



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

On behalf of the Taranaki Regional Council it is my pleasure to present the Council's *2008/2009 Annual Report* to the regional community.

The Council is involved in a diverse range of roles, responsibilities and public services. Across this range of activities 2008/2009 was another operationally and financially busy and successful year. The Council has continued to focus on the efficient and effective delivery of its core functions. High levels of outputs were delivered across the range of Council activity areas, consistent with previous years.

On the environmental front, of particular importance was the launch of the Council's third five-yearly state of the environment report. The report found that Taranaki can be proud of having a high quality environment, which is valued and well managed by the community.

Like any report card, though, there are positives and negatives. In summary, the report finds that:

- More of the eastern hill country land is being managed sustainably
- Our soils are generally healthy

- Agencies and community groups have stepped up efforts to protect indigenous biodiversity by undertaking predator control programmes
- The ecological health of rivers and streams has measurably improved at a number of sites and not measurably deteriorated at any site over the past dozen years
- Measures of ecological health, such as the communities of invertebrates living in streams, are good to excellent in the upper catchments where there is more stream bank vegetation cover but only fair further down the catchments where land use is more intense
- Fresh water usually meets the bacteriological guidelines for swimming, except after floods or in some intensively farmed catchments. Phosphorus levels, already naturally high and exceeding guidelines, are generally increasing further. Nitrogen levels meet guidelines in upper catchments but not further down
- Regionally significant wetlands have on the whole been adequately protected but small

wetlands and streams are under pressure from land development

- Coastal water quality for ocean swimming is excellent, and rocky shore ecological health is reasonably stable
- Overall air quality in the region is excellent
- Landscape, amenity and heritage values are of high quality
- While the whole region is now serviced by just one landfill, the quantity of waste has increased by 20% over 12 years.

The 2009 report finds total spending on the environment by the Taranaki community is conservatively estimated at \$85.1 million a year, an increase of \$28 million a year since our 2003 report. Our high-quality environment has not come about by accident but by the co-operative and increasingly proactive actions of the community.

On the recreation, culture and heritage front the regional community reaped the benefits of the Council's investments over the last few years. Yarrow Stadium hosted Taranaki's first All Black test match. The success of this

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event has resulted in Yarrow Stadium being awarded hosting rights for three games at the 2011 Rugby World Cup. In 2001/2002 the Council, with significant community backing, invested \$9.6m in the redevelopment of Yarrow Stadium.

Tupare and Hollard Gardens were re-launched in October 2008 following a period of redevelopment. The Council's investment in these properties has been embraced by the regional community. Visitors to Tupare rose from 4,000 to 21,100 in 2008/2009. Similarly public use of Hollard Gardens increased from 2,500 to 11,600. It is especially pleasing to report upon this increased use of these free public facilities. Both properties are garden icons of Taranaki.

Transport was a particularly challenging and busy activity for the Council throughout the year. Legislative changes resulted in a new Regional Land Transport Committee for the Council and then a new planning document—the *Regional Land Transport Programme*.

The Council also continued the improvements in the provision of its passenger transport services. New bus service providers and new routes were introduced throughout 2008/2009. These improvements resulted in the Council providing approximately 350,000 bus passenger trips and 80,000 total mobility passenger trips.

The ability to continue to develop and expand passenger transport services in line with the regional community's expectations is being curtailed by the government's funding decisions.

In terms of biosecurity the Council's *Self-Help Possum Control Programme* continues to be a highly successful collaboration with land owners. Their commitment to continuing pest animal maintenance on their property means that possums are at such a level that their ability to impact upon the region's agricultural and productive sector is under control. The residual trap catch rate – a measure of possum population numbers – is 6.9%. At this level production and biodiversity values in the region are being protected.

Financially the Council continued its strong financial performance. The Council had an operating surplus of \$1.3m and holds no public debt. This places the Council in an excellent position to move forward.

Over time the Council has continued its commitment to public ownership of a key strategic regional asset—Port Taranaki Ltd. The port company's contribution to the Council's financial position, through dividends, cannot be underestimated. However it should be recalled that Port Taranaki Ltd operates in a highly competitive environment. As such revenue, profitability and dividend streams are variable and cannot be guaranteed. The Council has always returned dividends to the regional community by reducing the general rate requirement. If the port company suffers financially then the reduced dividend streams will either impact adversely on general rates or upon the Council's ability to deliver its services. Regardless the Council remains committed to public ownership of Port Taranaki Ltd as a strategic asset.

An organisation of this type cannot operate effectively without the contributions from a dedicated and professional management and staff under the astute leadership of Chief Executive Basil Chamberlain. I would like to take this opportunity to personally, and on behalf of the Council, thank all of the staff, management and external parties who have contributed to another successful year.

The Council is in a very sound financial and operational position. With the continued assistance of our community, we are able to look forward optimistically to our role in enhancing our region's future.

On behalf of the Taranaki Regional Council Councillors,



David MacLeod
Chairman



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INTRODUCTION

The 2008/2009 year was a successful one for the Taranaki Regional Council in delivering quality outputs across a wide range of Council activities. As in previous years the Council continued to work closely with the Taranaki community to make good progress towards achieving community outcomes – those things we collectively desire for our wellbeing. With some exceptions, monitoring by the Council shows that the region has a good and healthy environment that is being maintained and improved with time and investment. This has occurred within the context of continuing economic uncertainty nationally and internationally during the year.

The fact that the Taranaki community is tracking well towards achieving a sustainable environment that supports a prosperous economy was demonstrated in the Council's five yearly report card, *Taranaki, Where We Stand: State of the Environment Report 2009*, launched in April 2009 by the Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Dr Nick Smith. The findings of the report show very good results in many areas for example in water and air quality and in land sustainability.

The Council has been collecting data for a sufficiently long enough period now for statistically significant trends to be identified.

Over the past twelve years, the ecological health of our rivers and streams has demonstrably improved at a number of sites the Council monitors, including a number in the middle and lower reaches of catchments and has not demonstrably deteriorated at any sites despite increasing pressures from more intensive land use. There are ongoing challenges for the future though. We know for example that water quality deteriorates with increasing distance downstream as the impacts of agriculture become more intense. The Council has programmes in place to address these issues and they are reported in later sections of this report.

Addressing our environmental challenges requires collaborative effort by the Council working with the community. There is very clear evidence that the Taranaki community is well positioned to meet these challenges and indeed is already doing so very successfully. Independent economic analysis carried out for the Council by Business and Economic Research Ltd as part of state of the environment report revealed capital investment by the Taranaki community on environmental improvements in excess of \$216 million over the last five years. Annual operating costs were of the order of \$41.8 million per year. Total spending on the environment by the Taranaki community was conservatively

estimated at \$85.1 million per year – up from \$57.1 million in the previous five year period.

