introduced species, we also acknowledge the value of an active fishing community monitoring the wellbeing of a species requiring good water quality as this will benefit our native species too.

Data Availability

We support actions to make Horizons' data, information and expertise more transparent and accessible to communities and individuals. "Horizons also holds a range of information and expertise which we seek to make accessible to our communities where possible, whether to inform farmers on environmental works, communities engaging in biodiversity projects, or homeowners seeking to understand natural hazard risk. Over the next 10 years, information accessibility is a particular priority for Horizons" (p.14). We suggest that Citizen Science projects (such as the Palmy's Plastic Pollution Challenge) can also provide data that is valuable for decision-making.

River Management:

Manawatū River Source to Sea support the goal that where practical, to include natural components such as wetlands and other biodiversity elements into flood protection infrastructure. (p.59)

In this context, we would like to better understand the trade-offs between more immediate investment in SLUI (hill country) and wetlands (lower Manawatū) versus the need to increase the height of stop banks and fortification of other flood protection infrastructure.

We would also like to understand whether regular silt removal in strategic locations could help to break the 'raise stop banks' cycle.

Climate change:

Climate Change is not a new phenomenon, and it is somewhat of a relief that it finally gains more prominence in the LTP. Whilst we can see an immediate need for a dedicated Climate Change Department in the short-term, we also expect that this department's work will inform Horizons' policies and procedures in a holistic manner across all departments. In the long run we would expect the need for a separate Climate Change department to cease as addressing climate change becomes a way of operating.

Climate change should be an important component of the farm plans prepared as part of the Sustainable Land Use Initiative so both short- and long-term gains are achieved. Beyond plans – are we seeing sufficient levels of implementation? We hope to see the new department also have this as part of their scope.

Food Security

Manawatū River Source to Sea support the Sustainable Land Use Initiative, that allows farmers to target and carry out erosion control works to protect our region's valuable soil resource (p.13).

We would like to see an increase in the application of Regenerative Organic farming methods to future proof our ability to produce healthy food while also improving the health of our soils and waterways and increasing our resilience to climate change.

Rodale Institute's 40-year study comparing conventional and regenerative farming methods provides valuable insights into what is possible.¹

Last, but not least, we also advocate for the protection of high-quality soils (Class 1 and 2 soils) from urban expansion to ensure food can be produced in an environmentally sustainable way for present and future generations.

Transport:

The growing investment by Horizons in regional transport is valued. We applaud the endeavours to increase the services for the Capital connection.

Rates and Economy

We notice that the cumulative increase in rates over the next three years alone will be 24%. While we see the need for the increase, we also hear more and more people worrying about long-term affordability if the rates keep increasing at this level. We are wondering to what extent Council has modelled and could promote a new economic drive aimed at regenerating our natural resources so that the need for remedial action will decrease over time.

¹ Regenerative Organic Agriculture and Climate Change A Down-to-Earth Solution to Global Warming Rodale Institute