

## Executive summary

This report reviews the Taranaki Regional Council's performance and achievements with regards to giving effect to its biodiversity functions for the 2008/2009 year. The report also fulfils the Council's statutory obligation under section 35 of the Resource Management Act 1991 to report to the regional community on its performance in exercising any functions, powers or duties delegated to it.

Set out below is a summary of the main biodiversity activities carried out by the Council in 2008/2009:

- Established its Biodiversity Section in August 2008 to coordinate and lead a 'whole of Council' approach to the delivery of its biodiversity responsibilities
- Undertook education activities, including the preparation of two new biodiversity specific information sheets, preparation of 21 media releases, undertaking three teacher workshops, undertaking the didymo communications programme, and maintaining the Council's website.
- Prepared biodiversity plans for 14 Key Native Ecosystems (covering 404.4 hectares). It had been intended to prepare 15 biodiversity plans. Two draft biodiversity plans were completed but not finalised due to the subsequent development of management plans by the community groups involved.
- Provided planning and technical input into three management plans prepared by community groups – two of which related to Key Native Ecosystems (Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve and Parininihi), the other involved a community kiwi recovery programme in east Taranaki.
- Supported the implementation of biodiversity plans by undertaking invasive weed and animal control work and wetland fencing/planting work at 11 Key Native Ecosystem sites.
- Through its environmental enhancement grants, Council contributed almost \$38,198 to support implementation of biodiversity plans. This included fencing, planting and invasive weed and animal control on seven Key Native Ecosystems. Council contributed a further \$39,423 of funding on works supporting the protection and enhancement of eight regionally significant wetlands.
- The Council obtained \$32,500 of corporate funding for biodiversity works at Waikirikiri and continues to manage Biodiversity Condition funding for Umutekai Bush.
- Taking into account Key Native Ecosystems already in the public conservation estate, 103 Key Native Ecosystems covering 111,073 hectares (66.9% of Key Native Ecosystem sites) are now formally (legally) protected.
- Facilitated one biodiversity forum and two kiwi forums to enable representatives from the various biodiversity agencies and community groups in Taranaki to discuss ways of working more closely and effectively together.
- Provided technical, financial and/or logistical support to several 'iconic' biodiversity projects, including the Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust, the East Taranaki Environment Trust kiwi project, and Ngāti Tama. The Council also continued to work in partnership with the Department of Conservation in terms of working towards the next possum control operation in Egmont National Park.
- Through its biodiversity activities, the Council is contributing towards community efforts to enhance agricultural production and indigenous biodiversity and amenity values in the region.



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose

This report reviews the Taranaki Regional Council's performance and achievements on its biodiversity functions for the 2008/2009 year.

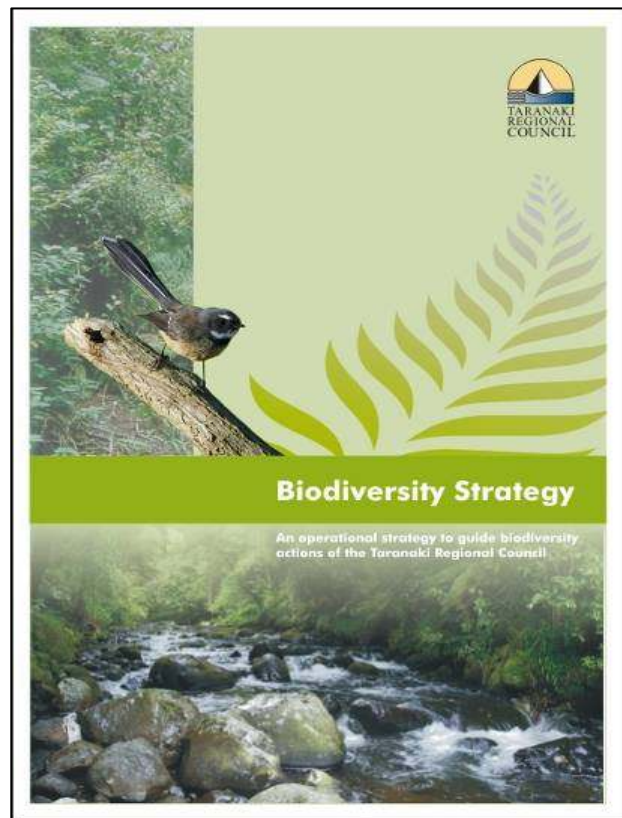
## 1.2 Background

Increased emphasis is now being placed on local government to provide for the maintenance and enhancement of indigenous terrestrial (land) biodiversity. The increased emphasis is supported by changes to the Resource Management Act (the Act) in 2003, which specifically identified the maintenance of indigenous biodiversity as a function of regional councils (section 30(ga) of the Act). It is also supported by government statements of national priorities for protecting rare and threatened native biodiversity on private land and by the Taranaki community, which has confirmed its support for such initiatives.

The Taranaki Regional Council (the Council) has previously been directly and indirectly involved in biodiversity related activities through the development of regional plans, the processing of resource consent applications, the protection regionally significant wetlands, the undertaking of pest animal and plant control, the assessment and removal of barriers to fish passage, and the implementation of riparian and sustainable land management programmes. However, in May 2008, the Council significantly increased its focus in biodiversity protection and enhancement when it adopted the *Biodiversity Strategy: an operational strategy to guide the biodiversity actions of the Council* (the Biodiversity Strategy).