The practical results are to be found in improved standards of waste treatment and disposal, fewer discharges to our coastal waters and streams, improvements in air quality discharges, consistent increases over time in the number of plants made available to landowners and greater efforts to protect our remaining wetlands and areas of bush.

The positive results for Taranaki's environment reported in the 2009 state of the environment report have therefore not come about by accident or by good luck, but by the hard work of many landowners, businesses and other organisations.

The people of Taranaki can be justifiably proud of their efforts to maintain the quality of our environment. These successes are important because they give the community – our businesses, landowners and resource users – the confidence to move forward and to face the challenges of delivering sustainable management of our environment long term.

Putting the report together was a major effort for the Council with large quantities of data collected collated and analysed for publication. Many other organisations assisted in the preparation of the report including the New

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Plymouth, South Taranaki and Stratford district councils, Department of Conservation, Ministry of Fisheries and a large number of Taranaki's businesses. My thanks go to all those who assisted in this task.

In all its work, the Council has kept a clear focus on continuous improvements in service, quality and productivity. Praise is due at the outset of this report to the Council's staff who are dedicated and competent professionals and who take their responsibilities of service to the community very seriously. The Council enjoys productive relationships with key people in organisations throughout the region and beyond. With only rare exceptions we find ourselves and our partners constructively focused on common goals, while acknowledging different roles. This has allowed the Council's energy to be applied to being productive and efficient in the provision of programmes and advocacy as opposed to resource sapping disagreements.

Some of the Council's activities are necessarily of a regulatory nature. These provide the essential standards and certainty for the community. Others focus more on voluntary measure with appropriate and ongoing support. All the Council's activities are aimed at working with people to ensure the standards and goals we have set as a community are achieved so that we all enjoy a sustainable and prosperous future.

POLICY

The policy and planning area saw continued progress on the phased review of the Council's significant policy documents and in particular its Resource Management Act instruments. A hearing of submissions on the *Proposed Regional Policy Statement for Taranaki* was held during the year and Council decisions released. Only one appeal against the Council's decisions was lodged. The Council will undertake mediation in an effort to reach agreement on a resolution of the appeal.

A *Proposed Regional Air Quality Plan* was publicly notified for submissions during the year. A total of 45 submissions were received. The *Proposed Plan* updates and revises the current *Regional Air Quality Plan* made operative in 1997. The process of reviewing the *Plan* will continue throughout 2009/2010.

Progress continued to be made on the review of the Council's *Regional Coastal Plan* but major work on the *Plan* was delayed to await release of the *New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement* being prepared by central government. However work continued on a review of the efficiency and effectiveness of the rules in the current *Plan* with a view to identifying where change may further promote sustainable management of Taranaki's coastal marine area.

Work continued in other areas of policy and planning, including commencing an interim review of the Council's *Regional Soil Plan*, redrafting the Council's navigation and safety bylaws for Port Taranaki and beginning work on a review of the *Lower Waitara River Reserve Management Plan*.

The Council was again active during the year in the area of advocacy and response, making 19 formal written submissions on a wide range of policy documents and legislative proposals from other organisations. Many of the submissions involved large or technically or legally complex documents that required thorough analysis and careful response. These ranged from submissions on a *Proposed National Policy Statement on freshwater management* to a submission on wide ranging changes proposed to the Resource Management Act through the Resource Management (Simplifying and Streamlining) Amendment Bill 2009.

The Council's representatives also provided direct assistance to a number of national level working parties.

RESOURCE CONSENTS AND COMPLIANCE

A total of 355 resource consents were processed during the year. This was an 11% decrease from the 401 consents granted in 2007/2008. The number of consents processed in 2008/2009 was the lowest recorded since 1999/2000 and may have been due to the current economic climate.

The majority of applications (95%) were processed without public notification. For the ninth year in a row all applications were fully processed within the statutory timeframes. The pre-hearing process which the Council strongly advocates has continued to be used

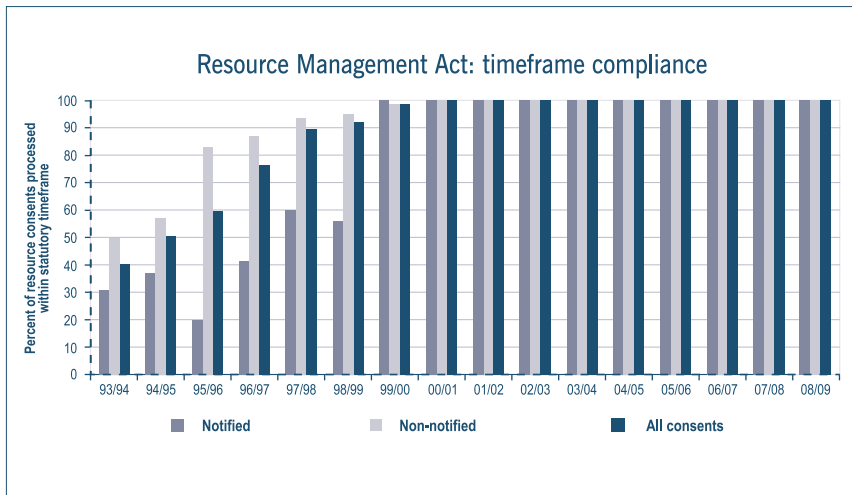
successfully to either avoid or reduce the length of costly hearings. Nine applications attracting 78 submissions to be heard in opposition or neutral, were not resolved via the pre-hearing process. These applications related to the Normanby hydro scheme by Normanby Power Ltd (three applications) and the Patea Hydro-electric Power Scheme by TrustPower Ltd (six applications). The Normanby Power applications attracted 31 submissions to be heard and the TrustPower applications attracted 47 submissions to be heard.

The key outcome of the pre-hearing process was that three potential hearings were not required as a result of successful pre-hearing meetings, considerably reducing the costs to all parties. There were no Environment Court appeals outstanding at the beginning of the year. However three appeals were lodged with the Environment Court during the year all relating to the re-commissioning of the Normanby Hydro scheme by Normanby Power Ltd.

