

From eyesore to asset – Care Groups review

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Executive summary

This review was carried out to document the value and contribution of Waikato Care Groups, the challenges they face and their potential to address regional issues in the future. Care Groups are community groups taking action locally to enhance natural resources such as water, soil, biodiversity and coastlines. (Note, however, that beachcare groups were outside the scope of this review.)

Information sources reviewed for this study included existing documents and databases held by the the Waikato Regional Council (formerly Environment Waikato), and the proposed Regional Policy Statement (as an indication of significant regional issues). In addition, data was drawn from a questionnaire developed by the Waikato Biodiversity Forum, and from twelve interviews carried out with a sample of Waikato Care Groups. In interpreting the results, comparison was made to an earlier (1995) review of Care Groups. Emerging themes were presented at a Care Groups' networking day for feedback.

Care Groups work across a full range of habitat types, including forest, riparian, wetland and lake sites. Common activities undertaken are planting, animal and pest control, fencing for livestock exclusion and encouraging the legal protection of habitat through covenants. Groups also discuss and address complex issues in working landscapes such as nutrient losses, peat soil and lake management and farm practices impacting on the resources under their care. They help with species recovery, raise awareness of historic heritage, enhance public access and create community assets (walkways, picnic areas, for example).

In addition to on-the-ground action, Care Groups undertake a range of education activities. Group members are vigilant in monitoring for pest incursions, breaches of fencelines or non-compliance with rules. They take a cooperative approach to encouraging better environmental practices. This helps to build a stronger sense of community, and provides opportunities for dialogue where perspectives differ. Groups also improve communication between agencies and communities. This creates the potential for new issues to be introduced and discussed, with reference to local conditions.

Some sites where Care Groups work are high priorities for agencies, and some are lower priorities.

The voluntary input of twelve groups was estimated. Over one year (1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010), a total of 13,070

unpaid hours were worked by 274 volunteers in these twelve groups. Calculated at the minimum wage of \$13/hr, this represents around \$170,000 worth of voluntary input by these twelve groups. In one year, the twelve groups:

- planted 22,011 plants
- erected 4,450 m of fencing
- carried out animal pest control over 9,132 ha
- carried out plant pest control over 146 ha.

These twelve groups were a sample of the 42 groups listed as Care Groups with the Waikato Regional Council, and a sub-sample of the 170 groups listed with the Waikato Biodiversity Forum.

Care Groups mobilise a wide range of funding and support. Mostly, they have been able to access the project funding they require and cover their out-of-pocket administration expenses.

Volunteers are often available for planting days, filling bait stations and building structures. However, some groups are finding it difficult to maintain enough volunteers on an ongoing basis. They find it particularly hard to resource ongoing maintenance work (such as weed control in plantings), and to cover the many hours spent in administration and coordination tasks. Further assistance from Waikato Regional Council or other supporters could be usefully directed at alleviating these constraints.

Groups appreciate the material assistance, facilitation and technical advice they do receive from the Waikato Regional Council and other agencies, and also the relationship that is built up over time. They gain a lot from the networking opportunities provided for Care Groups to interact. They look to the Waikato Regional Council to raise new issues with the group, and to put in place effective regulation and enforcement, so that their work is not negated by other practices and trends.

There is potential for Care Groups to address many of the issues highlighted in the proposed Regional Policy Statement (RPS), and to play a supportive role in the implementation of any future rules around livestock exclusion or nutrient inputs. For some issues, this would require proactive input from the Waikato Regional Council or other agencies to raise the concern and present technical information about it, and to facilitate the group in identifying practical ways to address that issue in their locality.

It is recommended that the Waikato Regional Council combine a responsive approach to groups' initiatives with a proactive approach to facilitating community engagement on issues and habitats of regional significance.

Continued collaboration with other agencies and NGOs is important in order to effectively coordinate these efforts.

1 Introduction

Care Groups are voluntary community groups taking action locally to enhance natural resources (water, soil, biodiversity and coastlines). Some use the name streamcare, landcare or lakecare and coastal groups may be called beachcare or harbourcare. (These names are also often written as single words, such as beachcare). The Waikato Regional Council, formerly Environment Waikato has worked with Care Groups since the 1990s, providing facilitation and practical support.

After almost two decades of Care Group support, the Waikato Regional Council has decided to conduct a review of the achievements of Care Groups and the appropriateness of current support. This will inform decisions about ongoing work with these groups. It was decided that beachcare groups would not fall within the scope of this review.

There are 42 Care Groups listed with the Waikato Regional Council (see Appendix 1). Of these, 34 are also on the Waikato Biodiversity Forum database, which lists over 220 projects undertaken by 170 groups across the region. Basic information about these groups is updated by the Forum coordinator, Moira Cursey, and transferred to a GIS system at the Waikato Regional Council.

The brief for this review was to:

- summarise basic information on the Care Groups listed with the Waikato Regional Council
- conduct in-depth interviews with around 25 per cent of those groups to find out about activity, achievements and benefits, challenges, effective support and future potential
- analyse the results, particularly in light of the objectives and policies in the proposed RPS, adopted in August 2010.

2 How the review was done

Existing information sources were reviewed, including:

- information held on the GIS system and the updated database held by the Waikato Biodiversity Forum coordinator. This information includes group name, location and contact details, project location, stage, area/size, aim, habitat type, activities, parties involved, funding sources, start date and projected duration
- websites and newsletters available on the internet relevant to Care Groups' activity
- the proposed RPS (scanned for policy that could be relevant to this review)
- an earlier study of landcare groups in the Waikato region¹.

It became apparent that within a similar time period to this project, the Waikato Biodiversity Forum was piloting a questionnaire aimed at gathering information on the value of community biodiversity groups' work over a 12 month period (see Appendix 2). The questionnaire asked about the groups' activities, volunteer numbers and hours, plant numbers and area, metres of fencing, animal pest control hours and area covered, pest types targetted, residual trap catch, weeding days, area weeded and target species, challenges and further training needs.

After consulting with the coordinator and gaining permission from the Care Groups who had filled in that questionnaire, their information was incorporated into the present study. Information from the Waikato Biodiversity Forum questionnaire was available for eight groups on the Waikato Regional Council Care Group list.

In addition, a question schedule was prepared to gather more in-depth information during interviews with one representative from each of twelve groups (see Appendix 3 for the question schedule). Groups were selected in consultation with the coordinator of Care Groups at the Waikato Regional Council. The aim in this selection process was to choose groups with a track record of action and of interaction with the Waikato Regional Council, and to include a land/water focus (as the forum sample was expected to adequately represent those with a biodiversity focus). The twelve groups interviewed included six who had completed the Waikato Biodiversity Forum questionnaire, four other groups from the Waikato Regional Council list who were then asked to complete the questionnaire, and two other groups who were interviewed but did not fill out the questionnaire. This

was because initial conversations with them indicated their groups were in an inactive phase during the past twelve months.

Nine interviews were conducted by telephone, one by skype and one in person. One person was unable to make time for a phone interview but answered questions by email. The interviews were conducted with the listed contact person for the group, except in one case where it was referred to another member with greater knowledge of the group’s history. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. Handwritten notes of responses were taken.

This information was then ‘mind-mapped’ to identify themes according to the research focus:

- beginnings
- activity and achievements
- benefits to the environment and the community
- support
- relationship with the Waikato Regional Council
- challenges
- future potential (in relation to RPS issues).

A Care Groups’ networking day fell during this phase of analysis, and the opportunity was taken to present emerging themes at that day and to seek further feedback. People attending the day included some of those interviewed plus others. A brief summary of results was presented and then small groups were asked to discuss what they would emphasise. Individuals were given sticky notes to write down messages they wanted to see highlighted as part of the review.

Information from all of these sources was incorporated into this report. Interviewees were given the opportunity to review a draft of the document and provide feedback.

3 Results

3.1 Snapshot of Waikato Care Groups (from database held by the Waikato Regional Council)

The following information draws data from the Waikato Regional Council GIS system. Information was accessed for groups which are listed with the Waikato Regional Council as Care Groups. Eight groups on the Waikato Regional Council’s list of 42 Care Groups are not on the GIS system, so their information is not included here. This means that the information in this section may be somewhat skewed towards groups with a biodiversity focus, rather than representing all of the groups with a land/water focus. Having said this, many groups on the biodiversity database were focused on stream, wetland and lake habitats (see Table 1).

Location and area

The location of the groups listed with the Waikato Regional Council as Care Groups, and also appearing on the Waikato Biodiversity Forum database is shown on the map in Figure 1. Their reported combined project area is almost 140,000 ha of the region. (This includes some catchment areas where, for example, a harbourcare group is focused across a whole catchment).

Habitat types

The table below shows the habitat types where groups were working. Most groups mentioned more than one habitat type (see far right column); however some groups focused on a single habitat type (middle column). All groups working on lake habitats said that they also worked on wetland habitats.

Table 1 Habitat type for projects of 34 Care Groups in the database (compiled by the Waikato Biodiversity Forum).

Habitat type	Numbers of groups focused solely on this habitat type	Number of groups working with this habitat type, among others
Forest	8	16
Stream	5	15
Coast	2	12
Wetland	1	17
Lake	0	4

Activity

The main activities listed for Care Groups in the database are shown below in Table 2. Most groups reported multiple activities.

Table 2 Activities of 34 Care Groups in the database.

Activity	Number of groups undertaking this activity (most groups mentioned more than one)
Planting	29
Pest animal control	25
Weed control	24
Fencing	18
Legal protection (covenants)	6
Walkways	2
Silt traps (for sediment/nutrient control)	2
Advocacy/education	2
Kiwi recovery work	1
Seed collection	1
Mangrove removal	1



Figure 1 Map of Care Groups in the Waikato region.