The Biodiversity Strategy is a non-statutory strategy that identifies over 180 actions for implementing the Council's biodiversity responsibility, particularly on private land. Through the Biodiversity Strategy, the Council aims to further the management of biodiversity on privately owned land in Taranaki by:

- Focusing on regionally significant sites (Key Native Ecosystems)
- Enhancing the biodiversity component of existing Council programmes



*Biodiversity Strategy*

- Working with others, particularly on iconic projects lead by others in the community
- Developing systems for the gathering and management of biodiversity information.

Working alongside land owners with practical advice and support is a key factor in the implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy. One year on, it is timely to review the implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy against the objectives and performance measures set out in the Council's 2008/2009 *Annual Plan* and against the priorities and performance indicators set out in the Biodiversity Strategy.

## 1.3 Objectives, priorities and performance measures

### 1.3.1 Objectives and priorities

The objective for biodiversity for 2008/2009, as set out in the Council's 2008/2009 *Annual Plan*, is:

*"To promote the protection of the environment through a programme of enhancement grants."*

The Council's top biodiversity priorities, as set out in the Biodiversity Strategy, are:

- 1. Key Native Ecosystems**  
*Develop and implement an integrated and coordinated biodiversity protection and enhancement programme with private land owners on prioritised **Key Native Ecosystems** (regionally significant sites).*
- 2. Building on existing Council programmes**  
*Acknowledge the biodiversity component of existing Council programmes, particularly the provision of education and advice. Bring an increased 'biodiversity focus' to these programmes, especially as they relate to the national priorities, i.e. indigenous vegetation associated with threatened land environment types, wetlands, and habitats for threatened species.*
- 3. Working with others**  
*Where appropriate, facilitate improved coordination of biodiversity work undertaken by different agencies, trusts, community groups across Taranaki in order to build community capacity for the efficient and effective maintenance and enhancement of indigenous biodiversity. This will include the development of community based partnerships to achieve success with a small number of 'iconic' biodiversity projects.*
- 4. Information management and gathering**  
*Contribute to the management and development of biodiversity information systems relevant to Taranaki to ensure management decisions are based on sound scientific information and to enable the monitoring of outcomes for biodiversity in the region and the revision of priorities as necessary.*

### 1.3.2 Performance measures

The performance measures for biodiversity activities for 2008/2009 (as set out in the 2008/2009 *Annual Plan*) are:

- Implement a programme using environmental enhancement grants for the protection of wetlands identified as significant in the Council's adopted wetlands inventory and in the *Regional Fresh Water Plan for Taranaki*.
- Use environmental enhancement grants for the protection of aspects of the environment identified as regionally significant.

- Prepare 15 biodiversity plans for properties containing key native ecosystems.
- Monitor and report on progress on the implementation of 15 biodiversity plans.

In addition, the Biodiversity Strategy identifies a number of performance indicators for monitoring progress with its implementation. As appropriate, these are also reported on in this report.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Biodiversity Strategy is a five year strategy with a number of actions to be commenced over the life of the Plan – not all actions will necessarily be implemented in any given financial year.*

## 2 Report on progress

### 2.1 Enhancing biodiversity component of existing programmes

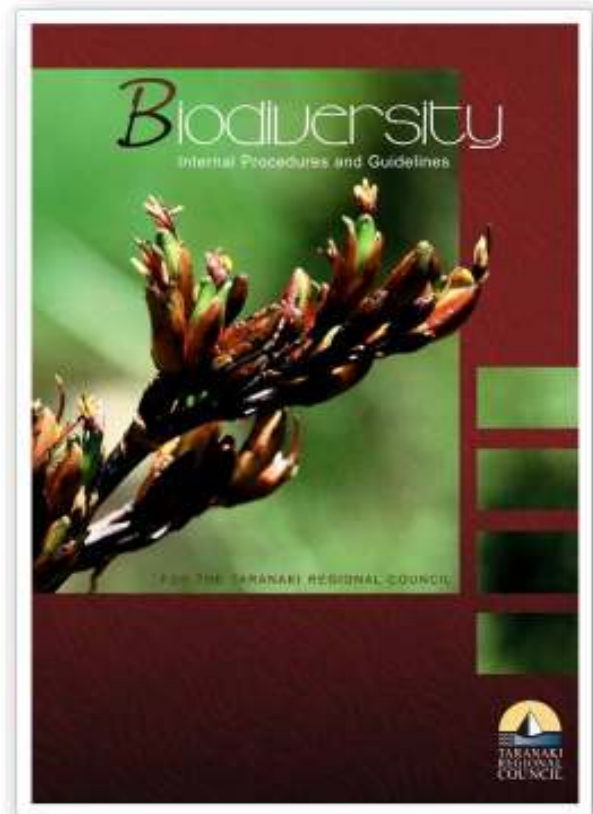
#### 2.1.1 Establishment of the Biodiversity Section

In August 2008, the Council established a small Biodiversity Section to coordinate and lead its implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy (currently two full-time equivalents).

However, the new structural arrangements recognise that biodiversity work, by its very nature, requires a 'whole of Council' approach. While the Biodiversity Section provides a point of focus, practically every section of the Council continues to be involved and contribute to the delivery of the Council's biodiversity programmes, including the Land Management, Pest Management, Technical Services, Inspectorate, and Policy and Planning sections.