The Council continues to achieve excellent results in resource consent processing which is a credit to all those involved in this activity. The Council compares extremely well in this function across a range of time, quality and cost metrics. The Ministry for the Environment's bi-annual survey of local authorities released during the year showed for example that in 2007/2008, pre-hearing meetings were held for only 11% of all notified or limited notified consent applications nationally whereas within the Council all such applications on which submissions are received are the subject of the pre-hearing process. Council staff decided on 97% of resource consent applications compared to 85% nationwide and nationally 69% of resource consents are processed within the statutory time limits compared to 100% by the Council. The Council's charges are among the lowest in New Zealand.

These results reflect the overall effectiveness of the Council's regional plans, staff competence and processing efficiencies.

The Council implemented 211 individually tailored compliance monitoring programmes involving 357 different resource consent holders with 898 resource consent during the year. These monitoring programmes



involved 1,030 inspections, 1,802 water and soil samples, 189 air samples, 78 freshwater biological surveys, 28 shellfish surveys and 12 marine biosurveys. Inspections and sampling covered site management, abstraction and discharge quality and receiving environment or impact monitoring. Overall, some 93% of consent holders achieved either a high or good level of compliance performance.

Council officers visited 1,848 dairy farms (all dairy farms in the region), 23 piggeries and 48 poultry farms to inspect waste treatment systems. Inspections often included the measurement of various water quality parameters in effluent or receiving waters. A reinspection rate of 4.3% was necessary due to failure to satisfy the Council's consent conditions or regional plan requirements. This was about the normal level of reinspection that has traditionally occurred in Taranaki.

Council officers also inspected 1,015 minor industrial operations. These included road works, exploration wells, production stations

and sandblasters. Only 1.7% of these sites required reinspection.

There were 517 environmental incidents registered and investigated by Council officers during the year. Nine percent related to the marine environment, 57% freshwater quality, 31% to air quality and the balance to soil. The Council continues to place a very high emphasis on responding to and acting on pollution complaints to ensure that consent, and plan requirements are complied with once approved.

During the year the Council required 64 letters of explanation from consent holders and others as to why enforcement action should not be taken as a result of non-compliance. One hundred and twenty abatement notices were issued and 26 infringement notices, essentially instant fines, were issued in relation to unauthorised incidents. During the year three prosecutions from 2007/2008 were concluded successfully. In 2008/2009 the Council resolved to undertake seven prosecutions

STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT REPORTING

The Council continued to implement its extensive state of the environment monitoring programme during the year. Some 17 separate programmes were implemented. Staff completed 30 inspections and 176 surveys at 254 monitoring sites collecting 915 samples. Eight annual reports summarising monitoring results were prepared. These reports provide valuable information for inclusion in the Council's 5 yearly state of the environment report, the latest of which, as previously noted, was published during the year.

The Council continued to maintain quality assurance programmes and information databases for the data collected under its state of the environment monitoring programme. The Council places great emphasis on having relevant and high quality scientific information available to it on which it can be informed as early as possible about trends in the environment so that as a community we make good resource management decisions. The results of state of the environment monitoring provide an essential input into the review of the Council's statutory plans and other policy documents.

RESOURCE INVESTIGATIONS

A number of investigations and research programmes continued to be progressed or implemented during the year. Some are joint venture projects with organisations such as Crown Research Institutes. The Council is committed to continuing to invest at an appropriate level to improve its knowledge of issued to aid sound decision-making.

Twelve research investigation and applied research projects were engaged on during the year. These included an investigation into the



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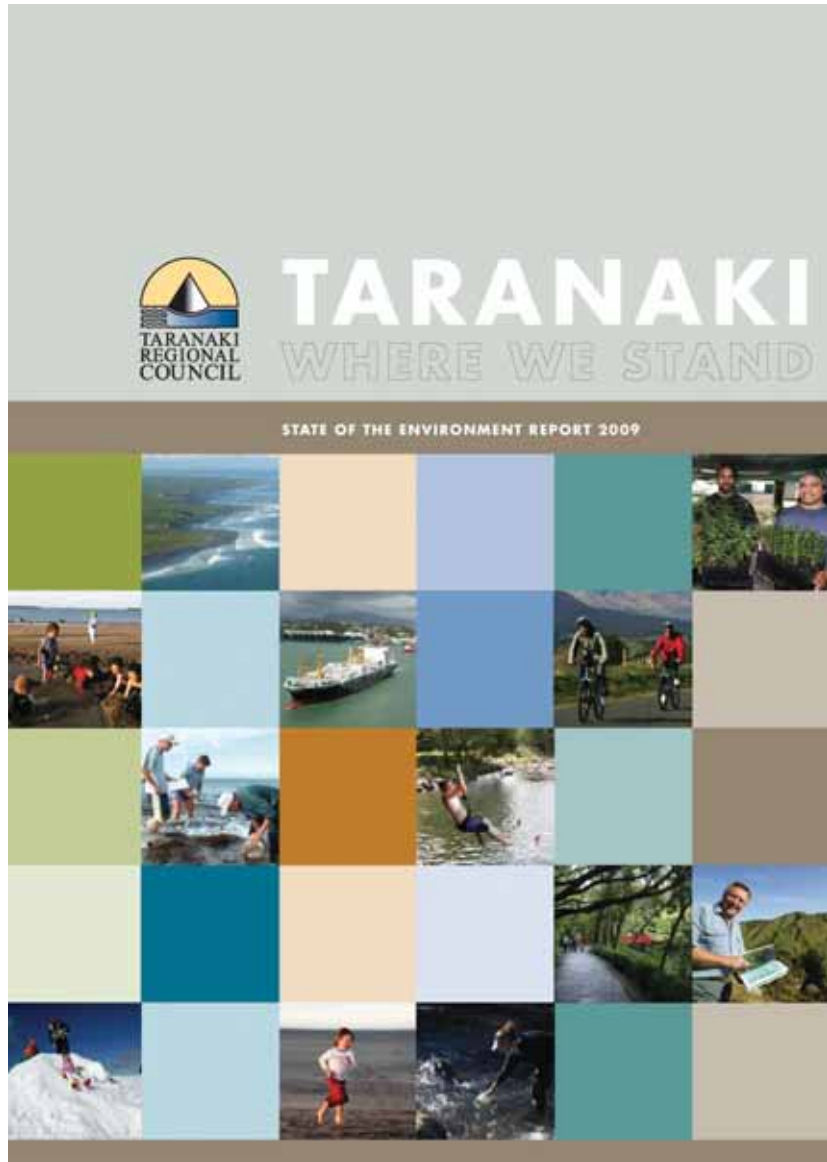
effect on water quality of point and diffuse source discharges from pastoral activities, studies into effects on soil structure and quality from on-farm fodder cropping, an investigation of the ecological significance of first order streams and consequences of stream modification and studies calibrating nutrient management models for Taranaki conditions.

