



Submission from Environment Network Manawatu Incorporated on Horizons draft Long Term Plan 2015-25

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Speaking to our submission:

ENM will speak to our submission. Preferred times are:

- Tuesday May 19th after 1pm
- Wednesday May 20th after 1pm

Background:

Environment Network Manawatu (ENM), an incorporated society formed in 2001, is an umbrella organisation for a growing and diverse network of Manawatu based environmental member groups, currently numbering 47 active groups. Through our members, this network is involved in a range of environmental activities, including biodiversity and catchment care, sustainability education in communities and schools, advocacy, recycling programmes, sustainable transport initiatives, and much more.

In this submission, our support for or opposition to certain programmes and features is based on the following criteria:

- Positive contribution to natural capital and ecosystem services, sustainable and active transport, biodiversity, walking and enjoyment of natural areas, energy efficiency
- Reduction in negative environmental impact, waste and resource use, fossil fuel use and vehicle use
- Resilience in the event of significant rise in fossil fuel costs during the plan period

The biggest activity area for ENM groups is biodiversity and catchment care, which are very closely linked in many projects. Community groups are making a very significant contribution to biodiversity activities in the region. In the last year or so, half of ENM's member groups have run or supported at least 22 projects related to biodiversity and/or catchment care.

These include:

- Protecting whio (blue duck) at the headwaters of the Oroua River volunteers through predator control.
- Riparian plantings at the source of the Manawatu River, near Norsewood, and at Kaitoke near Dannevirke.
- Riparian planting at Feilding, in the Oroua and Stoney Creek catchments, in the Turitea Valley, Summerhill Drive area and the Kahuterawa Valley.
- Bush restoration projects in the Kahuterawa, at Sixtus Lodge near Apiti, and in the Pohangina and Kawhatau Valleys.

- Predator control, rata planting, and the restoration of Parahaki Island as part of the Manawatu Gorge Biodiversity Project
- Projects to enhance a number of neighbourhood parks and reserves in urban Palmerston North (e.g. Edwards Pit Park, Waitoetoe Park, Green Corridors drainage reserves in Summerhill area and Linklater Reserve)
- Projects to protect and enhance natural areas and habitat at the coast including at the Foxton Loop, the Manawatu Estuary and Whitebait Creek.
- Growing thousands of plants for community plantings
- Education, awareness raising and advocacy related to conservation and freshwater quality issues.

For many of these projects, ENM and member groups work cooperatively with Horizons as well as with local councils, DOC, Massey University, schools, Te Manawa, other community groups (eg Dera Sacha Sauda), and at times with businesses. An example of community action was a mass planting weekend on September 20-21 2014, involving multiple groups and agencies, in which almost 8,000 native plants were planted at 4 different sites, largely by volunteers associated with the network in one way or another.

Groups working in the biodiversity and catchment care areas have started to develop a “biodiversity cluster” within the ENM network, a loose and informal association of groups formed with the intention to build greater momentum around biodiversity by sharing resources (knowledge, plants, equipment, Volunteers etc), through educational activities and through greater engagement with councils. At a recent meeting of the cluster, Alastair Cole of the NZ Landcare Trust advised that the Trust will set up a Manawatu working group and try to begin to develop citizen science capacity and capability in the Manawatu. Although it is very early days, there was considerable interest expressed at the meeting about the contribution a citizen science initiative could make to both environmental monitoring and education.

With regards to Horizons Regional Council, ENM and the biodiversity cluster are committed to continue working cooperatively with the Horizons’ Biodiversity Coordinator, currently held by Aaron Madden and other Horizons staff in the biodiversity space. The cluster is also committed to engage in and regular (two way) reporting to the Horizons Environment Committee. In the longer term the cluster would like to see the development of a Biodiversity Forum with the support of Horizons which would see ENM member groups and agencies work together and which would enable the development of an integrated – but flexible – vision and plan for the region.

Catchment care and biodiversity

Regarding water quality we strongly support the aims of the One Plan to minimise human sewage and other discharges to waterways.