Source: Waikato Regional Council. Topographical maps sourced from Land Information New Zealand. CROWN COPYRIGHT RESERVED. The names of the groups with their corresponding numbers are in Appendix 1.

Aims

Groups' listed aims were varied. They are shown in Table 3 below, grouped into themes.

Table 3 Aims of 34 Care Groups in the database compiled by the Waikato Biodiversity Forum.

Type of aim	Number of groups listing this aim	Examples – excerpts from groups' aims as listed on the database (most groups had multiple aims)
Improve water quality, enhance riparian management through stock exclusion and planting.	14	Reduce sediment and nutrients in stream. Protection of water quality of river. Improve the quality of water entering the harbour. Stream protection from cattle. Plant the harbour and streams of the catchment. Plant around the lake to enhance vegetation. Improve riparian habitat.
Conserve natural resources, enhance environmental values, biodiversity/wildlife/ecology, ecosystem restoration.	14	Ecological restoration of the mountain. Restore the estuary. Ecosystem restoration of coastal forest. Promote conservation of natural resources in the area. Create a wildlife haven for original inhabitants. Continue to restore the ecosystem on the peninsula. Restore the lake into a healthy wetland environment.
Control or eradicate pests (plant and animal).	9	Creation of a pest-free zone. Elimination of pests and woolly nightshade. Undertaking predator control.
Species or rare habitat recovery or protection.	9	Protect and reverse decline of kiwi. Halt decline of fern bird and protect all marsh bird populations. Translocation of endangered species. Protect magnificent native bushland including the best stand of rata on the peninsula. Enhance birds and bats.
Access, recreation and walkways, aesthetics.	9	Provide access to canyon. Provide recreation/walking area. Maintain public access to publicly owned land. Look after and maintain track. Create aesthetic values.
Community involvement/strengthening community/community input.	5	Comprehensive community involvement in ecosystem restoration. Raise community awareness of the lake to encourage participation in its use and clean-up. Develop a greater sense of community. Account for residents' concerns, such as views and access.
Restore/replant vegetation or maintain plantings.	4	Restore the land through planting native vegetation. Maintain native plantings at the DOC camping ground.
Communication, education and advice.	4	Media. Advise farmers. Mentor other groups.
Erosion control, soil conservation.	4	Revegetation for soil conservation purposes. Replanting after severe flood and erosion protection.
Remnant bush protection.	2	Protect remnant bush. Restore lowland bush.

In addition to these aims, there was one mention each of the following:

- adopt sustainable land management practices
- stop/reverse spread of mangroves
- protect social and cultural heritage values
- reduce flooding
- run a nursery.

Funding sources

The main funding sources listed on the groups' database compiled by the Waikato Biodiversity Forum can be seen in Table 4 below.

Table 4 Funding sources of 34 Care Groups in the database.

Funding source	Number of groups listed as accessing this source
Waikato Regional Council	21
DOC – including the Waikato Community Conservation Fund (one group) and biodiversity condition or advice fund (four groups)	17
District council (or community board) – Waipa, Waikato, south Waikato, Thames-Coromandel	8
Resident, landowner or private donations	7
Lotteries or gaming trusts	6
None/self-funded/membership only	5
NZ Landcare Trust	3
TransPower	3
Project Crimson	3
Fundraising	3
South Waikato Environmental Initiatives Fund	2
Trust Waikato	2
Forest and Bird	2
QEII Trust	2

Other trusts or grant organisations mentioned once were BNZ Save the Kiwi, BOC, Where There's Water, Valder Trust, E.B. Firth Trust, Jim Say Foundation, WWF, Mazda Foundation, Perry Foundation, SMF, Thames Coast Protection Society, Sir John Logan Campbell Estate, Fish and Game.

Parties involved

Landowners were the most commonly mentioned party associated with Care Groups (see Table 5 below). A range of agencies and non-government organisations were also involved.

Table 5 Parties involved with Care Groups.

Party involved	Number of groups mentioning this party
Landowners	26
Waikato Regional Council	12
DOC	12
Residents/community/members/bach owners	10
Schools	10
Iwi/ hapu	7
District councils	6
Volunteers	6
Recreational users/duckshooters/Fish and Game	4
Forest and Bird/conservationists	3
Overseas students/visitors	3
Employees/subsidised labour/conservation corps	3

Others mentioned once were Kiwanis, cubs, business, corporate sponsors, Whaingaroa Environment Centre, NZ Landcare Trust, Ratepayers' Association, Auckland Regional Council, HELP and Manukau Institute of Technology.

Project duration

Nearly all of the groups had long timeframes for their work. Most listed their projects as ongoing, in perpetuity, continuing indefinitely, or lasting 10+ years. Two groups said they would continue until the fencing of their rivers was completed. One group was unsure how long it would continue.

3.2 Value of community group work (from questionnaire)

Ten of the groups interviewed also filled out the Waikato Biodiversity Forum questionnaire. Two other questionnaires were available from groups that were not selected for interviewing but were on the Waikato Regional Council list of Care Groups.

From the twelve questionnaires, information was gained about the groups' principal activities and the work completed in a one year time period.

The groups were located in the following districts: Waipa (five), Waikato (four), Thames-Coromandel (two), Franklin – now Waikato (one), Hauraki (one). (One project crossed over two districts).

Type of activity

Main activities reported by the groups are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Main activities identified by twelve groups.

Activity	Number of groups involved with this (n=12)
Most groups had multiple activities	
Planting	9
Pest plant control	9
Pest animal control	8
Fencing	5

Other activities include silt trap installation and management, testing water and run-off, creating and mowing walkways, heritage feature identification and interpretation.

Most groups also carried out activities around public education, grant applications/fundraising and sustaining the group. Groups also mentioned hosting overseas students and community building.

Volunteer input

Across the twelve groups, 274 volunteers were involved. The number of hours worked per volunteer varied. A total of 13,070 volunteer hours were worked by these twelve groups in the year from 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010. Even if calculated at the minimum wage of \$13/hr, this represents around \$170,000 worth of voluntary input by these twelve groups.

Work completed in a one year period

In the year from 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010, the 12 groups did the following:

- planted 22,011 plants
- erected 4,450 m of fencing
- carried out animal pest control over 9,132 ha
- carried out plant pest control over 146 ha.

In addition, groups carried out many extension and education activities as well as ongoing work to sustain the group and coordinate its activity. The break-down of time spent on these tasks was not reported, so a value for this work cannot be estimated, but is expected to be significant.

Challenges

Four of the twelve groups said they had no problems or challenges.

One group said funding was a challenge and another said it was difficult to get funding for labour costs. The other ten groups had not had trouble with funding.

Technical advice was mostly readily available, although two groups with a focus on planting, weeding and walkways said they would like more advice or training on animal pest control.

Half the groups said they did not have enough volunteers, or would like more volunteers to help. In addition to getting new members involved, one group was having trouble finding information on which to base a robust risk management plan for volunteer safety.

Other challenges and training needs were discussed in the interviews (see section 3.3.6 below).

3.3 Group achievements, development, potential and support (from the interviews)

3.3.1 Beginnings

People were asked what prompted their group's formation. In general, there were three themes in the responses. The most commonly mentioned reason was where there was an issue or problem they wanted to address.

"The group started because farmers were upset as the stream was blocked by willows, and flooding...initially, four farmers on opposite sides of the stream were involved..."

"The lake was a bloody mess. Kids were rolling tyres into it, people were dumping rubbish in the water and it was smothered with willows."

"People said they were killing possums, but there were still lots of possums around... it was clear it was an issue that really needed a coordinated approach."

"Two people 'found' the reserve and saw the weeds overrunning it. So they got their friends together and decided to do something about it."

"The group started in response to an aerial 1080 drop."

The second, (but related) theme was when groups saw an opportunity to create a community asset.

“People wanted walkways, and we had the river there right near town, so we got together and we got community support and that’s how it started.”

The third theme was when groups formed following a high-profile public tree-planting event. Three groups traced their origins to this sort of event.

“It was International Year of the Volunteer, and a local resident wanted to set up a group in relation to that. It didn’t formally happen until the year after, which coincided nicely with DOC doing planting work along our local stream. So we had a big planting day, and went from there.”

3.3.2 Activity and achievements

Activity and achievements included tangible, on-the-ground action as well as information, education and promotion of environmental care.

On-the-ground action

Groups worked on land under various types of ownership and management, including public (managed by DOC, district councils or schools), private (farms or businesses) and covenanted lands. Some sites were considered high priority sites by agencies, others were not. One group was not focused on a particular site, but offered voluntary help on private or public land with a ‘mobile service’ focused on riparian planting and maintenance.

Planting and weed control

Groups had undertaken, with the support of agencies, substantial weed clearing and tree planting, as well as follow-up maintenance of planted areas. One lakecare group had planted 15,000 trees, and another had planted a 7.5 ha area. People reported public planting days attracting 40-200 people (but only four when it rained).

Several groups grew native plants or supported their local school to do so, while others raised funds to buy or subsidise trees. One group offered farmers a \$1 subsidy on native plants, another group offered landholders free trees, and many groups had helped landowners link up with funding sources like Clean Streams.

A streamcare group had worked with the Waikato Regional Council to clear 28 km of willow that was blocking a stream. This was followed up by appropriate riparian fencing and encouragement of landowners to plant the margins with natives.

Several groups worked progressively to clear and then keep weeds down with regular working bees. Committed individuals and families had put in thousands of hours clearing willows, privet, Convolvulus, blackberry, woolly nightshade, Tradescantia and other weeds. Several groups reported that after years of doing so, they were now on top of the major issues and in maintenance mode, as their own plantings were maturing and shading out the weeds. However, other groups were still struggling with weeds even in ten year-old plantings, with shade tolerant weeds and edge-habitat weeds presenting an ongoing problem.