#### 2.1.2 Whole of agency approach

In February 2009, the Council finalised the document *Biodiversity – internal procedures and guidelines for the Taranaki Regional Council*. The guidelines were prepared to assist in the delivery of the Council's 'whole of agency' approach. In particular, the guidelines provide staff guidance on respective (inter-departmental) roles and responsibilities for biodiversity related activities, and document agreed processes, criteria and procedures relating to the selection of Key Native Ecosystems, the preparation of biodiversity plans, and their implementation.



*Biodiversity – internal procedures and guidelines for the Taranaki Regional Council (2009)*

In 2008/2009, the Biodiversity Section regularly met with and worked with other sections of the Council in the development and implementation of biodiversity plans.

#### 2.1.3 Enhancing biodiversity actions in existing programmes

The Council has a number of programmes already that contribute to biodiversity outcomes on private land, rivers, streams and wetlands, and in the coastal marine area in the region. In 2008/2009, the Council investigated opportunities for increasing the biodiversity focus of existing programmes – particularly the provision of education and advice.

## Information, advice and communications

In May 2009, the Council finalised its communications plan for biodiversity to guide its information, advice and communications programmes. Council is now implementing that plan. Implementation of the communications plan, aims to increase public awareness and understanding of indigenous biodiversity in Taranaki, enable individuals, groups and communities to better value Taranaki's indigenous biodiversity; to work for its protection and enhancement; and to enjoy and share in its benefits, and increase the awareness of Council programmes and initiatives to maintain and enhance indigenous biodiversity in the Taranaki region, particularly in relation to Key Native Ecosystems.

In 2008/2009, the Council prepared two new fact sheets to supplement existing fact sheets relating to wetlands, indigenous forestry, bush retirement, and riparian planting. The new fact sheets were *Biodiversity – a general overview* and *Biodiversity plans – taking action to protect the jewels in our biodiversity crown*. Additional sheets are planned next financial year to progressively cover other aspects of biodiversity.

The Council continued to promote biodiversity through 21 media releases. The releases included information on World Wetlands Day, didymo awareness and the riparian restoration programme. In addition, three biodiversity-related case studies from the 2009 State of the Environment Report were published in the Taranaki Daily News.



New fact sheets

The Recount newsletter, which is distributed to over 1,000 key stakeholders, organisations and media, was used to inform people on a number of biodiversity related matters such as riparian planting, pest management, and wetland management. In addition, Council maintained biodiversity information on its website, which includes a biodiversity page and links to biodiversity publications. Website statistics show Chapter 3 of the Biodiversity Strategy, which gives an overview of biodiversity in the region, has been opened and/or downloaded more than 120 times a month, on average. Also of interest to website users is the Inventory of Key Native Ecosystems (e.g. pages 148-217 was opened and/or downloaded some 70 times a month, on average).

Three teacher workshops addressing biodiversity issues were facilitated by the Council including: *Visit the rock pools*; *A pond as an example of a wetland*; and *A biodiversity workshop*.

The *Didymo Communications Plan* for the 2008/2009 summer period was implemented by the Council on behalf of the Taranaki Regional Didymo Group. The programme was funded by MAF Biosecurity New Zealand. It involved education and promotion activities to increase public knowledge of didymo, especially amongst freshwater users, and to encourage responsible freshwater hygiene practices.

Environmental awards were awarded to seven schools (these being Coastal Area, Waitoriki, Marco, Matapu, Kaimata, Omata and Opunake High for increasing environmental awareness and understanding through environmental education.

For further information, please refer to the *Annual Significant Report for Public Information*.

### **Compliance programmes**

Each year the Council investigates and responds to public enquiries relating to its functions under the Resource Management Act (these responsibilities relate to the management of coastal, air, water and land resources in the Taranaki region).

In 2008/2009, Council responded to 517 environmental incidents - many of which, to some extent, impact on biodiversity values, e.g. discharge of contaminants to land and water, land drainage and culverting. However, three incidents of particular note are highlighted in this report.

The first incident involved land drainage and vegetation clearance activities at Pungarehu. The activities were investigated in October 2008 and were noted as being in accordance with standards, terms and conditions of the Council's regional plans. Advice and information were disseminated to the land holder and no further action was required.

On 23 January 2009 during unrelated monitoring it was found that unauthorised earthworks, drainage and clear felling of native bush had been undertaken in a protected wetland area at Alfred Road, New Plymouth. The second incident involved the discovery of unauthorised earthworks, land drainage and vegetation clearance activities at the Alfred Road Wetland. This wetland is 150 hectares in size. It is a regionally significant unprotected wetland (as listed in Appendix IIB of the *Regional Fresh Water Plan for Taranaki*), a Key Native Ecosystem, and is listed in the *New Plymouth District Plan* as a Significant Natural Area.

The Council undertook extensive investigations involving an aerial inspection and site inspection, including the exercise of a search warrant. Council investigations confirmed approximately 5.5 hectares of vegetation clearance and unauthorised drainage works. As a result of the investigations, an enforcement order was sought and granted by the Environment Court requiring the land holders to fill in the drain and divert water back into the wetland. Because of special circumstances, prosecution action was not considered appropriate.



*Vegetation clearance and land drainage activities at the Alfred Road Wetland*

The third incident involved the Swampy Bush Wetland. This wetland is 23 hectares in size and lies approximately seven kilometres south east of Rahotu. It is a regionally significant unprotected wetland (as listed in Appendix IIB of the *Regional Fresh Water Plan for Taranaki*), a Key Native Ecosystem, and is listed in the *South Taranaki District Plan* as a Significant Natural Area.