The results of a project to examine the biodiversity value of riparian margin planting initiated by the Council were made available during the year. The results clearly show continuing ecological enhancement for both flora and fauna as riparian planting is undertaken and matures.

Investigations and monitoring were undertaken in relation to chemical drum remnants unearthed at Marfell Park (a former municipal landfill) in New Plymouth during excavations to lay stormwater pipes at the northern end of the park. Laboratory testing of the waste and surrounding soil by the Council revealed the presence of agrichemicals and dioxin contamination. The drum remnants and soil were removed from the site. The Council undertook extensive consultation with local community leaders, representatives and residents and key stakeholders including the Ministry for the Environment, Ministry of Health, New Plymouth District Council and Taranaki District Health Board.

An independent consultant was then engaged to develop an investigation programme with the community to test soil at various other locations in the park to determine whether the soil contains contaminants in excess of soil concentration guidelines and if so to determine ways of managing the risk. That work was in progress at year end. Subsequently this investigation found the park is suitable for its current use.

The Council continued to work in close collaboration with the region's district councils on waste minimisation initiatives. Activities ranged from promotional work related to recycling in schools through to continuing to assist the AgRecovery Foundation with the delivery of a national farm agrichemical container recovery programme. The Council continued to promote the expansion of the AgPac silage wrap recycling scheme. The



Council participated in eDay – the collection of electronic equipment – held over 30 centres across New Zealand on 4 October 2008. Collection points were organised by the region's district councils with assistance from the Taranaki Regional Council. The collection was a great success with a total of 39 tonnes of unwanted computers collected for recycling. The Council also explored options for the recovery and recycling of glass within the region and alternatives to landfill disposal for organic wastes.

LAND MANAGEMENT

Land Management services continued to be well received during the year. Public demand for sustainable land management advice continues to be strong. Council advice is normally provided at a property scale through the range of plans:

- comprehensive plans that are based on detailed land resource mapping and the incorporation of all aspects of the farming operation and business into a whole farm package

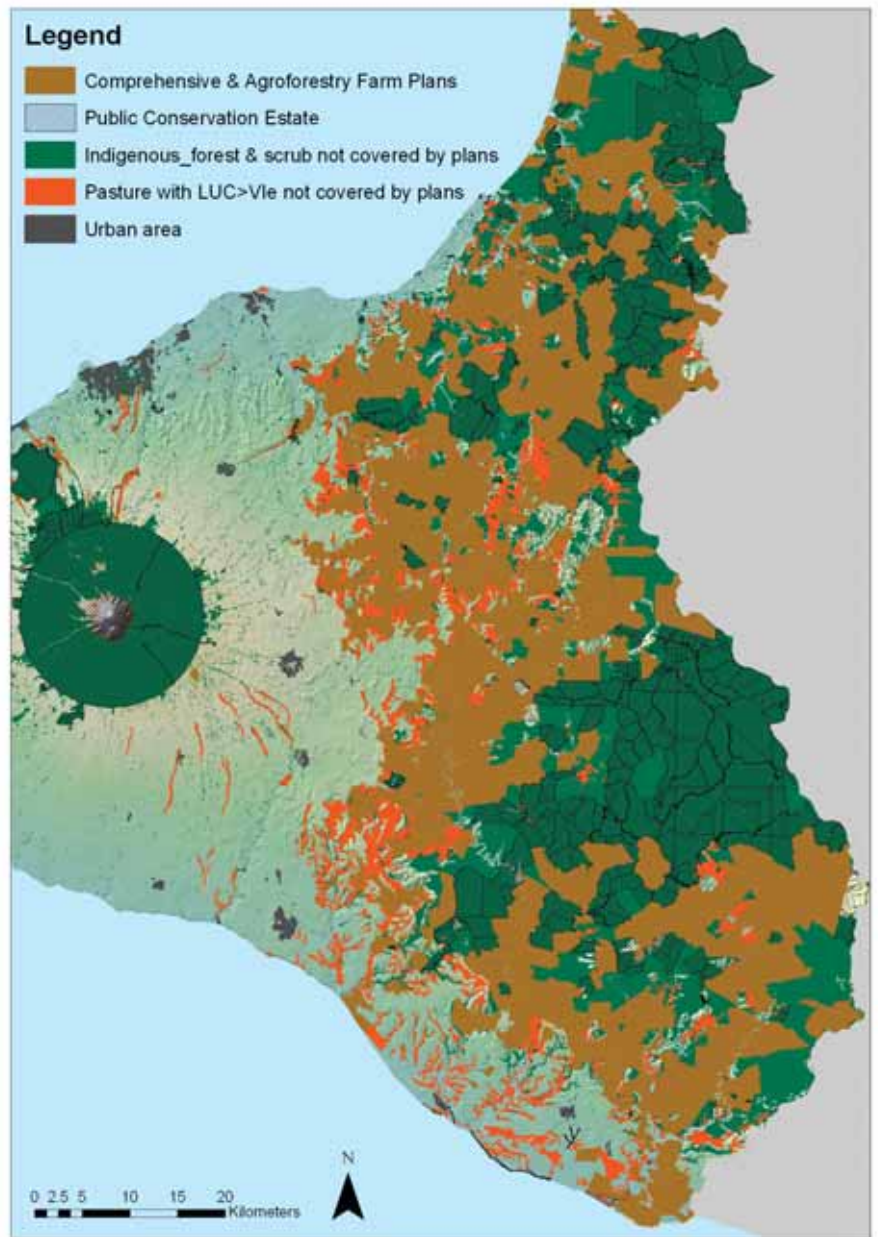
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- agroforestry plans which provide more detail on agroforestry or forestry proposals
- conservation plans which provide site or issue specific advice for often a small part of a property
- riparian plans, which provide site-specific advice on stream, bank protection and planting, primarily for water quality protection.

Sixteen comprehensive farm plans and three agroforestry plans were prepared for hill country farmers during the year. These plans brought an additional 12,180 ha of land under a comprehensive sustainable land management plan. This now means that over 179,182 ha of the hill country has coverage under comprehensive or agroforestry plans. During the year, five conservation plans were prepared bringing the total number of these plans to 229.