Pest animal control

Eight of the twelve groups did some animal pest control, even those with a principle focus on planting and weed control. Amongst the groups interviewed, there was a common focus on rats and mustelids, as well as possum control. Several groups had new traps from DOC which could trap both rats and mustelids. There were mixed results, with some people saying they had not caught large numbers, but one report of over 100 stoats trapped in the first year of trapping, and 30 per year in subsequent years.

Two of the groups had a principle focus on animal pest control over larger areas (totalling 6,000 ha). Both were using bait stations and controlling possums as well as rats. One of these groups had calculated that their voluntary work allowed pest control to be carried out at 20 per cent of the cost of using a contractor to do the same job. This group was focused on developing robust monitoring methods to demonstrate the efficacy of their work.

Recreation, access and amenity

Recreational and access facilities were the principle focus of one group, and also featured strongly among the activities of all the lakecare groups. Examples included mown walkways, picnic tables and barbecues, seating at viewing points, carpark improvements, and bridges. Usually this was done through funding from a district council or DOC, but one group had funded walkway development independently and another group had raised money to purchase land for a car park. Individuals within groups with walkways regularly put in many hours mowing (typically 15-20 hrs/month). Some received in-kind fuel from their district council, others did not. Weed control along walkways and access roads was another regular task.

Lake management

Lakecare groups had worked on input drains to get wetland infiltration areas or silt traps in place and then maintained, in an effort to try and improve lake water quality. Some private landowners had given land for silt traps and wetland filters; in other cases they had encouraged their district council to install them. Up to eight silt traps were in place around one lake, with one extensive system designed not only to trap sediment but also to retain moisture in the peat surrounding the lake. At one lake outlet a pest fish exclusion structure had been installed to prevent koi carp invasion.

“When the area was drained for dairying, the depth of water in the lake dropped. Back in the 1960s it was four metres deep and by 1998 it was down to one metre deep. Mostly just from sand coming in when the drains were dug, but also the peat shrunk a bit...so we knew we had to stop the sediment going in. In 1999 we put silt traps in, and they get emptied every six months, and a proper weir was built too, a bit after that. We now have silt traps on all the inlets and the area around the silt trap planted out in vegetation is trapping the fines and preventing P [phosphorus] going into the lake.”

Some landowners around lakes were engaged in nutrient management planning or whole farm planning to protect the lake, and said that this issue was raised in committees where other farmers or sharemilkers were present.

“DOC paid to have a plan put together for us, and we are now putting on less P fertiliser – we’ll save a lot of money there. And our N has dropped down from 180 to 50 units a year, even though we have maintained our pasture production of 13.5 tonnes a year.”

Fencing for stock exclusion

Several groups encouraged fencing to exclude stock from waterways and bush areas. One group had used their funds to pay for fencing off a walkway by a river, while another had physically helped to put up fences. This person noted that farmers had then gone on to fence further areas on their own.

Convenanting and land acquisition

Farmers in several sites had been encouraged to covenant bush remnants or riparian areas – five of the twelve groups interviewed said areas had been covenanted. Some groups offered to help plant and weed covenanted areas and gave landowners advice on under-planting in covenant areas. One group had raised money for the purchase of land to expand a reserve area; others had encouraged their district council to acquire lands adjoining existing reserves.

Monitoring

Some monitoring activity was undertaken by groups doing large areas of animal pest control, including bird counts, rat tracking tunnels, and wax tags. They also accessed Residual Trap Catch data from agencies working in their area. One group had recently received training in bat monitoring.

Groups also engaged in research and trials. One group had conducted trials on weed control methods, while another is experimenting with simpler and cheaper ways to monitor rat and possum numbers.

Education, promotion and liaison activity

Education activities undertaken were many and varied. They included field days, open days, demonstration days, seminars on riparian management, stalls at local markets, art awards to feature the local landscape, hosting public evening meetings with speakers or giving presentations at other groups’ meetings, newsletters and articles in the local paper, websites, brochures, noticeboards/signage and trips within the catchment.

“Our best activity was a trip up into the source of the stream, with a local forestry man, and another trip up the stream in a boat, from the bottom. And we also went to see dairy conversions happening, so people knew more about the catchment.”

“I have put photos in the local paper and written about unfenced bush stands, to try and highlight the effects of stock.”

“We won a prize which was some time from NIWA scientists, so we organised a local day in conjunction with the local dairy discussion group, the regional council and the NZ Landcare Trust, and we got 70 people along.”

One group had made a promotional DVD and was in the process of creating a podcast of a guided walk to encourage visitors to download it and bring it with them on their walk.

Many had visited other Care Groups or hosted networking days.

Submissions and consultation

Several groups had made submissions on policy matters or had input into local reserve management plans.

“When the plan came out, there was nothing in it for community groups, but we submitted on that and they retained sixty or seventy thousand for community projects.”

One had been consulted as part of a consent process and groups had also carried out their own local consultation, sometimes quite intensively, as part of developing facilities. Time was also given to building relationships with local Maori.

“There is a huge amount of consultation required – with the Waikato Regional Council, with Historic Places Trust, with the territorial authority, with neighbours, the community, DOC. We are constantly having conversations to move things along. Nobody pays you anything for it, but it’s a reality for a robust community group.”

“We have an important emphasis on Maori values and tikanga relating to the site, and have made it a priority to keep a relationship with the local marae. We don’t want it to be just lip service.”

Vigilance

Care groups also took a ‘vigilance’ role in spotting issues which could be detrimental to the local natural resources. This included monitoring fences and alerting agencies to tree-falls, or reporting weed problems in sites under agencies’ management. Sometimes agencies referred public enquiries to group members for a local response, or alerted groups to issues they might address, such as invasive weeds appearing in their area.

“Ownership – it’s so important for long-term sustainability of management. If you can get involvement, then you have eyes and ears there.”

Meetings, administration and financial management

Group meetings varied in frequency from regular monthly meetings to once or twice a year, or even none – only meeting at working days. Larger groups also described the amount of behind-the-scenes work that was done in terms of administration, coordination and liaising with contractors or (for two groups) supervising employees. The constant cycle of funding applications and reporting was common to nearly all groups. There were two groups which did not handle finances, being able to function by accessing in-kind support from a district council or an umbrella conservation group.

3.3.3 Benefits to the environment and the community

Groups generally had not quantified environmental outcomes, but they had made observations and taken photos. Groups focusing on animal pest control did monitor their effectiveness. Two groups also kept track of water quality monitoring data for their stream, publishing

it in newsletters, and some lakecare groups were aware of their lake condition ranking.

Tangible environmental benefits

Groups spoke of the transformation of their local environment as a result of their work.

“People are seeing the difference now... seeing the park where there was nothing – seeing trees growing, the stream cleaned up, seeing fish turning up, birds turning up, seeing the water clear and the stony bottom...”

“In eight years it went from an eyesore to an asset. The lake has gone from a muddy, pugged mess with willows everywhere to a place you would want to go for a picnic, with a barbecue table, viewing areas off the walkway with seats to look over the lake. The 25 metres around the lake have been retired from dairy stock and now there is a walkway all the way round.”

Specific environmental benefits which people identified as arising from their activity included:

- successful tree plantings with native trees
- invasive weeds and animal pests brought under control, including in some key ecological sites
- biodiversity gains: bush regeneration, more birds and fish sighted, reintroduction of rare Waikato species like cane rush and mudfish
- stock exclusion, better riparian condition, vegetated stream banks
- cleaner water
- new covenants
- heritage features highlighted
- flooding problems reduced
- less rubbish.

Success with plantings and biodiversity gains

Many groups were principally focused on planting new areas, and defined their success by the growth of their plantings.

“The plantings would not have happened if the group didn’t make them happen. We have returned those swampy areas to native plantings, where before there were cows grazing right to the edge.”

“The photos show the growth of the trees – people are blown away that the seedlings that were 60 centimetres tall at planting are now four or five metres high.”

Groups emphasised that plantings were of native species, and several mentioned that they made an effort to eco-source trees.

Six of the twelve groups said they had seen a noticeable increase in bird life, and one group was doing regular bird monitoring.

“Our bird count graphs show the numbers tracking up for tui, kereru and grey warbler.”

Another group was looking forward to restoring species that had been lost from the area.

“We have enough area under rat control now to be eligible for robin reintroduction, and we are on the waiting list for kokako.”

Groups were pleased that areas of native habitat were now protected, and weeds under control.

“We have been encouraging people to fence remnants, and there are several new covenants now in the area...so there is protection of some under-represented habitat types such as swamp maire and lowland kahikatea.”

“Finally we are getting on top of it and the time we are spending on weed control has gone down now from 360 hrs/yr to only 60.”

Stock exclusion and water quality gains

People working on livestock exclusion spoke of the benefits of not allowing areas near waterways to be pugged. They were aware that riparian management brought water quality improvements.

“With riparian management, there will have been some water quality benefits. Maybe they are small improvements, but if everybody did it, it would make a difference.”

Lakecare groups were conscious, though, that while stock exclusion and plantings had made some gains, further water quality improvement depended on attention to run-off issues.

“Our lake ecosystem ranking fluctuates, sometimes we are 9th, 10th or 11th; it isn't improving.”

“We now trap most of the silt going into the lake unless there is a heavy rain.”

“The lake was very sick in the 1980s and in 1998 every fish died. Now we have inanga coming back up, and the depth has stabilised. Waikato Regional Council found no difference in depth since the silt traps and the weir went in, so we have stopped the trend of the lake getting shallower.”

Heritage features

One group had a strong focus on interpretation of local historic heritage, and several others took an active interest in local history.

“When putting in the walkway we are able to identify historical features in the ground and to raise awareness and appreciation of things that would otherwise not be seen.”