Water Quality and Quantity research and monitoring: ENM supports increased research in areas such as the interaction between ground and surface water, periphyton science, lake and estuaries (Page 8 of summary and page 31 of supporting document). This is essential to ensure we have adequate understanding to better manage use of the water resource in our region, particularly with increasing demand from the agricultural sector.

Lake Horowhenua weed harvesting: ENM supports funding for this activity to improve water quality. There may well be an opportunity to generate funds for some of the operations. We suggest Horizons explores potential commercial uses for the harvested weed, including compost making. We note that there is a biosecurity risk associated with using the harvester in other lakes – the potential to spread weeds into lakes that are currently free of them. (p3 summary doc and p41 supporting docs)

Sustainable Land Use Initiative: The SLUI programme is hugely important to the goals of improved water quality and reducing sediment in the rivers downstream. ENM notes that ongoing funding from the central government Hill Country Erosion Fund could be cut. This is regrettable. We strongly support inflation adjustment to SLUI funding and the proposal to increase the funding by \$2 each year over the next 3 years to accelerate SLUI (p3 of summary and p35 of supporting docs)

ENM supports continued funding for other land management programmes such as the Whanganui Catchment Strategy (this is SLUI for the Whanganui catchment), p36 of supporting docs.

As a region, are we making the most of the opportunity to generate income for farmers and potentially HRC to fund other initiatives?

In relation to the 30 year infrastructure strategy (page 10 of summary) – ENM submits that SLUI is one of our best defences against climate change impacts and against sedimentation of our water ways (that lowers flood protection).

Manawatu River Leaders Accord: Manawatu River Accord funding is inflation adjusted, which we support. ENM notes that Clean-up Fund project funding from central government is coming to an end (page 42 of supporting docs) and the intention to revise the Accord's Action plan in 2015. We support Horizons efforts to get a further grant from central government. ENM also supports proposed funding for more fencing and fish passage projects, and community protection projects on priority waterways (page 43).

Flood protection: Under the flood protection section, it is stated that the only negative effects of flood protection works on the environment is temporary during construction, and that once they are completed it is all positive (page 49).

ENM notes that there are also long term negative effects caused by channelising and increasing the velocity of the river, something that should at least be acknowledged.

The legacy of flood protection on areas of the Manawatu catchment has resulted in long term ongoing downstream effects from some of the scheme works. An example of this is the dewatering of the Foxton Loop from the creation of the Whirokino Cut and the continued deposition of sediment into the Foxton Loop as a result of the operation of the Moutoa spillway, without any funding identified to remedy the effects on the Loop and Foxton.

We support continuation of the amenity enhancement fund for the flood protection schemes page 59.

Increased funding and labour in the living heritage area: (p71 of supporting document)

ENM strongly supports increased funding to employ an additional person in the community biodiversity area. This is to enable Horizons to meet the growing demand from community environmental initiatives, while keeping up with existing and essential work maintaining remnants and wetlands that have been brought into the Priority Sites programme. We note however that the extra funding will not bolster the top 100 wetlands and top 200 bush remnants programme that was cut back years ago (for current targets see p80 of supporting document). We are still many years away from bringing all of the top 100 and 200 sites into the programme, now set for 2028.

ENM is concerned that the biodiversity value of many of the priority sites not yet brought into the programme may well be declining over time, e.g. priority sites with significant infestations of pest plants that are not targeted under the Regional Pest Plant Management Strategy. Relatively minor pest plant issues can become serious in just a few years if weeds are not attended to and are allowed to seed and multiply.

Possum Control Operation: ENM supports continued maintenance of possum control over 1.14 million hectares once the initial Possum Control Operation is complete in 2016. (p75 supporting document).

Regional Pest Management Plan: ENM supports putting together a consolidated regional pest management plan (p75 supporting document).

We recommend that the regional council spends more money on biosecurity especially on pest plants as the weed problem is growing all the time. A big issue is agricultural pest plants, but equally serious is the spread of weeds such as Old Man's Beard in biodiversity areas, and in areas of community use and enjoyment.