In addition to its property planning services, the Council undertook a range of advisory, educational and extension activities promoting sustainable land management. A major emphasis during the year was the potential business opportunities that exist for land holders through climate change initiatives such as the proposed *Forestry Emissions Trading Scheme*, the *Permanent Forest Sink Initiative* and the *Afforestation Grants Scheme*. During the year the Council organised a series of meetings for farmers informing them of the opportunities for carbon farming as an alternative and sustainable land use. The meetings involving the Council, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the forestry industry and carbon investors were very well received.

Early in 2009, the Council also visited and advised plan holders of the forestry opportunities available through the *Afforestation Grant Scheme*. This scheme involves the land holder receiving a grant to establish a forest on Kyoto compliant land which can lead to land holders entering the *Emissions Trading Scheme* and earning carbon credits. In 2008/2009, the Council on behalf of interested land owners obtained funding for 320 hectares of new plantings from the scheme. Such schemes complement and assist the Council's own programme for soil



conservation and erosion control, particularly in our hill country.

Complementary to these schemes, the Council was successful in securing over \$1 million over four years from the government's sustainable *Land Management Hill Country Erosion Fund*. The funding will assist the Council's *South Taranaki and Regional Erosion Support Scheme* (STRESS) to deliver a programme of poplar and

willow pole planting, close space planting, retirement and reversion fencing, targeting the Waitotara catchment and other erodible land in the region.

Good growth also continued in the development of riparian plans. Two hundred and sixty six plans were prepared, covering 1,292 kilometres of stream bank. The Council has now prepared 2,255 riparian plans for

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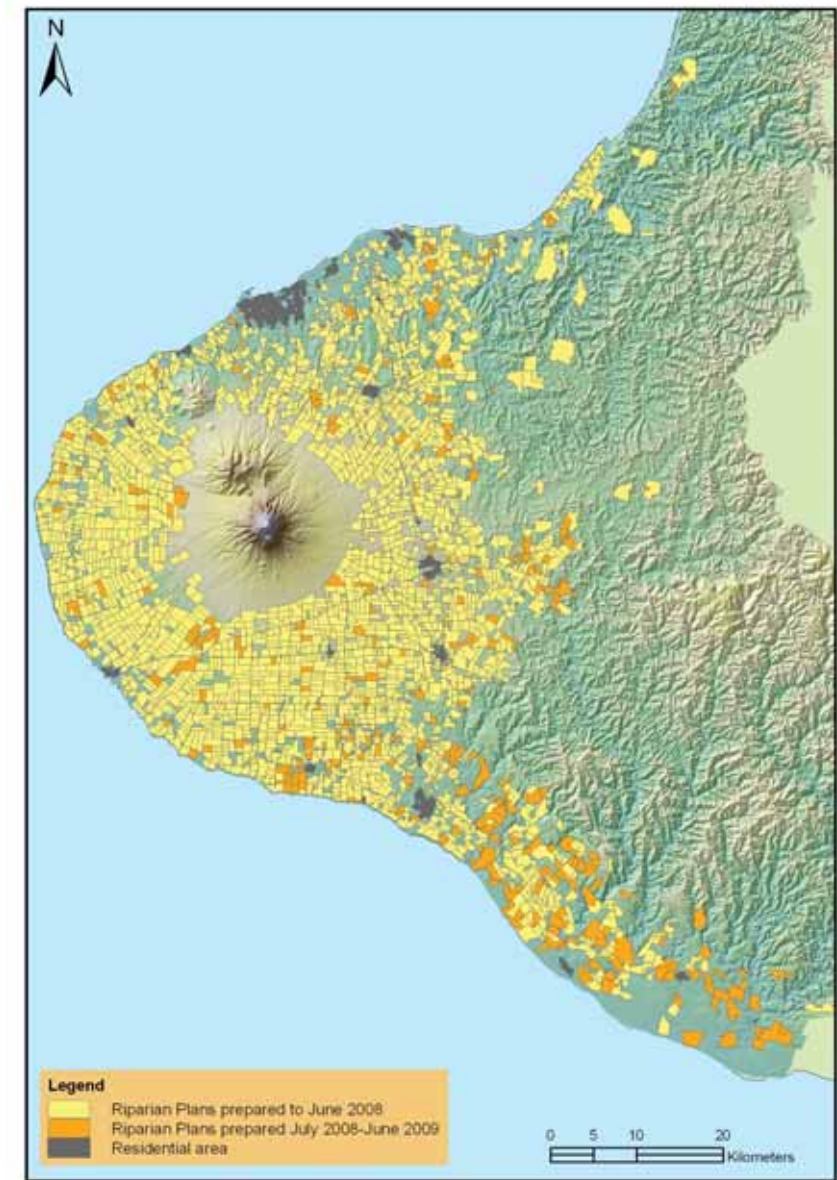
land owners. Taking the existing fencing and planting into consideration, 66% of the fencing was completed prior to last winter's fencing and planting season and 56% was planted.

The majority of farms on the ring plain now have plans. Plan implementation, though, is moving quite slowly. The *Regional Action Plan, which gives effect to the national Dairying and Clean Streams Accord in Taranaki*, has a number of targets for plan development and implementation. Although the 2010 targets are well within grasp or already surpassed, fencing and planting rates will have to increase substantially to meet the 2015 targets. It is important that Taranaki farmers now get on with the business of implementation as opposed to being led by regulation, as advocated is necessary by many critics of farmers' environmental performance.

In order to promote the riparian programme and to encourage uptake of riparian plan recommendations by landowners, the Council continues to work in partnership with Fonterra to implement a joint communication strategy. During the year the Council prepared a number of press releases relating to riparian management. Key messages were to include riparian management expenses into annual farm budgets, ordering plants in advance to take advantage of the Council's bulk purchase scheme to obtain plants at cost and the importance of riparian fencing and planting to future-proof dairy production and the industry. The Council continued the recent initiative to tender for the provision of planting contract services for landholders who were undertaking their first lot of riparian planting. Feedback from all involved in this scheme was positive.

One of the actions from the communications strategy completed during the year involved Fonterra sponsoring two major prizes in a competition to encourage farmers in to riparian management. The promotions were a success with increased plant orders.

Overall there were encouraging signs in the growth of riparian plant sales through the Council's bulk purchasing scheme. Approximately 257,500 plants (riparian and poplar/willow planting material) were distributed at cost. By any comparison this



number of plants going into the ground last winter is a major planting effort, noting that a significant number of farmers also use plants from other sources. One million six hundred thousand plants have moved through the Council's purchasing scheme in the last 13 years, so although fencing and planting rates need to keep moving upwards, recognition also needs to be given to the significant efforts by many at present.