Intangible environmental benefits

In addition to physical environmental outcomes, groups felt there were less tangible environmental benefits from their work, including:

- greater appreciation and awareness of environment and local heritage values
- effective models established, spread to other sites
- presence in a community
- local knowledge informing action.

Several examples were given of groups becoming models for others.

“The local Waikato Regional Council officer used to bring people in here as a model of riparian planting.”

“The council say this lake is now probably the best managed reserve in the district.”

“Waikato Regional Council have taken photos of this lake to show to other lake groups in the region.”

“Members of our group also go to help other groups on their planting projects.”

Simply the presence of a local Care Group was seen to enhance environmental management in the local area.

“Just having a group does some good – the presence of a group of people who care. It highlights the stream, it means people think twice about what they are doing that might affect it.”

The input of local information from the group helped to maximise the environmental benefits of activities.

“It was invaluable to have the local knowledge when we put the silt traps in – local people working with the digger operator. They knew the lie of the land, how peat soils work when you dig into them, and the seasonal water levels.”

Community benefits

In addition to environmental outcomes, groups were asked about community benefits. The community benefits they identified included:

- satisfaction of looking after an area and putting something back
- recreational benefits
- links with schools and other groups
- restoration of cultural weaving and thatching materials
- attractive farms and landscapes
- fun, social activity and interaction with neighbours.

"It's an opportunity to do something practical for the environment, to feel they can contribute. Something easy."

"You can put something back in nature for your grandkids. It's creating a legacy for the future."

"They get out there, get exercise, and enjoy being in the environment for free – doing something you don't have to pay for – people feel better. And people like that there are lovely places to walk, to walk the dog – it's appealing."

"People get satisfaction from looking after a nice piece of bush."

"There are benefits with revegetated stream banks, the farm looks more attractive and there is resale value."

"Our district is very diverse but this creates community solidarity. It's a friendly group."

"People see each other and there is more interaction between neighbours who otherwise might not get the chance to talk."

"People enjoy the work, it's an exercise, builds fitness and gives them an insight into what we are trying to achieve – a learning curve if you like! Many of our volunteers have had nothing whatsoever to do with plants before joining us. They soon learn!"

Many groups had made links with schools. In several cases, schools were involved in raising and planting trees.

"We have supplied seedlings to one school that grow them on. Their trees go to parents who want to plant on their farms. They have planted 500 to 800 in the last couple of years. The kids are very enthusiastic, more parents are asking for them. The school goes to plant them on the day."

Schools were also involved with rat control and monitoring projects, with one using this as part of gaining Hillary Awards.

In addition, Care Groups allowed people to have a say on issues affecting them, and provided a forum for discussing potentially divisive issues.

"Keeping people talking – they have representation. There is an opportunity to air your views."

"There are issues and people need to talk about them. Duckshooters want nothing but acorns and yachties want no trees around the lake at all...and lake levels have been very contentious."

3.3.4 Support

Most groups were happy with how much support they had received from agencies, businesses and the community.

"If you slack, they slack, but if you do something, they come in behind you...we've had great support."

Groups received support of several types:

- project funding
- trees
- volunteers
- other in-kind inputs
- administrative tasks or expenses
- facilitation
- awards
- technical advice and research expertise
- supportive policy and enforcement.

Project funding

Groups had accessed project funding from a range of agencies and philanthropic organisations, gaming trusts and local business sponsors. One group had a 'sponsor a hectare' programme at \$30/year for a rat control operation, which covered track maintenance and post-operation monitoring, while volunteers maintained the bait stations. Grants from the Waikato Regional Council were received for fencing, trees, and bait.

"We got a Waikato Regional Council grant for fencing early on, and that was a huge boon."

"We get \$3000 a year for bait between DOC and the Waikato Regional Council, and we've expanded each year; now our bait stations cover 850ha."

Groups commented that funding was available for purchases and to do the initial work on a project, but it was more difficult to get funding for ongoing work.

“It’s easy to get the money to build or plant things. But not for maintenance – and we have to employ a ticketed guy to do the spraying.”

Trees

As planting was a focus for many groups, the sourcing of trees was a key form of support. Several groups said that free or subsidised trees were an incentive to get landholders involved. The Honda NZ Tree Fund was a source of trees accessed by over half of the groups interviewed. The liaison service provided by the Waikato Regional Council to the Honda fund was greatly appreciated. Some groups ordered trees from the contract growing list coordinated by the Waikato Regional Council. Other sources of trees were DOC, district councils or through growing their own or working with schools growing native plants. Some school nurseries had potting mix and seedlings sponsored by companies like Fonterra or by local nurseries. No group identified a problem getting enough trees to plant.

Volunteers

In addition to drawing volunteers from their own communities, Care Groups appreciated the help of volunteers from a range of other supporters, including accounting firms, Girl Guides, duckshooters, Honda staff and Fonterra tanker drivers and other staff. The contribution of Fonterra to Conservation Volunteers NZ was recognised, though it was noted that it was limited to dairying areas.

“Fonterra has their Catchment Care Programme and the Conservation Volunteers have come and they are keen to work...it was starting to get too much for us so they have been a real blessing.”

“It’s a shame there is no assistance for drystock like there is for dairy from Fonterra.”

Other in-kind support

Groups received in-kind inputs of various sorts, including fencing materials, spray for weed control, bait, fuel for mowers, and petrol vouchers for volunteers travelling distances. One group had fees waived for the use of the local hall. Fish and Game had contributed by building bridges as part of walkway development around lakes.

In addition to thousands of hours of their own time, group members provided some in-kind services such as photocopying for the group. Farmers contributed land for riparian plantings, silt traps and wetland infiltration areas. Many landowners had also set aside areas under covenants.

Depending on responsibilities for the land in question, groups received more support from DOC, the Waikato Regional Council or their district council. Agencies carried out work on land that was within their roles, including willow clearing by rivers, fence maintenance around reserves and developing recreational, interpretive and carparking facilities. One group also mentioned that possum control operations for TB on their boundary were very helpful in preventing reinvasion into their area.

Groups generally gave very positive reports about the level of support from agencies, except for one group who reported working mostly on district council land and on recreational assets, but receiving little support for their work from their district council.

Administration tasks and expenses

Groups received support for their administration-related expenses from a range of sources. The NZ Landcare Trust helped with some mail-outs, as did the Waikato Regional Council and the Waikato District Council. Some Waipa groups received annual grants (\$500-900) from the Waipa District Council for administration and office expenses, and one group received free postage under the NZ Post scheme for community groups. Groups also used email to cut down on postage expenses.

While groups had found ways to cover cash expenses, they found it difficult to get funding for time spent on administration and coordination. Some agencies and companies provided in-kind support with promotions, coordination and helping to seek funds. One group had secured two years’ sponsorship from a local business for their part-time administrator. Another group was about to trial a part-time paid coordinator using \$2,000 they had saved. However, several groups identified the key role of administrator/ coordinator as a critical, and usually unpaid, position.

“The vulnerability of our group is in the admin position – it’s a huge amount of work and if for any reason I couldn’t do it anymore I don’t think anybody else would take it on.”

“Coordination – it takes a lot of my time. But how do you get others to pick it up?”

“We can find money for a bridge, but nobody wants to fund admin, even though it’s a lot less money involved.”

Facilitation

Several groups mentioned the facilitation support they received from the Waikato Regional Council. Some groups had also received support from NZ Landcare Trust staff through a former funding arrangement with the Waikato Regional Council. One group had accessed the facilitation services of Community Waikato.

Facilitation support from the Waikato Regional Council in the start-up phase was acknowledged. Some felt that where there was a local feature like a peat lake, it was appropriate for agencies to initiate group formation.

“Somebody has to take a lead to get the group together. It could be the Waikato Regional Council, DOC, or a district council...”

Groups also acknowledged the attendance of the Waikato Regional Council staff at their regular meetings. However, some thought that staff attending all meetings was less critical than project support and organising networking and exchange between groups. A couple of groups identified the need for some ongoing facilitation input.

“I think we are experiencing some divergence about what we want to achieve, even though we put our objectives on the wall at each meeting – people bring their own ideas about environmental enhancement... Agencies such as the Waikato Regional Council and the district council and even DOC, when they liaise with a community group, they need to encourage the group to look after their organisational stuff, not just what’s happening on the ground.”

Awards

Groups sometimes mentioned awards as a form of support. Two groups said they had won Trustpower Awards, one had received a natural heritage award from their district council and another from an Environment Centre ‘Green Christmas’ event.

Technical advice and research expertise

Technical support came from a range of sources including the Waikato Regional Council, DOC, the University and CRIs. Examples included pest control advice, botanical survey results, students doing research projects on nutrient loss, a monitoring buoy deployed in a lake, and assistance with analysing rat track tunnel papers. The Waikato Environment Centre had helped one group learn to design a newsletter with a software programme. There were few reports of a lack of technical assistance, but some groups wanted to deepen their knowledge of certain topics. Examples were nutrient run-off and its impacts on lake health, and landowner responsibilities

with respect to drain management. Cost-effective revegetation methods were of interest to one group, as the expense of planting large areas of native trees was seen as prohibitive. Many groups had some animal pest control measures in place but some were not having success in trapping rats or stoats; more technical assistance might increase success rates in these sites.

Supportive policy and enforcement

When asked a general question about support for their work, groups sometimes identified policy approaches which they felt reinforced their activity, and also spoke about policy and enforcement which they thought was not strong enough.

Supportive policies included district plan provisions for acquiring esplanade reserves upon subdivision, and the incentive of extra subdivision lots if people created wetlands or placed covenants over bush. Some councils facilitated contributions from developers or industry to Care Group projects. Subsidies for fencing and planting waterways were seen as beneficial for attracting people to Care Groups.

“When we had Clean Streams funding we could encourage people to come to our field days to see the Waikato Regional Council person and get the funding.”