The Council undertook a site inspection in response to vegetation clearance activities in May 2009. The inspection confirmed the vegetation clearance but no contravention of the land drainage rules of the *Regional Fresh Water Plan for Taranaki*. The vegetation clearance activities were reported to the South Taranaki District Council. The land holder has subsequently offered to covenant another area of bush on his property to mitigate/offset the removal of the vegetation from Swampy Bush.

### Other Council programmes and activities contributing to biodiversity

As highlighted in Table 1 below, there are a number of other Council programmes/activities contributing to biodiversity outcomes in the Taranaki region. These include the Self-help Possum Control Programme, which involves Council working with land holders to reduce and maintain low possum numbers on the ring plain (at or below a 10% residual trap catch – a level, which amongst other things, protects tree canopy from possum browsing).

Another programme, the Sustainable Land Management Programme, involves the provision of a property planning service and other assistance to interested landowners to promote sustainable land management practices in the hill country (e.g. retiring indigenous vegetation) and the retirement and replanting of stream banks on the ring plain (e.g. wildlife corridors from the coast to the mountain).

**Table 1:** Summary of other Council activities contributing to biodiversity in 2008/2009

Other Council programmes	Highlights for 2008/2009
<b>Policy and Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proposed <i>Regional Policy Statement for Taranaki</i> adopted by Council</li> <li>Prepared biodiversity guidelines, fact sheets &amp; communication plan</li> <li>For further information refer to <i>Annual Report – Policy and Planning 2008/2009</i></li> </ul>
<b>Pest animal and plant management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As at 30 June 2009, through the Self-help Possum Control Programme, low possum numbers being maintained on 3,753 properties covering 228,418 ha (mean residual trap catch of 6.9%)</li> <li>55 Key Native Ecosystems on the ring plain are in the Self-help Possum Control Programme</li> <li>Participated in several major pest control operations on Key Native Ecosystems and iconic sites in partnership with land occupiers, other agencies or community groups</li> <li>For further information refer to <i>Annual Report – Pest Animal Management 2008/2009</i></li> <li>Undertook direct control of environmental weeds not yet established in the region, e.g. Senegal tea, climbing spindleberry, mignonette vine, giant reed and Darwin's barberry</li> <li>As required, assisted biodiversity plan holders with weed control</li> <li>For further information refer to <i>Annual Report – Pest Plant Management 2008/2009</i></li> </ul>
<b>Sustainable land management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As at 30 June 2009, 2,255 riparian plans covering 12,212 km of stream bank have been prepared</li> <li>As at 30 June 2009, 286 comprehensive plans have been prepared addressing sustainability issues in the hill country. These plans cover 171,845 ha</li> <li>Provided 254,038 native trees to 702 plan holders at low cost. Over 1.5 million native plants supplied to date</li> <li>8 regionally significant wetlands received \$39,423 of the Council's Environmental Enhancement Grant funding for works contributing to their protection &amp; enhancement</li> <li>Continued to administer, service &amp; provide financial support (\$30,000) to the Taranaki Tree Trust</li> <li>For further information refer to <i>Annual Report – Land Management 2008/2009</i></li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring &amp; investigations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refer section 2.4 of this report</li> </ul>
<b>Others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enforcement – investigated 3 drainage and wetland clearance activities</li> <li>For further information refer to <i>Annual Report – Compliance Monitoring 2008/2009</i></li> </ul>

## 2.2 Key Native Ecosystem Programme

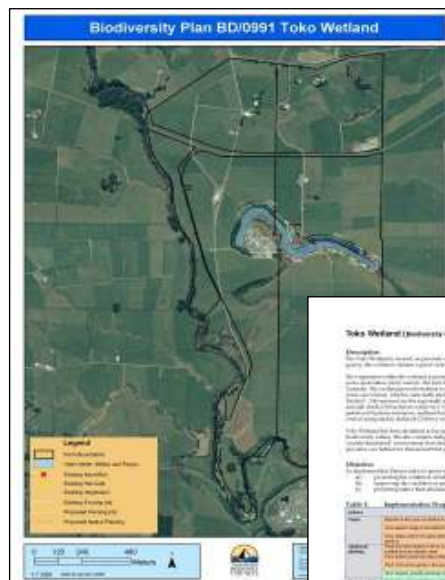
### 2.2.1 Biodiversity planning

As at 30 June 2009, the Council's Key Native Ecosystem Inventory<sup>2</sup> included 154 sites (covering 118,933 hectares), 103 of which are partially or completely privately owned (covering over 9,000 hectares). These sites are typically small coastal or lowland remnants but have been identified as having regionally significant indigenous biodiversity values based on the presence of acutely threatened or regionally distinctive native flora and fauna species, indigenous vegetation that is representative of a type now much reduced from its original extent, and the wider ecological context.

Management actions necessary to protect Key Native Ecosystems will vary from site to site. Accordingly, the Council provides a property planning service targeted at Key Native Ecosystems on privately owned land. The property planning service involves the preparation of biodiversity plans that are customised to suit the site and land holders (model similar to that used for riparian plans and comprehensive plans). Planning the management at each site is important to ensure that all aspects of management are considered (e.g. it is no good killing the predators if meanwhile old man's beard is smothering the canopy).

A biodiversity plan consists of a laminated A3, colour, aerial photograph of the property, and identifies the actions that will be undertaken on the site to improve and enhance biodiversity values and who is responsible for these.