Regional Leadership and Governance:

Environmental education: ENM supports continued work with enviro schools and the aim to increase participation p87,88.

Air quality monitoring: ENM supports the inclusion of a small budget for public education around air quality p91

Iwi and hapu: ENM supports the intention to build stronger relationships with hapū and iwi p 107

Regional growth and prosperity (and agribusiness): ENM notes that the Central New Zealand Agribusiness Strategy is to be completed June 2015 – a plan that aims to take opportunities identified from the Regional Growth study and to put them into practice “within environmental limits”. ENM is concerned to read in the draft LTP that collectively local councils “see significant advantages in building on our agribusiness base and ***aim to double the region’s agribusiness exports by 2025.***” (Page 111, italics and bold added)

ENM is concerned about what local councils define as ‘agribusiness’. If it refers to all agribusiness, including the agricultural support industry (machinery, engineering, distribution, consultancy, value added processing, contracting etc), ENM would be supportive of this aim. However, aiming for massive increases to primary production (more of the same) over a relatively short time frame is another matter that ENM would strongly oppose. What is the proposed process to try and entice high value (or value added) enterprise rather than low value, high volume production increases that degrade our regions environment?

We need to discourage intensive land use on land that is unsuitable and to make sure that primary production becomes ‘tailored’ to the types of soils and landscapes our region has to offer – making sure we utilise our good classes of land well (cropping, horticulture, dairying). There is also potential to increase high value crops/products in the region that also support biodiversity outcomes (eg manuka or kanuka honey production).

If we were to do this tailoring we may be able to enhance primary production within the region without effects, but we would need to do this at an appropriate pace and with appropriate monitoring. 2025 is much too soon and not a smart target when considering that we are spending millions regionally trying to clean up our past environmental mistakes.

Transport:

Passenger Transport:

We note the following time frame to introduce or increase the following services over the first three years of the plan (see page 124 of supporting docs)

Starting Year 1 (2015-16): Introduce new electronic ticketing system for all buses; a commuter van service for Dannevirke

Starting Year 2 (2016-17): Introduce late night bus services in Palmerston North; a daily service PN to Ashhurst (currently just a twice-weekly shoppers’ service); a more frequent Feilding to PN bus service; a Wanganui to Palmerston North daily commuter service.

Starting Year 3 (2017-18): Increase frequency for the Palmerston North urban bus service; introduce a Levin to Waikanae daily commuter service.

ENM supports funding to enhance the current Palmerston North bus route structure (increased frequency, late night services).

We support enhancements to the PN to Ashhurst buses. We suggest that Horizons runs a commuter service but also trials additional trips though the day.

We support enhancements of services between Feilding and PN bus, and Wanganui and Palmerston North.

We recommend funding for bike racks on selected bus routes be added into the LTP.

We note that other potential additions to services listed in the Regional Public Transport Plan have been left out of the draft LTP, at least for the first three years. We submit that enhancements to Summerhill services are definitely needed as under the current system services are reduced to just 7 buses per day outside of Massey Semester terms. Funding for services to Longburn and Linton, and direct services to Palmerston North Hospital and Palmerston North Airport are also important and should be included in the LTP.

Transport Policy: ENM notes the proposed change to the policy that currently requires a transport service to attract NZTA subsidy before it will be funded by Horizons (p15 of summary). We support the proposal that if a community wants a service and is prepared to fund it 100%, Horizons will run it.

Road Safety Education Programme:

We note that Horizons is considering exiting this activity after 2015-16 in response to reducing levels of funding from NZTA (initially from current 66% of cost down to 53% in year 1 of LTP).

ENM recommends that Horizons continues to fund the road safety programme. Road safety is an on-going issue that is likely to worsen with the increasing numbers of trucks on the region's roads. Cyclists are particularly vulnerable when sharing the road with heavy vehicles. We recommend that the Community Road Safety Education activity includes awareness training for truck and bus drivers around cyclists.

Closing:

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. We are keen to continue working with Horizons and appreciate the invitation to participate in local decision-making.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alastair Cole'.

Alastair Cole
Chair
Environment Network Manawatu Inc