One group appreciated that DOC had laid down a policy about using only native trees within fenced areas on DOC land, as it ended debates about what to plant. The Waipa District Peat Lakes Accord and the Dairying and Clean Streams Accord were also seen as useful initiatives. However, many groups wanted to see more enforcement and a stronger line on certain issues.

“Fonterra sustainability people come and check effluent, but they don’t look at people’s nutrient budget. They tell them to fence waterways, but they shouldn’t pick up the milk unless they are fenced.”

“I think the district council is scared of farmers, they don’t want to protect SNAs [Significant Natural Areas].”

“There’s no rule on how much N fertiliser you put on – some people are still chucking on 300 units of N and there’s no rule against it.”

3.3.5 Relationship with the Waikato Regional Council

All of the groups interviewed reported a positive relationship with the Waikato Regional Council. They said the organisation was responsive and helpful.

“The Waikato Regional Council always say ‘yes.’”

“We tell them what we want, and we get it.”

“We have always had an excellent response to our requests for funds.”

“Through Clean Streams, people got in touch with the Waikato Regional Council and developed a positive relationship”

“During the time we have worked with the Waikato Regional Council we have met some wonderful people. It has encouraged us to be a part of the plantings and weedings...the petrol vouchers received have been graciously accepted and it certainly helps to keep them interested. The communication has been extraordinarily good also.”

Other than funding, examples of practical support included providing speakers on relevant topics (such as the Halo project), facilitation on issues (such as lake levels), supporting events with marquees, barbecues and print-outs, and councillors attending working bees.

Staff built rapport with groups by attending meetings, keeping the communication lines open, replying to their letters and working alongside them. Through regular liaison, groups felt they could report issues that required staff attention.

However, many groups looked to the regional council to take a stronger stand on environmental issues.

“Rules might help drive attitudinal change. If nobody drives it, it won’t happen – it needs someone like the Waikato Regional Council to wear the muck...we see them as too ‘softly, softly’ at the moment.”

“The Waikato Regional Council need to provide the back-up, saying ‘there’s too much N going onto that farm’... checking the nutrient budget – there’s nobody saying ‘hey, we’re watching you’ – I’m not talking about a fine, just policing.”

“I’m surprised the Waikato Regional Council doesn’t push more for nutrient management of lakes given the recreational interest...why they don’t talk to farmers about effluent draining to the lake, and clarify drainage rules and responsibilities.”

“The drains were deepened, and it stuffed up the flow...these were drains dug out within 200m of the lake, and nothing was done.”

“There is a pampas infestation on the neighbouring farm and it’s always seeding into our planting area... we do report effluent spills too...but it’s hard for us as a group to say anything, because our kids go to the same preschools and schools. Maybe the Waikato Regional Council could help with these sorts of issues, but it is sensitive.”

Groups also thought the Waikato Regional Council could do more to assist with funding, particularly of ongoing maintenance work like weed control. One group requested that part of the special rate for natural heritage purposes be set aside for small groups, as the Maungatautari project was seen to be monopolising that funding source. Another sentiment expressed was that ‘in a perfect world’ the regional council would purchase land around lake catchments to protect them, although it was acknowledged that this was unlikely. There was a suggestion that funding be simplified, creating a ‘one-stop-shop’ process for groups to access funds for various activities, with streamlined accountability to cut down on the administration required. Another suggestion was that the Waikato Regional Council could provide more prompting and assistance to local groups to make submissions on relevant documents.

“If they think local management is important, they’ll have to encourage it.”

3.3.6 Challenges

Most groups found they could access sufficient funding and materials, even though it was a constant job and funding applications became tedious. The key challenge for groups was keeping their people resource going. The next most commonly mentioned issue was weeds. Peat lake management presented its own problems. Other than this, there was a range of specific issues with which groups were grappling.

Getting and keeping people interested

Most groups reported a regular core of people coming to meetings, but some were challenged to attract people to open days or events. Groups located some distance from a large town found it harder to attract volunteers, unless they could access Fonterra Catchment Care support.

“It is hard to get people interested – people are busy and more and more groups compete for their time.”

“People just don’t have the time and inclination to get together. We tried lots of things – workshops, trips, planting days, field days. Only a few came, and not the farmers. You run out of energy after a while, you have no more ideas.”

Several groups said they were getting older, and there was no interest from younger people to take part.

"We have had students in the past, and one even brought their hockey team. But our numbers are dwindling, we are getting older...we struggle with a heavy chainsaw now."

Volunteer numbers fluctuated.

"When people are volunteers, they choose when and when not to do something."

"Groups like to plant but they don't like to come back and do maintenance."

"We have had forty or sixty people come to a planting day, but at our last weeding day, there were only four of us."

"Somehow, we have to make it easier long-term, so people stay with it."

Not all groups struggled to attract people. One group were pleased to regularly get 20-25 people at their public evening meetings, held three or four times a year. Another group kept their volunteer opportunity to two days per bait operation, and emailed everyone to let them know; they had had plenty of volunteers.

"We make it easy for them, we let them know, but there is no pressure if they can't do it – as long as they let us know if they are coming or not, we can reassign their line to someone else."

"People come when they see results – success – when they see you can do it."

In one case, a contentious issue saw more involvement in the group.

"We got a flow of interest when the lake level was decided, but it rolls over now so things are quiet again."

Most groups involved landowners, but several said they would like to see more active cooperation from farmers and sharemilkers.

"We invite people to field days but I think if farmers invited other farmers, it would be more successful."

"We raise issues, but a dairy farm is a working machine. It would be great to have buffers by drains. Cow poo overflows to the lake sometimes. Getting landowners to empty the silt traps is a real challenge."

"The silt traps get destroyed by rain. Drains feed silt and nutrients into the lake. It is hard to influence landowners but we can encourage them to keep stock away...it's just sometimes they don't have options."

"Sharemilkers have no motivation."

"We've had a mixed reaction to fencing... you can't force it or the group becomes the baddie."

One reason for groups becoming less active or effective was key people leaving. One group was no longer having committee meetings for this reason.

"Some active people left due to family circumstances. Then there was no-one chasing me up and insufficient interest to keep having meetings...so we haven't had any for a while."

In one case, an active farmer had died, and the sharemilker was not seen to be as supportive of the work of the group. In several instances, plant propagation nurseries in schools had been neglected when key teachers were no longer there.

Some groups became disillusioned when they felt their efforts were negated by other trends. This was the case for one streamcare group who noted nutrient levels rising in the water monitoring data in spite of their work, and saw dairy conversions occurring upstream with no riparian management or tree-planting being done. Some lakecare groups had received the message that their lake could not recover, and the most they could hope for was aesthetic improvement and some terrestrial biodiversity gains.

Several people said that while they were happy doing the core project work, they struggled to find time to make submissions or do the communications work like writing local newspaper articles. Sometimes people delegated these jobs but still found themselves chasing up the delegated people, or re-writing things.

Weeds

Weeds were the second most commonly mentioned challenge.

"You have to keep on top of the weeds, you have to follow up after planting, or they get away on you."

Of particular concern were invasions of blackberry, pampas and willow, and convolvulus climbing over new plantings. Weeds were reported to be the biggest concern for landowners considering whether to retire areas.

Peat lake issues

Groups working around peat lakes faced a range of biophysical challenges. These include pest fish (koi carp), figuring out the best form of fencing in wet peat soils, lake level fluctuations affecting plantings, lakes not getting water due to peat shrinkage and drain deepening, and algal blooms. Lakes affected by algal blooms were closed to recreation, and where the lake was not monitored by authorities for toxic algae, recreational clubs had to test the water at their own cost before they could have club days on the lake.

Other problems

Other than the challenges described above, groups mentioned problems with paper wasps, poor choice of species in early plantings, vandalism, and floods carrying away rat traps.

3.3.7 Future potential (in relation to RPS issues)

Groups were asked about the potential for them to address some key issues highlighted in the proposed RPS. These included:

- restoration of the Waikato river
- wetland/lake restoration, riparian management and stock exclusion
- effluent management
- nutrient management in sensitive water bodies
- local biodiversity enhancement work
- historic heritage
- effects of climate change and
- soil management, including peat.

Restoration of the Waikato River

The majority of the groups interviewed were working in the broader catchment of the Waikato River, and saw their work contributing towards its restoration. They also saw the restoration project as a potential contributor to their own projects, through funding or coordination at a larger scale. For example, one lakecare group wanted to see silt traps installed further up the catchment and hoped this could be achieved by working with the new Waikato River Authority.

Even groups focused on terrestrial ecosystems, working well away from the river believed their work was relevant to the restoration effort due to ecological interconnections. One group outside the catchment felt their work was still relevant, as it provided a working restoration model.

Wetland/lake restoration, riparian management and stock exclusion

Most of the groups were actively engaged in this work. Groups were generally supportive of stricter rules for livestock exclusion.

“The dairy people already have the Accord, but rules would pick up the drystock people.”

When asked what value local Care Groups added to riparian management (for example if region-wide stock exclusion rules were to be put in place), people said that Care Groups can help with implementation of the rules.

“The value-added of a group if you have rules is that it gets it done.”

“In theory, groups bring local knowledge, expertise and ‘man-power’ to the job.”

However, most groups said they were at capacity in terms of managing areas already, so they were not sure they could provide practical help over wider areas. The issue was also raised of further riparian weed problems if widespread livestock exclusion was required across the region.

Effluent management

Some groups had discussed effluent issues within their meetings, and others said they had reported effluent spills. However, mostly they saw this as a regulatory issue, outside their role.

Nutrient management in sensitive catchments

Both lakecare and streamcare groups had raised nutrient management issues at meetings and field days and in newsletters.

“It’s a more difficult issue to manage than planting and weeding. There is lots of discussion about cows and nutrients on the committee, and the sharemilker is on it.”

