

Memo re: Whangamarino Wetland

For CSG Focus Day 26 February 2016

Information for discussion regarding regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to freshwater in Whangamarino Wetland and wetlands generally

Ideas for fine-tuning the CSG policy mix for Whangamarino

- Short term outcomes to be achieved in the life of the Plan Change

Objectives could include a specific Whangamarino outcome that CSG wishes to see achieved in the next 10-15 years, and be written as narrative objective rather than trying to set numerical limits.

An example would be that the total area of low nutrient peat bog is not reduced, and understanding of the link between contaminants, flooding, and flood management need to be improved through research.

- Non regulatory methods

Methods could direct WRC (with timeframes) to:

- Implement a Lake Waikare and Whangamarino wetland catchment management plan in partnership with others, including specific timeframes and direction for reporting and review
- Ensure the Regional Plan review identifies and protects aspects outside the scope of Plan Change 1 such as the biodiversity-related significant values of wetlands such as Whangamarino and include priority weed control and pest fish control, restoration of indigenous wetland vegetation, and take steps to mitigate sediment accumulating in the wetland.

- Rules

Add to the rule framework for land around Whangamarino.

- Require landowners to meet a particular timeframe or a particular standard for mitigation actions via the controlled activity consent for a tailored property plan (effectively this is equivalent to mapping this catchment as a priority area).
- Neighbouring landowners (land adjacent to wetland) to complete fencing of wetland from stock access with suitable buffer to protect seasonally wet margins
- Require shorter timeframe on completion of stock exclusion from all waterways, including high-risk intermittent streams, since it is the high flows that mobilise sediment and cause greatest threat to sensitive wetland ecosystems.
- Larger setbacks between cropping and waterways, and include conservation tillage practices on slopes (or even create a rule for maximum slope that may be cultivated)

- Implementation

- Mapped as priority catchment
- Focus on prevention and mitigation of sediment and P losses to waterways.

- Priority for farmland bordering peat bog
- Particular attention and priority to erosion and sediment transfers into wetland from farmland, by implementing stock exclusion from gullies, sediment detention on roads/races/drains. Note: work needed to identify and target main sediment sources in catchment, to prioritise mitigations.

Other projects outside Plan Change 1 that will assist in improving the health of Whangamarino

- WRC Shallow Lakes Restoration Strategy
- Department of Conservation Arawai Kakariki wetland restoration programme
- Waikato Regional Plan review will include:
 - a process for lake level setting limits
 - biodiversity-related policies and methods

WRC Integrated Catchment Management Directorate (ICM) is undertaking a non statutory Catchment Management Plan for Lake Waikare and Whangamarino wetland. It is not required by RMA legislation and does not contain rules. The Catchment Management Plan will be produced by 2017 with key stakeholders with support from the Waikato District Lakes and Freshwater Wetlands Memorandum of Agreement (signatories are WRC, Waikato District Council, Waikato-Tainui, Department of Conservation and Fish and Game). The Healthy Rivers Plan should require this to be achieved, with an additional timeline for achievements to be reported. Priority given to identify significant wetland values. CMP could be an opportunity to showcase BMP for land use practices.

- Raise the profile and promote the significance of Whangamarino wetland. The NPS-FM requires councils to protect the significant values of wetlands, so build on the partnership between WRC and DoC (and other groups) to promote, protect, restore.
- An investment, in partnership with DoC, which may include suitable visitor facilities and boardwalk (for example, off Island Block Rd), would be a great idea. There are no examples of public walkways and interpretation facilities in the Waikato that lead visitors into our high value peat bog areas.
- Other technical work that will be used for the Catchment Management Plan
 - The Waikato and Waipa Restoration Strategy will produce a prioritised list of interventions to improve water quality and biodiversity for the Lower Waikato and for Lake Waikare (WRA, WRC and Dairy NZ). This technical work will feed into the Catchment Management Plan and is set for completion in 2017.
 - WRC is undertaking refinement of water quality and biodiversity priority areas within the Lower Waikato in 2015/16 financial year.
- WRC is investigating potential options to reduce sediment in and around the Lake Waikare Northern Outlet Control Gate (NOCG) and the Pungarehu Canal under the Lake Waikare NOCG Section 128 consent review in 2016. This will produce a series

of physical works in and around the gate. WRC has allocated \$5.5 million in the Long Term Plan to the design, consenting and construction of the physical works. The CMP will record and take note of the sediment and water quality reduction that these physical works will contribute.

The CMP and supporting technical work support the non statutory plan to improve the health of the streams, land, lake and wetland, including gathering additional monitoring information and undertaking modelling of Lake Waikare and its contributing catchment.

Other methods in Waikato Regional Plan for wetlands

Waikato Regional Council, working with others, will:

- Through a regional “Waikato Wetlands Protection and Restoration Strategy (WPRS)” the significant values of natural wetlands should be identified and then work towards implementing objectives and limits to protect these (including use of wetland FMUs where appropriate), for the next plan change. The strategy should be completed by 2018 (?). One of the goals of the WPRS would be prioritisation for funding to support landowners to fence off and control weeds in functional wetlands.
 - Note that even wetlands that have lost many of their natural values (e.g. indigenous wetland vegetation) still have important functional values that may be beneficial for mitigating contaminants from land.
 - WPRS should provide tools for mapping wetland extent (including seepages) that can be used in property plans to prioritise fencing and restoration.
 - WPRS should develop guidelines for BMP for setbacks and weed control in wetlands at property scale.
 - A toolkit for landowners.
 - Constructed wetland areas should be considered separately from natural wetlands so would not be included in the scope of the WPRS (“protect and restore”, not “construct for mitigation”), although the area of overlap needs to be recognised.
 - Support research that addresses the management needs of wetlands, including development of techniques to monitor ecological change and predicting the evolution of wetland characteristics under the pressure of present uses.
 - Seek better knowledge and understanding of the costs and benefits of changes to wetland ecosystems to support future decision making.
 - Analyse and document the linkages between wetlands and the opportunities to improve people’s livelihoods. This would entail social science focussed research.
 - Bring together results of research already completed (e.g. Arawai kakariki, MBIE wetland restoration programme).
- Provide significant additional support and resourcing for the protection and restoration of wetlands.
- identify areas at the property scale that support an existing natural wetland ecosystem and areas suitable to be restored back to supporting a natural wetland ecosystem when developing a property management plan, and work with industry to do so through an industry assurance scheme process.
- Identify areas at the property scale suitable to be developed into a constructed wetland when developing a property management plan, and work with industry to do so through an industry assurance scheme process.
- A proposed constructed wetland that replaces or modifies an existing natural wetland would need to be subject to resource consent, with damage to significant wetlands being avoided.

- Assess and determine effective and efficient placement of constructed wetlands at a sub-catchment scale to improve water quality.