Through biodiversity plans, the Council aims to work with and assist land owners in maintaining and enhancing indigenous biodiversity values associated with their Key Native Ecosystems. The plans are also used to access Council and external funding for works identified in the plans.



*Biodiversity plan for Toko wetland*



<sup>2</sup> Taranaki Regional Council, 2006: 'Key Native Ecosystems – Inventory of sites with indigenous biodiversity values of regional significance'.

improve the natural values on the property. Where applicable, the Council will also be seeking opportunities to enhance connectivity between fragmented remnants on a property.

Council also prepared two draft biodiversity plans for Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve (243 hectares) and Parininihi (1,600 hectares). These Key Native Ecosystems are 'iconic' biodiversity projects (refer section 2.3.2 below), being delivered by local community groups/Iwi. The biodiversity plans were not finalised due to the subsequent development of management plans by the community groups involved (and to avoid unnecessary duplication). Instead the Council provided planning and technical input into the management plans.

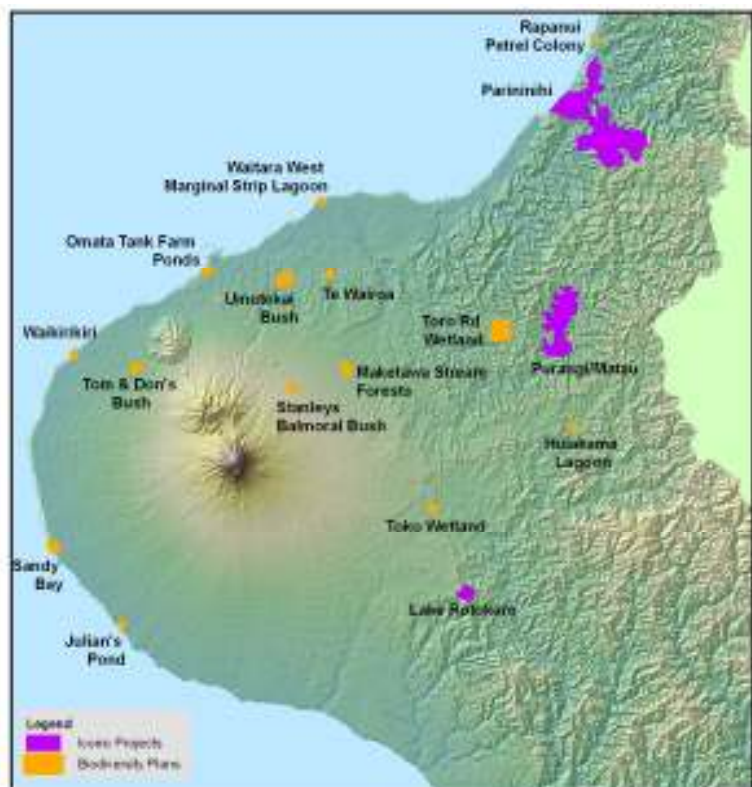
Council also had input into a community kiwi recovery programme in eastern Taranaki (Pouiatoa/Purangi/Matau) – this covers approximately 13,000 hectares of privately owned and Department of Conservation land. The Council will be preparing memorandums of understandings, instead of biodiversity plans (to avoid unnecessarily duplicating the plans), to formalise its support of the care groups' activities.

Council has commenced discussions with a number of other land holders as the first step in determining their interest in having and implementing a biodiversity plan.

Figure 1 shows the location of Key Native Ecosystems for which Council has prepared biodiversity plans plus significant community-led programmes for which the Council has also provided planning and other support. For further information on the



*Council officer investigating options to actively manage and protect Umutekai bush*



*Figure 1: Biodiversity plans and community management plans in the Taranaki region*

community-led projects refer to section 2.3.2 below.

## 2.2.2 Biodiversity plan implementation

Out of its biodiversity planning work, Council has supported possum and predator control work, invasive weed control and wetland fencing/planting work. In 2008/2009, the Council commenced works on 11 of the 14 Key Native Ecosystems for which it has prepared biodiversity plans. In particular, the Council:

- carried out invasive animal control on nine Key Native Ecosystems – predominantly possum, mustelids and rodent control (Julian’s Pond, Maketawa Forests, Rapanui Petrel Colony, Sandy Bay, Te Wairoa, Toko Wetland, Tom and Don’s Bush, Umutekai Bush, and Waitara West Marginal Strip Lagoon)
- carried out or commissioned invasive weed control on two Key Native Ecosystems (Umutekai Bush and Toko Wetland)
- contributed 1,035 native plants covering five hectares at two Key Native Ecosystem (Waikirikiri Lagoon and Huiakama Lagoon) plus the Council assisted with the planting of 9,000 spinifex plants at Sandy Bay
- contributed to the cost of 2,320 metres of fencing on two Key Native Ecosystems (Waikirikiri Lagoon and Tom and Don’s Bush).

Through the biodiversity plans, the Council typically undertakes initial control works, with the land holder/care group assuming responsibility for and increasing share of on-going maintenance. Appendix I and II of this report provides a summary of the Council and land holders/community groups’ progress with implementing biodiversity plans.

## 2.2.3 Environmental Enhancement Grant and other funding

Where possible, the costs of Council activities supporting biodiversity plan implementation are borne within existing departmental budgets. However, \$38,198 of additional funding was also sourced from the Council’s Environmental Enhancement Grant to support implementation of the biodiversity plans at the Huiakama Lagoon, Maketawa Stream Forests, Toko Wetland, Tom and Don’s Bush, Umutekai Bush, Waikirikiri Lagoon, and the Waitara West Marginal Strip Lagoon.