“Most are aware of it...we have raised the issue of cultivation near the river at meetings – it gets mentioned subtly – ‘you’re meant to be so far back’...”

“The main farmer is on our committee and he runs light stock and puts on no fert by the lake.”

Groups had done practical work to reduce nutrient inflows to lakes through silt traps and riparian setbacks. At one lake, DOC had paid for a farm management plan to be prepared for the landowner to look at strategies

for nutrient loss reduction. Reference was made to a shallow lakes project being run by the NZ Landcare Trust, also working on farm plans for landholders. The Waikato Regional Council's contribution to the project in subsidising fencing was acknowledged. This project was seen as a useful model of a partnership, where all farmers in a lake catchment were approached and supported by the agencies. One lakecare representative said that although nutrients were a problem, the group was not focused on this as they had been told the lake could not be restored.

"The agencies say the lake can't be brought back. How much effort do you put into a lake that's never going to get any better?"

Some comment was also made about the role of the Waikato Regional Council in tightening up nutrient rules.

"I think the regulatory pressure has to come from statutory bodies – they have to put the drivers in place."

Some people interviewed said that nutrient and effluent issues were not within their scope.

"I think there are enough people in the industry doing that."

Local biodiversity enhancement work

All groups were contributing to biodiversity enhancement, either terrestrial or aquatic. Some were restoring areas affected by pests and others were creating new areas of habitat, though mostly the re-creation of habitat was small-scale.

There was support amongst many groups for more active district council involvement in encouraging biodiversity enhancement, as signalled in the RPS. They believed they could have useful input into local biodiversity strategies and some had already submitted on their district's environment policy. An alternative view was also expressed.

"I tend to think there should be one set of rules so I don't see a need for local biodiversity strategies."

Historic heritage

Historic heritage was a main focus for one group, which had identified features along their walkways and created interpretation about the sites. There was interest amongst several other groups, indicating potential to do more in this area. One group had compiled records about local historic heritage sites, another had representation on the local heritage committee and one person had written a book on local history. Groups reported that

consultation was carried out before willow-clearing operations to ensure any heritage sites were identified.

Effects of climate change

People identified some implications of climate change for their work, mostly around increased flooding in areas they planted or looked after. More severe or frequent storms could mobilise more sediment and this would have implications for managing silt traps. None of the groups interviewed were revegetating large areas so there were no carbon offset implications identified from their work.

Soil management, including peat

The groups interviewed were not working in erosion-prone areas, other than streambanks. But they were addressing peat management. Lakecare groups were very aware of peat shrinkage and one landowner had reduced cultivation by intentionally working towards having more biologically active soils. Groups knew that drain management had a critical role in protecting peat, although they were not always sure what the regulations were.

"Don't put drains by the lake – keep soil moist and you don't get peat shrinkage."

"If people knew landowners' responsibilities, they could encourage others, but it is unclear how drains should be managed or what the rules are."

One landowner talked about cadmium accumulation as an emerging issue.

"We want to look at cadmium now on our place. That is the next big issue. And some people have got the high levels, and they are only just hearing about it."

3.4 Messages to highlight (from Care Groups' networking day)

A 10 minute presentation was made of emerging themes from this review, at a Care Groups' networking day. Participants were then asked to discuss in small groups what they would emphasise that they had heard that day, and what else they wanted to say, which had not been mentioned.

After discussion in small groups, individuals were given sticky notes so they could write key messages they wanted to emphasise. They were given three prompt questions:

- what value do Care Groups add?
- what is the potential of Care Groups in future?
- what support is required?

Their answers are presented verbatim below. For the purposes of this report they have been grouped under themes, but these themes were not developed or checked with participants on the day.

Value of groups

- Value of community groups cannot be underestimated. Contribute so much more than environmental gains – there are social and community building gains. Couldn't be achieved by one person or one agency on their own.
- Community group activity multiplies the value of agency projects.
- Size doesn't matter – organisations with achievable goals and cooperation are invaluable.
- Increase the value of lakes and waterways – raising awareness. Care groups create a greater voice to get things done.
- Giving people greater access to places.
- Values: waterway health. Potential: increasing value of waterways and lakes.
- Care groups often pick up the small picture stuff that would otherwise be overlooked.

Communication, liaison and representation

- Communication – radio and interactive media – podcasts etc – reach people and make it easy for them to learn.
- Create a closer liaison with long term planning of goals and projects at workshops like this on an annual basis.
- Provide more opportunity for groups to interact, such as a two day workshop rather than half a day workshop.
- Required: Communication Groups-Agency-Community.
- Care groups need a voice in regional council.

Funding

- Sustainable funding – it is easy to get money to start something or put it in place, but hard to get money to continue or maintain a project.
- Government support – financial like landcare.
- Success attracts success (and money). Care groups need to get some runs on the board and make progress to prove efficacy to funders.
- Funding. People to do the job.
- Funding particularly for Care Group manager.

Other types of support

- Administration support would be helpful.
- Training re: computing and office/record keeping.
- It would be great to have help (facilitator) for long term planning sessions. And sourcing volunteers.

Developing and sustaining groups

- Care groups need a 'champion' to keep group going. The Waikato Regional Council can usually help in setting up and support from afar, but the Waikato Regional Council can't be relied on to prop up/be driving force of groups.
- Better education, particularly young people, so there is succession. Either passing it on as parents or at work.
- Problem – lack of fit and committed members.

Working with landowners and catchment land use

- More emphasis on managing catchment rather than ambulance at bottom of cliff.
- The Waikato Regional Council and councils to spend more effort providing support, guidelines and incentives to farmers to make positive environmental changes.
- There are rules around land usage designed to protect the environment. These need to be implemented everywhere, all the time.
- Owner cooperation – control of catchment.
- Conflicting info to farmers: fertiliser salesman vs sustainable farming. Who is right?.
- Some farmers are frightened of change. Farmers do not know soils anymore.
- We (New Zealand) have a major problem with toxic fertilisers which are the root to the problem. Wouldn't it be a first priority to fix this problem? Yes it can be fixed!!!

4 Discussion

4.1 Value of Care Group action

Care Groups are taking action on a range of issues that are core business for the Waikato Regional Council – water quality, soil management, biodiversity and biosecurity.

In terms of water quality, Care Groups are creating enhanced riparian areas, through promoting stock exclusion and planting stream banks and lake edges. This will have a range of water quality benefits as well as enhancing terrestrial and aquatic habitat values. Care Groups are also considering wider water quality issues such as nutrient and sediment run-off, particularly in respect to lake environments.

Lakes have also been the focus for peat soil management activities of Care Groups. As local people who understand seasonal water tables and value the wetland environments of the peat lakes, they have useful perspectives in terms of managing drainage and cultivation in peat soils.

Other than peat soils, the riparian activities of Care Groups help with soil management by reducing bank collapse and erosion. A smaller number of Care Groups in upper catchments include a focus on reducing erosion from hillslopes. Groups have also helped to address localised flooding caused by willows blocking waterways.

Care Groups enhance biodiversity through their plantings, species reintroductions and pest control activity, which also achieves biosecurity outcomes. They help to ensure timely and ongoing plant pest control in their sites, and are vigilant in spotting new plant pest invasions. By helping keep riparian weed issues under control they add value to, and advance the concept of riparian plantings, as weeds are a primary concern for landowners. Care Groups can provide a coordinated community approach to animal pest control, which is critical where there are scattered habitat areas in a landscape dominated by private ownership. They also mobilise volunteers to look after larger tracts of indigenous vegetation. Care Groups have played a further valuable role promoting legal protection of native vegetation on private land.

Groups work in a wide range of habitats, often focusing on more than one habitat type. Many groups included within their aims a broad view of ecological restoration. This can help to create integrated management across a

local landscape. As a focal point for bringing in relevant management agencies, they also create a coordinated approach between those with different statutory roles, resulting in more cohesive management.

All of this work constitutes leverage for the Waikato Regional Council's investment, as volunteer hours effectively multiply the funding that the regional council puts into Care Group support. In effect, the Waikato Regional Council gets core business done for a smaller financial input. Care Groups do not work exclusively in priority strategic sites from a regional perspective, but their work does cover some such sites. Examples include wetlands, peat lakes and Key Ecological Sites, as well as catchment scheme areas. In some circumstances, a coordinated community effort can enhance an area in such a way that its ecological value increases and it becomes a higher priority because of their achievements. Care Groups also play a valuable role in looking after sites of lower priority, which would otherwise be overlooked, but nevertheless contribute to environmental values in local areas.

Care Groups also promote and enhance broader resource management issues, through their work on assets like walkways and recreational facilities, and through raising awareness of historic heritage. While these may not be considered core regional council roles, they have the effect of increasing the public's connections and interactions with the environment, which contributes to achieving a range of the Waikato Regional Council's goals. In addition to environmental connections, Care Groups may strengthen social connections, effectively building social capital. In this way, groups reinforce the 'four wellbeings' (environmental, economic, social and cultural) and thus make a contribution to achieving the aims of the Local Government Act as well as the other operative legislation guiding regional councils.

A further contribution of Care Groups is in the form of vigilance and local knowledge, which makes for more informed responses from local government agencies. Care Groups become advocates within their own community, which can be an effective education mechanism. The group may also serve as a type of social conscience, prompting others to think twice about actions that might have adverse impacts on local environmental resources.

4.2 Support and relationships

Care groups have attracted a range of support, and are capable of drawing in funding from a wide range of sources. Each group becomes a focal point through which

various parties interact and cooperate. This enhances the value of their individual contributions, and also increases understanding between people and allows different perspectives to be aired and acknowledged.