The Council continued to administer and service the Taranaki Tree Trust including a

financial contribution to the Trust's operations. A highlight during the year for the Trust was the ongoing facilitation of the Hutiwai Stream whitebait restoration project funded by the Honda Tree Fund. The Taranaki Tree Trust also provided funding for the Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust. The Tree Trust further participated in a World Wetland Day public field trip to a recently restored wetland. Wetlands protection was also a continued focus with grants provided to enhance eight regionally significant wetlands.

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FLOOD CONTROL AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Flood protection schemes at Waitara and Waiwhakaiho were maintained to design specifications during the year. A key element of the successful management of the Waitara flood protection scheme has been regular maintenance and monitoring of channel characteristics and flow conditions. Where deterioration or damage to the river training groynes and bank protection occurs, remedial work is carried out. Bank lining has been extended by 180 metres on the right bank downstream of Richmond Street. Further rock protection work has been put in place to provide armouring for a high flow channel to be developed behind Mangaroa Island to improve the efficiency of the main channel in that locality.

During the year the New Plymouth District Council undertook redevelopment of the lower boat ramp and protection works were upgraded at the same time. General caretaking activities continued throughout the whole scheme area during the year including vegetation control and management of plantings within the wildlife habitat area. Passive recreation and community care of the reserve is being encouraged by the Council. Community input into the future management of the reserve will be sought through the review of the reserve management plan as noted earlier.

The Waiwhakaiho flood protection scheme was managed to agreed standards with less need for extensive maintenance upgrade works than is the case for the older Waitara asset. On-going maintenance work focused on removing invasive vegetation considered restrictive to flood capacity. Special attention continues with channel clearing of the Mangaoe Stream upstream of Katere Road.



Preliminary investigations were completed to facilitate a more detailed study of a scheme upgrade of the lower Waiwhakaiho to provide a higher level of protection of the increasing assets within the Waiwhakaiho scheme area. The Council continued to work with communities in central Taranaki to maintain the small schemes in that part of the region.

A further 2.4 km of channel clearance work was undertaken in the Waitotara River in accordance with the Council's agreed river clearance and maintenance programme for the Waitotara River adopted in 2005/2006. Material removed from the channel was stacked at designated sites adjacent to the river and later burnt after a drying period. The co-operation of adjacent landowners to work on their land, stack material and in some instances remove fences to allow access, has been an essential part of this work. To date a total of 18.5 km of channel clearance work has been undertaken and maintained.

The key focus of the Taranaki Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) group during the year was the implementation of the *Taranaki Civil Defence Emergency Management Group Plan* and the *2008/2009 Taranaki Civil Defence Emergency Management Business Plan*.

The CDEM Group was not faced with the events of last year when a swarm of tornadoes invaded the region, followed later in the year by a series of extreme storm and rainfall events, and a fire at the former Patea Freezing Works site. However, the group was called on to respond to the occurrence of Influenza H1N1 ("swine flu"). The CDEM group recruited volunteers, assisted with the preparation of information pertaining to large event contingency planning in the New Plymouth district and participated in local and interregional training exercises.



During the year the CDEM group carried out an audit of the Emergency Operations Centre. The audit was carried out at the request of the Ministry of Civil Defence Emergency Management and is to be carried out by all CDEM groups in New Zealand. The Taranaki CDEM group was the second group to complete the audit process in 2008/2009. The audit showed that our Emergency Operations Centre is very well equipped to deal with emergencies, having met the vast majority of the key performance actions set by the review. A number of initiatives were undertaken in 2008/2009 to address those action areas that were not met. These initiatives included Council approval to purchase a dedicated stand alone generator which is awaiting quotes and installation in 2009/2010; a revised evacuation plan with new instructions posted at the Emergency Operations Centre and completion of operational guidelines for the Emergency Operations Centre. The audit was a very useful exercise that will further increase the effectiveness of the Taranaki Emergency Operations Centre for the benefit of Taranaki residents.

The CDEM Group held a very successful exercise – *Exercise Billow* – in November 2008 based on a scenario of Mt Taranaki erupting, affecting lifelines and utilities. The raising of community awareness of planning for emergencies continued on a number of fronts during the year.

The work of the CDEM Group was greatly assisted by the co-ordinating executive group which comprises professional representatives from a wide range of organisations and emergency service providers including Councils, the Fire Service, the District Health Board and Police. Their contributions to seek the benefits from combining resources have been greatly appreciated.

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PEST ANIMAL AND PLANT MANAGEMENT

The Council's two pest management strategies were successfully implemented during the year. Implementation of the *Self-Help Possum Control Programme* on the Taranaki ring plain continued to be a major pest animal focus, under the Council's *Pest Animal Management Strategy for Taranaki*.

As at 30 June 2009, 3,753 properties covering approximately 228,418 hectares have been incorporated into the *Self-Help Possum Control Programme*. Except for urban area, the *Programme* now covers almost all privately owned land on the ring plain and significant parts of the coastal terraces and frontal hill country.

Within the *Programme* possum infestation levels have been successfully reduced to a level that protects agricultural production values and animal health on the ring plain. Reducing infestations of possums also protects indigenous biodiversity values and contributes to the protection of such values in the Egmont National Park. In preceding years, the Council has undertaken initial possum control to include new areas in the *Self-Help Possum Control Programme* (typically between 8,000 and 12,000 hectares). However, in 2008/2009 the Council determined that a hiatus on the addition of new areas was appropriate to allow resourcing of Council support for possum control on privately owned land around Egmont National Park in conjunction with major possum control work planned for the Egmont National Park by the Department of Conservation.

Commencement of the Council's part in the Egmont control programme involving 220 properties covering some 15,229 hectares was scheduled for June 2009. However the planned commencement of the control was deferred until August 2009 at the request of the Department of Conservation to align with their timeframes and ensure the best pest and biodiversity outcomes. Notwithstanding that, as at 30 June 2009, the Council had completed planning for its part of the operation. Agreement has been reached with the Department on the timing and methods of control, contracts had been tendered, medical officers of health and district council consents



applied for and land occupiers notified. It is important for the region that there is a co-ordinated and integrated approach to possum control in the Egmont National Park that extends across both public and private lands and the Council will work hard to ensure this happens.

With a very large area of the region now within the Council's *Self-Help Possum Control Programme*, it is important that monitoring and follow up work occurs to ensure compliance with strategy rules to keep possum numbers at low levels. Compliance monitoring during

2008/2009 showed a number of properties with excessive possum numbers. In these instances land occupiers were advised to undertake possum control. Follow up inspections confirmed most land occupiers had undertaken the required possum control. Only six Notices of Direction were required to direct land occupiers to control possums on their land and these were complied with and no other enforcement action was necessary.