The Council also contributed another \$39,423 of Environmental Enhancement Grant funding on works contributing to the protection and enhancement of eight regionally significant wetlands (listed in the *Regional Fresh Water Plan for Taranaki*).

In addition to Council funding, approximately \$86,000 of central government funding has



*Waikirikiri is a regionally significant ephemeral wetland. Historically, livestock damage has been a problem.*

been obtained via the Biodiversity Condition Fund for two Key Native Ecosystems (Umutekai Bush, which the Council is managing on behalf of the landowners, and Sandy Bay, which is managed by the community group).

The Council has also successfully obtained and is overseeing \$32,000 of corporate funding from AWE and Prosafe for 1,950 metres of fencing and the 935 enhancement plants to protect and enhance natural values associated with Waikirikiri Lagoon.

Table 2 provides an overview of the state of Key Native Ecosystems particularly in relation to their management. Of note, as at 30 June 2009, 103 Key Native Ecosystems covering 111,073 hectares (66.9% of Key Native Ecosystem sites) are now formally (legally) protected<sup>3</sup>. Since the preparation of the Council's Key Native Ecosystem Inventory in 2006, eight Key Native Ecosystems have been QEII covenanted.

**Table 2: State of Key Native Ecosystems (KNEs)**

Indicator	30 June 2009	
	No.	Ha
Total KNEs	154	118,933
KNEs wholly or partially on private land	103	9,303
KNEs in the Self-help Possum Control Programme	55	1,459
KNEs with a biodiversity/management plan	16	2,247
Privately-owned KNEs receiving Council/external funding	16	718.7
Area of KNEs formally protected	105	111,073

## 2.3 Working with others

### 2.3.1 Biodiversity forums and partnerships

The Biodiversity Strategy recognises the many agencies, community groups, and individuals contributing to biodiversity in Taranaki and opportunities to support others.

On 3 June 2009, the Council held the second Taranaki Biodiversity Forum to discuss the latest Landcare Research findings applicable to Taranaki. The meeting was well attended by representatives from a wide variety of agencies, trusts and community groups involved in biodiversity in Taranaki, including representatives from the Council, Landcare Research, Taranaki Kiwi Trust, Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust, South Taranaki District Council, New Plymouth District Council, Federated Farmers, Forest and Bird, Ornithological Society, East Taranaki Environment Trust, Department of Conservation, Herpetological Society, and interested land holders.

The Council has also organised and facilitated two Taranaki Kiwi Forums (16 February and 8 April 2009) to improve liaison and communication between all parties interested/involved in kiwi protection in Taranaki, explore opportunities for joint work such as communications, and promote a Taranaki approach to kiwi recovery projects.

<sup>3</sup> 'Formal protection' refers to where land has been set aside for conservation purposes, e.g. the site lies in the public conservation estate, is protected as a reserve, or has a covenant or caveat on the title deed protecting natural values associated with the land. Of note all natural areas are protected to some extent by district and regional rules that control the use and development of resources.

Council meets regularly with care groups and other stakeholders to progress biodiversity outcomes, e.g. Royal Forest and Bird, Queen Elizabeth II Trust, the district councils, Department of Conservation, East Taranaki Environment Trust, Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust, and Ngāti Tara Oaonui Sandy Bay Society Inc. It is anticipated, over time, parties may wish to formalise partnerships, particularly where opportunities exist to increase capacity and stretch finite resources.

### 2.3.2 Iconic projects

The Council also supported several 'iconic' biodiversity projects. Iconic projects are 'big ticket' projects driven by community groups and which showcase Taranaki's biodiversity. Council involvement in such projects is assessed on a case by case basis (recognising and acknowledging the different levels of commitment and contributions to the project).

In 2008/2009, Council provided technical and financial support to the following iconic projects:<sup>4</sup>

- **Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve:** The Council assisted the Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust with their pest eradication programme through the provision of ongoing advice and technical assistance (such as storage and monitoring of bait), and financial support. In September and November 2008, Council officers assisted the Trust to undertake two aerial bait applications in the reserve (specifically targeting the eradication of rodents). In May 2009, following a pest incursion into the reserve, the Council also assisted with a small ground application.
- **Parininihi:** Parininihi, which was returned to Ngāti Tama in 2003 as part of their Treaty of Waitangi settlement, lies in the Whitecliffs Key Native Ecosystem. In August 2008, the Council assisted Ngāti Tama to undertake aerial possum control work on 1,600 hectares of forest at Parininihi. The possum control operation successfully reduced possum numbers to very low levels (down from 16.0% residual trap catch in 2006 to 0.66%). Council officers also provided technical advice and training to Ngāti Tama in relation to pest management.
- **Sandy Bay:** The Council continued to provide logistical support, advice and information, and other assistance to the Ngāti Tara Oaonui Sandy Bay Society on predator control (particularly in relation to hedgehogs and feral cats) and restoration



*Council officers assisting with aerial rodent control in the Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve*

<sup>4</sup> Three of these projects also involve Key Native Ecosystems, i.e. Lake Rotokare, Parininihi and Sandy Bay.

plantings. The Society has successfully obtained biodiversity condition funding to protect and restore natural values associated with Sandy Bay. In May and June 2009 the Council undertook rabbit and hare control to protect newly planted enhancement plants at Sandy Bay. The Council is planning to upgrade traps next financial year in accordance with their biodiversity plan.