The existence of a Care Group serves to strengthen relationships between local communities and the Waikato Regional Council. Groups in this study valued similar qualities in staff to those that were expressed in an earlier 1995 study.² At that time, groups valued staff who were 'open-minded, able to listen and take on ideas' and 'willing to admit mistakes'. There has been a noticeable shift between the two studies, in that the earlier study recorded that many Care Groups formed because they believed that the Waikato Regional Council at that time was not consulting with them or taking local knowledge into account. This motivation was not mentioned in the current study, suggesting there is less frustration now around consultation, although good communication is still seen as a key to a good relationship.

Groups in this study were generally able to find funding for the cash expenses associated with their projects and administration or assistance with postage/mail-outs and photocopying. However, they did express a need for help with the ongoing workload of administration and coordination, as this was harder to fund than project funding. The groups interviewed for this study range from purely voluntary groups that handle no cash through to those with paid employees to carry out their projects. However, even these groups still involve a great deal of unpaid time in other roles pertaining to the group. The groups with paid workers cover larger areas and take on bigger projects, so that while care may have become a business for them, it is still a community business focused on environmental improvement. As the administration and coordination load increases with these bigger projects, it is important to consider how these operations can be sustained over time with appropriate paid support in these roles.

In the current study, there was more emphasis on funding as a form of support, and less emphasis on staff being a contact point, information source or conduit back to the regional council. In the 1995 study, materials and funds were seen as 'symbolic' evidence of support for groups and there was some nervousness, in the post-1980s era, of too much financial support being seen as a subsidy. This concern was not expressed in the current study. As Care Groups have more years' experience and perhaps greater ambition for their projects, the constant grind of finding funds has become a primary concern for some.

Groups certainly did value the communication with agency staff, help with start-up facilitation and setting goals, and the role the Waikato Regional Council plays in fostering interaction between groups. These were similar themes to the 1995 study where groups were looking to the Waikato Regional Council for coordination, integration, and well-researched solutions.

In contrast to that earlier study, DOC is now a much more prominent supporter, as are district councils, none of whom featured strongly in the mid-1990s. The Waikato Biodiversity Forum is another development, and plays a useful role in maintaining an up-to-date database and fostering interaction between groups and agencies. Since the mid 1990s the New Zealand Landcare Trust has played a part as a supporter to many groups in the region. Importantly, they have proactively initiated and supported projects in key habitats through projects focused on wetlands, shallow lakes and lowland kahikatea remnants. The NZ Landcare Trust has sought to identify roles that would fill in gaps in existing work with groups, which has produced an effective form of collaboration with the Waikato Regional Council and communities in the region.

Proactive support was called for by some of those interviewed in this study in the form of more stringent rules or enforcement on the part of the Waikato Regional Council and the dairy industry. This related to stock exclusion, effluent spills and restricting nutrient inputs, or at the very least checking nutrient budgets.

4.3 Potential

Care Groups have the potential to influence or act on many of the issues highlighted in the proposed RPS. As groups are mostly focused on the immediate projects they have already initiated, it would require proactive leadership from the Waikato Regional Council to raise other issues that pertain to that group's situation. In the 1995 study, groups seemed to form around well-defined local issues, such as trout habitat, or better management of soil conservation works. However, they were open to discussing other matters once they had a relationship with the regional council, and said that they wanted 'a clear steer' from the council on new issues. Groups listed on the current database seem to have broad aims from the outset, such as ecosystem restoration, improved harbour water quality. But people interviewed in this study also looked to the Waikato Regional Council to take the role of raising new issues with the group.

The 1995 study found that Care Groups provide an opportunity for non-confrontational discussion with peers and can influence the acceptability of change. They are a forum to raise issues, present the science and help find practical local solutions. All of these findings still stand. Where there are large financial implications of adopting a practice, Care Groups are not likely to overcome these barriers, and regulatory pathways may be required. However, Care Groups are a useful place to advance those issues with win-win solutions e.g. nutrient efficiency.

There is now a large number of Care Groups, and an even larger number of groups listed with the Waikato Biodiversity Forum. They form nodes within a restoration network that collectively has extensive coverage of the region. This means that voluntary groups are not only able to address small, localised issues, but together they are a significant force in regional resource management.

They also offer an important avenue for advancing the restoration of the Waikato River and its catchment and lakes, as they have local knowledge and have developed working models that others can follow.

The limitations to the extent of Care Group action lie in engaging and sustaining enough volunteer input, and in the critical roles of administrator/coordinator, (who usually also maintains group leadership). Most groups have been able to secure project funding, but this is a constant task.

Potential in respect of specific issues

Care Groups are already active in biodiversity restoration, and could have useful input into local biodiversity strategies. They would welcome district councils providing more incentives and encouragement for this work, as suggested in the proposed RPS.

Many Care Groups are working in some of the key habitats for restoration identified in the RPS, such as wetland and lake restoration. There is potential and some precedent for agencies like the Waikato Regional Council and the NZ Landcare Trust to take a proactive role initiating community action around important habitats, although the work will be most effective if it is eventually picked up and carried forward by local people.

Some groups already highlight historic heritage, and others have a keen interest in this area. Because Care Groups have local knowledge of the terrain and an affinity for the land where they work, there is potential for them to play a useful part in heritage protection and awareness. Some groups might be able to take part

in the regional heritage forum that is suggested in the proposed RPS, but this would be an additional call on their voluntary time.

The RPS does not give specific direction about stricter rules around livestock exclusion, but the signals are that this could follow in the review of the Waikato Regional Plan³. Care Groups see themselves as still playing an important role if livestock exclusion is required through regulation. This is because rules require implementation, and groups can help advance this through cooperative local action. Care Groups could promote riparian management actions to extend beyond a bare minimum of stock exclusion to establishing more comprehensive riparian areas with the benefit of native plantings. However, most groups said they were currently working as hard as they could with the resources available to them, so it is unclear how much they could expand their activity.

Managing nutrients is a complex issue which requires local discussion and learning about options, even if rules are put in place. Care Groups are one way to prompt this sort of discussion, and this is already happening in some lakecare groups.

Care Groups do not see themselves having a great role in managing effluent, but in some cases they are willing to report effluent spills. They look to the Waikato Regional Council to take a stronger role in enforcing existing regulations, and can be a local voice advocating for better farm management of these issues and for tighter compliance efforts.

Soil management in terms of streambank collapse is the core business of many Care Groups, and some groups also address hillslope erosion. The management of peat soils benefits from local discussion in the same way that nutrient losses do, and Care Groups have particular potential to address this issue around peat lakes. Care Groups can also be a conduit of information on diffuse soil contamination (such as cadmium). Care Groups do not generally see themselves as taking a role in planning issues such as protecting high class soils from subdivision.

5 Conclusions

Care Groups take valuable action aimed at addressing local issues, and have been successful in creating assets out of areas that were formally eyesores. Groups can help create practical solutions, drawing on their own local knowledge. They work on core regional council issues and also enhance the broader well-being of their community and local environment. They are committed to this for the long haul, as most have indefinite time horizons for their involvement.

These community groups multiply the funds and resources they receive through their own unpaid input and by harnessing the energy of other volunteers, so they can be a cost-effective means of getting work done. They also attract funds from a range of sources and channel them towards resource management activity.

Members of Care Groups are community advocates for better environmental management, and for more effective regulation and enforcement. People interviewed in this study encouraged regulatory agencies and the dairy industry to take a stronger stand in environmental protection with tighter rules and compliance effort on issues like livestock exclusion, nutrient budgets and input restrictions, effluent irrigation and drain management in peat areas.

Care Groups are open to learning about more complex farm management issues, and in this way they can add value to situations where regulation on its own may not achieve the desired outcomes.

A good relationship with agencies is important for this to happen, as is sound technical and practical advice. Groups in this study reported no concerns about their current relationships with the Waikato Regional Council, or the technical expertise they were able to access. This suggests that the work the Waikato Regional Council has done to date with Care Groups has been effective in creating good relationships and supporting local action. The support of other key players such as DOC, district councils, the NZ Landcare Trust, Honda NZ Tree Fund and the Waikato Biodiversity Forum has also contributed to group effectiveness.

Groups do struggle to keep up with all the work involved, especially administration, coordination and grant-seeking. Most groups have been able to access funding and materials for projects, but ongoing maintenance and

administration/coordination work are harder to resource. Some smaller voluntary groups have operated under the umbrella of a larger community group which handles any cash they receive and fulfils the obligations of being a registered charity.

If the Waikato Regional Council (or other agencies, including those involved with the Waikato River restoration) were looking to add more value to the work Care Groups do, it would be useful to address these key limitations. This would mean resourcing maintenance work on projects and assistance for administration and coordination, especially for larger projects. Streamlined assistance with funding and accountability requirements would help reduce the time groups spend on this. Another area groups were looking for advice is how to get and keep more volunteers.

Facilitation is still important for groups at start-up and at critical points in the group's life. It may not be essential for the Waikato Regional Council staff to attend regular group meetings, and indeed some Care Groups have not had any staff attendance at meetings. However, regular contact helps to build rapport and trust. Groups also value the networking and cross-fertilisation that occurs when agencies organise events to bring them together.

People are busy, and in some cases groups may become inactive if there is not outside encouragement. When key people leave, it may be appropriate for a group to wind up altogether. The Waikato Regional Council can help a group to try and make a transition, but in the end the Waikato Regional Council cannot drive a group where there is insufficient interest.

While Care Groups are essentially about local communities taking action, there is still a role for agencies to proactively engage with local people around issues and see whether there is interest in addressing key issues. There are good models for this, for example in the NZ Landcare Trust projects getting all landowners around shallow lakes to examine their nutrient management practices. It would seem appropriate for the Waikato Regional Council to combine a strategic approach to proactively engaging with local communities around priority issues and habitats with a responsive reaction to groups that self-initiate projects. Ongoing liaison between the key support agencies is important to avoid any duplication of effort or any gaps in addressing priority issues in the region.