During the year the Council also undertook monitoring of 460 randomly selected residual trap catch lines to determine the effectiveness

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of the *Self-Help Programme* overall. This monitoring showed a residual trap catch of 6.9% - below the required 10% target - confirming the *Self-help Possum Control Programme* is successfully maintaining possums at very low levels over time. It also demonstrated the importance of land occupiers undertaking regular and ongoing possum control. Compliance by property owners with strategy rules for the *Self-Help Possum Control Programme* has once again been exceptional.

The *Self-Help Possum Control Programme* is an outstanding example of a local authority facilitating and empowering land occupiers to actively manage an environmental and agricultural pest to achieve results that could not have been attained by the Council acting on its own or simply leaving the issue to private individuals to address.

The animal pest management team also contributed significantly to the Council's targeted facilitation of protecting significant biodiversity assets as noted under the biodiversity heading later in my report.

The Council continued to respond to a large number of requests for advice and assistance in pest animal control.

The *Pest Plant Management Strategy* for Taranaki was implemented as required. Promotion and enforcement of agricultural plant and pest control continued to be a major focus, although compared to a decade ago the ragwort problem in Taranaki is much reduced.

The pest plant statistics for 2008/2009 show some significant differences from the previous year where staff resources were redeployed to deal with a major oil spill on the Okato coastline. A combination of increased use of technology and the availability of staff resources also led to a concerted focus in 2008/2009 on environmental weeds such as Pampas and Gunnera. In 2008/2009 the Council undertook over 8,400 inspections of properties for compliance with the Council's strategy rules (up from just over 5,660 inspections last year), responded to 123 complaints relating to pest plants and 395 requests for information about weeds and other plants.

In 2008/2009 the number of properties identified as having significant infestations of 'containment pest plants' (i.e., Category

C properties) decreased slightly with the Council undertaking 389 inspections. It is anticipated that as compliance with strategy rules improves, particularly in relation to environmental pest plants such as Gunnera, Pampas and Wild Ginger, that the number of Category C properties will decrease further. The overall increase in property inspections in 2008/2009 however, saw a significant increase in the number of inspections of other properties (Categories A and B). The increased level of monitoring of properties led to an increase in the number of notices directing landowners to comply with strategy rules. In total 436 Notices of Direction to control pest plants were issued, up from 274 last year. A significant number of these - 213 - related to Pampas grass either to require Pampas plants not part of hedgerows to be destroyed or to take measures to prevent the flowering of Pampas in hedgerows or shelterbelts. The Council is working hard to advise landowners of the strategy rules in relation to Pampas grass. Of note was that all notices were complied with and no further enforcement action was necessary.

The Council also inspected 36 plant nurseries and retail outlets in Taranaki to ensure they are not selling propagating or distributing pest plants. In relation to "eradication pest plants" the Council treated 75 properties and directed land occupiers to treat a further 13 infestations. The Council successfully met its strategy targets of destroying all eradication pest plant infestations that were known in 2007 (when the current strategy became operative) and responded to the discovery of new infestations.

BIODIVERSITY

Increased emphasis is now being placed on local government to provide for the maintenance and enhancement of our indigenous biodiversity - the variability among all of our native plants and animals and the ecological complexes of which they are a part. This increased emphasis is supported by changes to the Resource Management Act, government statements of national priorities for protecting rare or threatened native biodiversity on private land and by the Taranaki community which has confirmed its support for such initiatives through various

Council consultation and policy development processes.

The Council has always been involved in biodiversity related activities through the development of regional plans, the processing of resource consents, the protection of significant wetlands, undertaking pest control and the implementation of its riparian and sustainable land management programmes - all of which have been reported on in previous years. Last year 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*. This was complemented by earlier work to identify the most significant sites - or key native ecosystems - where the Council could target its resources. The *Strategy* enables better prioritisation and deployment of resources on biodiversity work, which can be very resource intensive.

In the 2008/2009 year the Council took its biodiversity responsibilities a step further by establishing a Biodiversity section within the Council structure and appointing experienced and skilled staff. The Biodiversity section has the task of coordinating and leading a "whole of Council" approach to the delivery of its biodiversity responsibilities. The new section has "hit the ground running" and in its first year has undertaken a wide range of activities focusing on supporting the efforts of landowners to maintain and enhance biodiversity on private land.

One of the key tools used by the Council is a biodiversity plan prepared by the Council in conjunction with the landowner and customised to suit the site. This property planning service (modelled on the Council's very successful riparian and sustainable farm plans) identifies the biodiversity values present and sets out actions that will be undertaken on the site to enhance biodiversity values and who is responsible for those. Any external funding is noted in the plan and an annual implementation programme set out. Through these plans the Council aims to work with and assist land owners in protecting and enhancing biodiversity values on their land.

In 2008/2009, the Council prepared 14 biodiversity plans covering 404.4ha of the targeted key native ecosystems.

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The Council supported the implementation of biodiversity plans by undertaking invasive weed and animal control work and wetland fencing or planning work at 11 key native ecosystem sites and by financially supporting fencing, planting and pest control work through its environmental enhancement grants. The Council also provided technical, financial or logistical support to several "iconic" biodiversity projects including the Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust, the East Taranaki Environment Trust Kiwi Project and the Ngati Tama pest control project to protect natural values on over 1600 hectares of land in the Paranihi/Whitecliffs area.

Other activities undertaken during the year included the preparation of two biodiversity specific information sheets, undertaking three biodiversity related forums to discuss ways of working more closely with biodiversity agencies and community groups and preparing 21 media releases.

In areas where active management is required by landowners - as is the case for biodiversity enhancement - landowners must be encouraged to own their bit of the problem and to work collectively towards an agreed outcome. The Council sees its primary role as being to inform, empower and facilitate. The Council considers that commonly agreed objectives, clarity of roles, sharing of tasks and goodwill are the fundamental components for nature conservation activities on private land and this will continue to underpin the Council's biodiversity activities into the future.

TRANSPORT

The Council's transport activities presented many new challenges for the Council in 2008/2009, following on from the busy schedule of activities reported on in the previous year.



Statutory changes introduced by the Land Transport Management Amendment Act which took effect from 1 August 2008 saw a number of changes to the planning and funding of land transport and the introduction of significant new activities for the Council.