- **East Taranaki kiwi recovery project:** The East Taranaki Environment Trust aim is to work with local land occupiers in east Taranaki and have 500 pairs of the western North Island kiwi under predator protection. In 2008/2009, Council provided financial and 'in kind' support to the Trust for the construction of a goat enclosure plot, to undertake pre possum control monitoring at Purangi and Matau, and with kiwi call monitoring. The Council has also supported the Trust's successful application to the Ministry for the Environment's Sustainable Management Fund for project funding.

This financial year, the Department of Conservation will commence its treatment of the Egmont National Park to reduce possum infestation levels. In conjunction with the Department of Conservation's operation, Council has agreed to treat privately owned land adjacent to the Park and ensure an integrated approach to possum control across both private and public land. This will involve 220 properties covering 15,229 hectares of land. Council's planning, including the award of possum control contracts has been completed with the control scheduled to commence in August 2009.

In 2008/2009, the Council further assisted the Department of Conservation, East Taranaki Environment Trust and the Central North Island Blue Duck Trust with land owner liaison to extend the stoat trapping programme to safeguard blue duck habitat.

Liaising with community groups and other agencies is critical. Other groups and agencies may already have developed a relationship with the land holder, and it is important to streamline the management of biodiversity on that site to avoid doubling up of effort. Other agencies or community groups may also be helpful in terms of information gathering, e.g. Ornithological and Herpetological Societies.

### **2.3.3 Advocacy**

The Strategy identifies a number of avenues for Council led advocacy on biodiversity matters. In 2008/2009, the Council make submissions on a number of biodiversity-related documents. These included making submissions on Biosecurity New Zealand's High Priority Organisms Project, and the Department of Conservation's review of Canada goose wildlife status.

## **2.4 Information management, monitoring and information gathering**

### **2.4.1 Ecological monitoring**

Much of Council's ecological information on Key Native Ecosystems is based upon surveys carried out in the 1980s. Accordingly, as practicable, Council staff have been visiting sites and updating information.

In 2008/2009, the Council carried out seven forest condition assessments, three quick plot monitoring of vegetative health, and three quantitative monitoring of wetland condition at various Key Native Ecosystems.

Fauna species presence/absence surveys have been conducted and plant species lists compiled at a number of Key Native Ecosystem sites where ecological data of this kind was lacking. Examples in which regionally rare or threatened species were detected for the first time include fernbird and spotless crake at Huiakama Lagoon, spotless crake at Lake Kaikura, and gold stripe gecko at Umutekai Bush. In addition, five minute bird count surveys were conducted at Umutekai as part of an ongoing programme to measure the benefits of pest animal control on bird populations at the site. A number of sites were also visited to assess whether they qualify to be included in the Key Native Ecosystem Inventory.

Of note is the contribution of care groups, and interested organizations and individuals to the Council's monitoring. For example, Barry Hartley (Ornithological Society of New Zealand) regularly visits several sites for which biodiversity plans have been prepared (e.g. Julian's Pond, Sandy Bay and Waikirikiri) to record bird diversity and abundance and Peter Fryer undertakes bird monitoring at Waitara West Marginal Strip. Building and utilizing community capacity to undertake monitoring will be an important component of the Councils upcoming biodiversity monitoring strategy.

In September to October 2008, the Council collaborated with the Department of Conservation in providing technical and field support to Ngāti Tama to assess the benefits of possum control on forest cover in the Parininihi and adjacent control area.

Throughout 2008/2009, the Council provided technical support and assistance with ecological monitoring to the Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust, specifically with vegetation and reptile monitoring aimed at demonstrating the positive impacts of eradicating pest mammals from the reserve.

In May 2009, the Council also assisted the East Taranaki Environment Trust with kiwi call surveys in Pouiatoa.



*Council officer undertaking vegetation monitoring in Tom and Don's Bush*



*Gold striped gecko – largely endemic to Taranaki – just one of many threatened species urgently requiring habitat protection*

## **2.4.2 Biodiversity database**

Council has made considerable progress in the development of a Biodiversity Database. Over the summer, information in the Council's Key Native Ecosystem Inventory was entered into the database. Council now has the capacity to easily amend information on Key Native Ecosystems (and other sites) as new information comes to hand.

Corporate Services is progressively developing the database so that information on management actions and monitoring can also be collated.

## **2.4.3 Development of a Monitoring Strategy for Biodiversity**

In 2008/2009 Council commenced a review of its monitoring requirements for biodiversity – particularly in relation to terrestrial (land) biodiversity – and is currently developing a Biodiversity Monitoring Strategy. The Strategy will address the state of biodiversity in the Taranaki region, including privately owned Regionally Significant Wetlands and Key Native Ecosystems. The main aims of this Strategy will be:

1. To enable Taranaki Regional Council to assess to what extent objectives stated in the Council's Biodiversity Strategy are being achieved;
2. To provide necessary data to enable Taranaki Regional Council to report on the state of the region's biodiversity and meet its biodiversity reporting obligations under the Resource Management Act (1991); and
3. To provide data by which the Council can make better informed decisions relating to management of Key Native Ecosystem sites and species, in particular by providing data on the effectiveness of management actions such as predator and weed control.

This exercise will involve reviewing what other agencies and councils are doing in terms of biodiversity monitoring and current best practice. The Biodiversity Monitoring Strategy is anticipated to be completed in 2009/2010.

### 3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Council has substantially met its objectives and performance measures for biodiversity as set out in the Council's *2008/2009 Annual Plan*.