6 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made arising from this review.

1. That the Waikato Regional Council continues to provide support to local community Care Groups taking action on land, water, biodiversity and coastal resources, as part of a balanced mix of policy methods.
2. That the form of this support should continue to include project funding/provision of materials where appropriate, technical advice, facilitation at start-up and at critical points in the group's progress, regular liaison and organising networking opportunities between groups (such as networking field days). Continued support of the Waikato Biodiversity Forum is also recommended.
3. That further consideration be given to how groups' ongoing work in project maintenance and time spent in coordination and administration can be supported.
4. That regulation and enforcement on key issues be strengthened (such as livestock exclusion, drainage around wetlands and nutrient management in nutrient-sensitive catchments), as a way to reinforce the work of voluntary groups; and that these matters be the focus of further discussion and education with existing Care Groups.
5. That a responsive approach to community-led initiatives be combined with a strategic and proactive approach to community engagement around priority issues and habitats.
6. That this occur in liaison with key players in the region (such as, Waikato River Authority and iwi groups, NZ Landcare Trust, DOC, Honda NZ Tree Fund, Fonterra/ regional industry, Waikato Biodiversity Forum, science providers) and others active in local sites (district councils, schools, hapu and whanau, recreation and conservation groups).

Appendix 1 List of 42 landcare groups on the Waikato Regional Council database

The groups shown below are listed with the Waikato Regional Council as Care Groups. The number shown is the group number for those groups listed on the Waikato Biodiversity Forum database (see Figure 1 for a map of these groups).

Group name	Group number
Friends of Barret Bush	1
Friends of Lake Hakanoa Walkway Group	2
Friends of Waikawau	3
Friends of Waimana Bay	4
Habitat Tuatēawa	5
Hamilton Fish & Game Club	6
Hikuai/Wharekawa Community Possum Control Group	7
Kaituna Lake Care Group	8
Kekepuku Care Group	9
Kirikiri Catchment Care group	10
Lake Cameron Care Group	11
Lake Kainui Management Committee (Kainui Lake Care Group)	12
Lake Taharoa Trust	13
Lake Waikare Care Group	14
Little Waipa Streamcare Group	15
Lower Mangapiko Streamcare	16
Mahakirau Forest Estate Group	17
Mangahia Lake Care Group	18
Mangawara Landcare Group	19
Moehau Environment Group	20
Morrinsville Landcare Group	21
Ngaroto Lake Care Group	22
Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society Inc	23
Pokaiwhenua Streamcare Group	24
Project Kiwi (Kuaotunu)	25
Tuakau Bridge River Care	26
Serpentine Lake Care Group	27
Te Pahu Landcare Group	28
Te Waihou Landcare Group	29
Te Whakaoranga o Karioi Incorporated Society	30
Thames Coast Kiwi Care	31
Torepatutahi Landcare	32
Upper Waihou Streamcare Group	33
Waihi District Walkways	34
Waiotahi Valley Trust	35
WET Landcare Group	36
Whaingaroa Harbour Care	37
Whakaupoko West Franklin Landcare Group	38
Whangamata Harbourcare Inc	39
Whangapoua Harbour Care Catchment	40
Wharekawa Catchment Care Group	41
Whenuakite Kiwi Care Group	42

Appendix 2 Waikato Biodiversity Forum survey

PILOT questionnaire – Valuing community action on the ground 1 July 2009-30 June 2010.

The Waikato Biodiversity Forum sees benefits in having more detailed information about the contribution the community is making on the ground to biodiversity protection and improvement. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather the collective estimate of this contribution to help advocate for biodiversity protection resources to support the work of community groups. The information collected will provide base line data to observe trends over time. It is hoped this information would be useful to your group when you are reporting on your projects to your committee and/or funders.

Your group won't be identified in any summarising reports written from the questionnaire information. The results will be **anonymous** and confidentiality will be protected. Please give estimates only.

Name of the group: _____

Contact name: _____

Phone number: _____ Email: _____

1 Location of work: _____ District: _____

2 Main type of work. Please tick the box (tick as many as you need)

Fencing Planting Pest plant control Pest animal control

3 What other activities were carried out by the group during 1 July 2009-30 June 2010? Please tick.

Education of public Sustaining the group Grant applications Internal capacity building

Other (please say what) _____

4 Approximately how many regular volunteers worked with your group during 1 July 2009 – 30 June 2010?

Number of regular volunteers the group: _____

5 Approximately how many volunteer hours were worked by the group 1 July 2009– 30 June 2010.

Number of hours worked by the group: _____

Formula example 1 volunteer working for 1 hour equals 1 volunteer hour

6 Approximately how many plants has your group planted during 1 July 2009 – 30 June 2010?

Plants planted _____ N/A

7 Approximately how many hectares or kilometres or metres (m²) have been planted during 1 July 2009 – 30 June 2010?

Hectares _____ or kilometres _____ or m² _____ N/A

8 Approximately how many metres of fencing have been built during 1 July 2009 – 30 June 2010?

Metres of fencing _____ N/A

9 Approximately how many pest animal hours carried out during 1 July 2009 – 30 June 2010? Please tick.

1-29 hours 30-59 hours 60-99 hours 100 and more hours N/A

10 What pest animals have been targeted during 1 July 2009 – 30 June 2010? Please tick.

Possums Rats Mustelids (stoats ferrets and weasels) Wasps

Other _____

11 How many hectares or m² of animal pest control do you undertake?

Hectares _____ m² _____

12 What has been the residual trap catch (RTC) from the work during 1 July 2009–30 June 2010?

Possums _____ Rats _____ Mustelids _____ N/A

13 How many weeding days carried out during 1 July 2009- 30 June 2010? (Include tree releasing). Please tick.

1-29 days 30-59 60-99 100 and more N/A

14 Approximately how many hectares or kilometres or metres (m²) have been weeded during 1 July 2009 – 30 June

2010? Hectares _____ or kilometres _____ or m² _____ N/A

15 What weeds species have been targeted during 1 July 2009- 30 June 2010? Please tick.

Privet Gorse Tradescantia (wandering dew)
 Woolly nightshade Japanese honeysuckle Blackberry Broom Convolvulus

Other – please list _____

16 Have you faced any of these challenges during 1 July 2009 – 30 June 2010? Please give reasons.

Funding _____
 Availability of technical advice _____
 Enough volunteers _____
 Other _____

17 What would like to receive further training on?

18 Any other comments

Appendix 3

Questions asked during interviews

Origin

Can you tell me how and why you formed?

On-the-ground action

The survey for the Biodiversity Forum asked about fencing, planting, weed control and pest control undertaken over a one year period. Would that have been a typical year for you? How many years have you been doing that?

Other than those activities, are there other on-the-ground actions that your group takes?

How much of that activity is undertaken in a typical year?

Do you work on private or public land?

Other group activities

The Biodiversity Forum survey asked about education of public/sustaining the group/grant applications/internal capacity building.

Can you tell me a little bit more about what you do in those categories?

Summary of benefits

Thinking about your group activity as a whole, what environmental benefits have been achieved?

What community needs are met?

Relationship with the Waikato Regional Council

How would you describe your relationship with the Waikato Regional Council?

What is your expectation of the Waikato Regional Council in future? What would improve the relationship in the future?

Increasing the value

What is the total number of people involved in your group?

Has that changed over time?

What do you think draws people to be part of your group?

Could you tell me about challenges your group has faced over the years?

I'm interested to know what sort of support would make your work easier or more effective. What ideas do you have about what would make a difference?

Regional Policy Statement issues

The Waikato Regional Council has just put out a new draft 10 year policy statement to signal what it wants to achieve. As part of my interviews with Care Groups, the Waikato Regional Council is interested in knowing the place of Care Groups in delivering on those outcomes. I'd like to ask you a few things about topics in the RPS and see if you think your group has an interest in those.

First of all, as part of the settlement for the Waikato River, the Waikato Regional Council will be working towards restoring the health of the river and its catchment and lakes. Would your group contribute towards that at all?

Does climate change have any implications for your group?

Does your group work with any historic heritage sites?

The Waikato Regional Council in the RPS is expecting councils to take more action to enhance biodiversity, and there may be actions taken such as developing local biodiversity strategies and more incentives for more protection and restoration work. How do you see your Care Group being involved there?

Restoration of lakes, riparian habitat and wetland habitat is in the draft RPS. Does your group contribute to those outcomes, and if so, how?

In water protection, the Waikato Regional Council wants to see progress in all degraded water bodies, and protection of high-value water bodies. While there are no specific words to this effect, it is possible that stock exclusion rules may be introduced across the region when the Waikato Regional Plan is reviewed. If your Care Group has been involved largely in fencing streams, what role will there be for your group if it becomes mandatory to fence stock from waterways?

The Waikato Regional Council is indicating it will work with industry bodies on certain issues, and I just want to run through a list and ask if you see any of these are relevant to your group, or could be in the future:

- appropriately managing animal waste; (effluent*

management)

- b. adopting best practice in fertiliser application and soil disturbance*
- c. adopting property-level nutrient management and soil conservation plans*
- d. preventing stock access to water bodies [may have already covered above]*
- e. protecting existing, and promoting new, appropriately vegetated riparian margins [may have already covered above].*

If the Waikato Regional Council works with primary industry on these issues, is there any further value that Care Groups might add in addressing those water quality issues?

I am now going to ask about soil issues and whether any of these are relevant to your group:

- protecting high class soils from becoming developed (such as, through subdivision)
- reducing the rate of cadmium accumulation (linked to phosphate fertiliser) and zinc accumulation (related to eczema remedies)
- peat soil management
- soil conservation, erosion and catchment management.

What value could Care Groups add to managing these issues?



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