Significant progress has been made by the Council in terms of working with land holder (and other affected parties) to protect Key Native Ecosystems and Council initiatives and activities have been well received by the community. Set out below is a summary of the main biodiversity activities carried out by the Council in 2008/2009:

- Established its Biodiversity Section in August 2008 to coordinate and lead a 'whole of Council' approach to the delivery of its biodiversity responsibilities.
- Undertook education activities, including the preparation of two new biodiversity specific information sheets, preparation of 21 media releases, undertaking three teacher workshops, undertaking the didymo communications programme, and maintaining the Council's website.
- Prepared biodiversity plans for 14 Key Native Ecosystems (covering 404.4 hectares). It had been intended to prepare 15 biodiversity plans. Two draft biodiversity plans were completed but not finalised due to the subsequent development of management plans by the community groups involved.
- Provided planning and technical input into three management plans prepared by community groups – two of which related to Key Native Ecosystems (Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve and Parininihi), the other involved a community kiwi recovery programme in east Taranaki.
- Supported the implementation of biodiversity plans by undertaking invasive weed and animal control work and wetland fencing/planting work at 11 Key Native Ecosystem sites.
- Through its environmental enhancement grants, Council contributed almost \$38,198 to support fencing, planting and invasive weed and animal control on seven Key Native Ecosystems. Council contributed a further \$39,423 of funding on works supporting the protection and enhancement of eight regionally significant wetlands.
- Obtained \$32,500 of corporate funding for biodiversity works at Waikirikiri and continues to manage Biodiversity Condition funding for Umutekai Bush.
- Taking into account Key Native Ecosystems already in the public conservation estate, 103 Key Native Ecosystems covering 111,073 hectares (66.9% of Key Native Ecosystem sites) are now formally (legally) protected.
- Facilitated one biodiversity forum and two kiwi forums to enable representatives from the various biodiversity agencies and community groups in Taranaki to discuss ways of working more closely and effectively together.
- Provided technical, financial and/or logistical support to several 'iconic' biodiversity projects, including the Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust, the East Taranaki Environment Trust kiwi project, and Ngāti Tama. The Council is also working with the Department of Conservation with regards to the next possum control operation in Egmont National Park.

Through its biodiversity activities, the Council is contributing towards community efforts to enhance indigenous biodiversity and amenity values in the region. These activities are contributing towards achieving community outcomes relating to a prosperous and sustainable Taranaki.

This report will be forwarded to key interested biodiversity stakeholders.

## Appendix I: Summary of progress with Key Native Ecosystems (as at 30 June 2009)

Key Native Ecosystem	Management initiated							Comments
	Biodiversity or other plan	Formal protection	Fencing/natural barriers	Enhancement planting	Invasive weeds	Invasive animals	Council /external funding	
Alfred Road wetland			√	√			√	Regionally significant wetland
Dudley Road (Stanley Balmoral) Wetland	√	√	√					Biodiversity planning just completed. Implementation to be commenced 2009/2010
Huiakama Lagoon	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Julian's Pond	√	√	√			√		Biodiversity planning just completed. Implementation to be commenced 2009/2010
Lake Mangawhio North			√	√			√	Regionally significant wetland
Lake Oturi			√	√			√	Regionally significant wetland
Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve	Management Plan*	√	√		√	√	√	Predator proof fencing. Council continues to provide advice and support to care group
Lake Waikare and catchment			√	√			√	Regionally significant wetland
Maketawa Stream Forests	√		√	√	√	√	√	
Nukuhau Lake Catchment			√	√			√	Regionally significant wetland
Omata (Tank Farm) Ponds	√	√	√	√		√		
Parininihi (Ngati Tama Whitecliff area)	Management Plan*	√						
Rapanui Petrel Colony	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	Council staff carried out annual inspection of predator proof fence
Sandy Bay	√	In part	√	√	√	√	√	Biodiversity Condition funding obtained by care group. All of site formally protected through QEII or as reserve except for one property owner
Swampy Bush			√	√			√	Regionally significant wetland
Te Wairoa	√	√	√	√	√	√		
Te Wara Wetland			√	√			√	Regionally significant wetland
Toko wetland	√	In part	√	√	√	√	√	Biodiversity Plan only covers part of the site (1 of the 2 properties). TRC memorandum of encumbrance applies to site
Tom and Don's Bush	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Toro Road	√	√	In part	√	√	√		Large site. Biodiversity planning just completed. Implementation to be commenced 2009/2010 & focuses on wetland only (seeking external funding in 2009/2010 to actively manage remainder of the site)
Umutekai bush and conservation area	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	Biodiversity condition funds secured to put in place predator control. Rat and bird surveys conducted, prior to predator control commencing
Waikirikiri	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	Significant corporate funding. TRC memorandum of encumbrance
Waitara West Marginal Strip Lagoon	√	In part	√	√		√	√	Largely Department of Conservation land. Difficulties to date with obtaining Department of Conservation 'buy in'

\* Refers to a management plan prepared by the care group that the Council has had input.

## Appendix II: Summary of progress with iconic and other sites

Key Native Ecosystem	Management							Comments
	Planning	Formal protection	Fencing/natural barriers	Enhancement planting	Invasive weeds	Invasive animals	Council funding	
Pouiatoa/ Matau/Purangi Kiwi Recovery Programme	√	In part				√	√	Council has continued to provide advice and support including financial support to prepare marketing proposal to progress predator control over the area.