A new transport Crown entity, the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) was established combining the functions of the former Land Transport New Zealand and Transit New Zealand with new staffing and organisational structures. The Council worked through the initial "bedding in" period which saw the Taranaki region aligned with a new central region with offices in Napier and Wellington replacing the previous alignment with the Hamilton office of Land Transport New Zealand.

The legislative changes also required the Council to reconstitute its Regional Land Transport Committee with new responsibilities and membership. The first meeting of the reconstituted committee took place on 9 October 2008. A Regional Transport Advisory Group was also established to assist and advise the Committee on technical matters relating to land transport within the region.

An immediate requirement of the new legislation was for the Council's Regional Transport Committee to begin planning for the development of a new land transport funding instrument - the *Regional Land Transport Programme (RLTP)* required to be prepared and submitted to NZTA by 30 June 2009. The *RLTP* is required to identify all land transport activities in the region and to place in order of priority all activities relating to the state highway network in the region and any other large capital works and new public transport services. This was a significant change from the previous year when regional programmes only dealt with regional council expenditure.



Preparation of the three year *RLTP* presented challenges for the Council in accessing information, coordinating the public submissions process with the long-term council community planning processes of all local authorities in the region and agreeing on priorities. These challenges were compounded by a change of government in October 2008 which subsequently altered the *Government Policy Statement* and priorities on land transport funding which the Council was required to take into account in preparing its *RLTP*.

It is of great credit to all involved in this process that the *RLTP* for Taranaki was prepared and submitted on time following a full public submission and hearing process. Very good support and cooperation was provided by the New Plymouth, Stratford and South Taranaki district councils and NZTA. The process of prioritising projects across the region, was approached with the best interests of Taranaki as a whole in mind, demonstrating again the unity that exists within the region on such important matters. The "Team Taranaki" approach will stand the region in good stead when it comes to arguing the Taranaki case in an environment where funding for land transport will become increasingly tight for regions such as Taranaki with central government's current spending focus on roads of national significance and improving national economic productivity.

In my report last year I noted the significant changes that had occurred in the way in which the Council's public passenger transport services were delivered in the New Plymouth urban area. The fully contracted service, won under tender by Transitz Coachlines Ltd commenced operating the New Plymouth, Bell Block, Waitara and Oakura bus services on 1 July 2008. The transition from the previous

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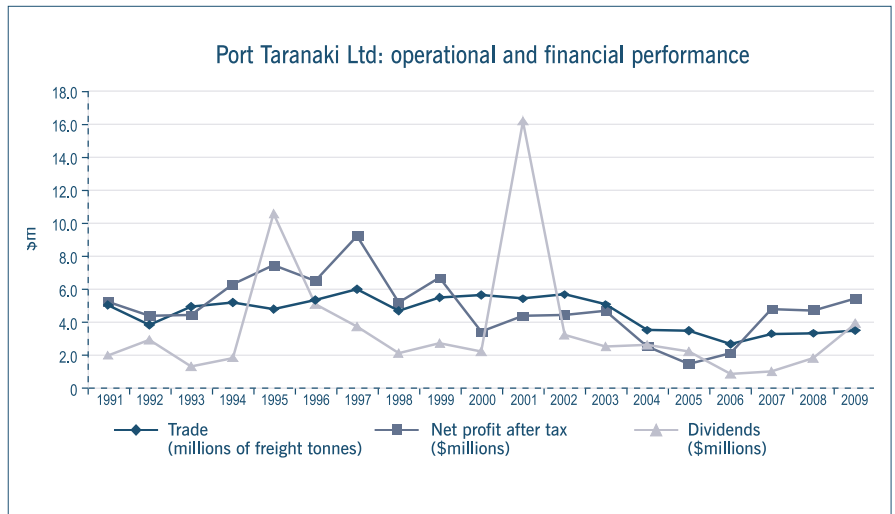
providers has proceeded without significant issues for the travelling public. The services are being provided within budget and Tranzit's new style of bus and service enhancements continue to be well received. Approximately 350,000 passenger trips were taken on these services in the past year.

The Council is committed to growing the service in New Plymouth to provide an efficient and attractive service that meets the needs of users in the region's largest urban area, at reasonable cost. To this end the Council engaged independent passenger transport experts to undertake a comprehensive review of the New Plymouth bus service. This resulted in a number of recommendations to improve the service. A proposal was developed and costed and included in the Council's 2009/2019 Long-Term Council Community Plan for public submissions. The proposals were confirmed and a request for funding submitted to the New Zealand Transport Agency. However, no decision had been made by the end of the financial year. Until this time the service will continue to operate as is with the Council and the operator working together to further improve services as budgets allow.

The three once-a-week services in South Taranaki: Waverley-Patea-Hawera; Opunake-Hawera; and Opunake-New Plymouth continued to operate during 2008/2009 on a trial basis. In February 2009, the Council approved the contracting of these services thereby securing their longer term future. However, this is on the basis that the services continue to meet pre-determined performance criteria. The trial of the once-a-week service from Inglewood to New Plymouth was extended to allow further evaluation of the trial to occur.

The introduction of the nationally funded SuperGold Card Scheme for over 65s has had a positive impact on all services, especially the once-a-week trial services, and has helped push passenger numbers above the trial criteria.

A total of 79,099 passenger trips were taken in total mobility services provided in New Plymouth, Bell Block, Waitara, Stratford and Hawera. The number of passenger trips and expenditure decreased for the second



year in a row. This can be attributed to the Council's ongoing requirement for clients to have a photo ID card, improved screening of applicants, improved communication to prospective clients and the ongoing commitment of the Council's Total Mobility Co-ordinator.

The Council continued to make concession fares available to users at Ironside vehicles to aid the Society's income.

The Council has continued to strongly advocate for improved roading and other transport infrastructure for the region. Specific working groups, being the State Highway 3 Working Party and the Stratford to Okahukura Rail Working Party, were serviced and tangible progress was advanced on their objectives.

The Council continued to support the work being undertaken by Port Taranaki Ltd to progress a feasibility study on opportunities for allowing roll-on, roll-off ships to berth at the Port as part of a western "Blue Highway" proposal between New Plymouth, Nelson and other west coast ports. Funding assistance from Land Transport New Zealand for the study was confirmed during the year and the study commenced.

On the maritime front, the Council continued to administer navigation bylaws for Port Taranaki through its harbourmasters and honorary enforcement officers. During the year there were 1,560 vessel movements without any navigation and safety incidents occurring.

The Port Safety Management System and associated Risk Assessment System were fully operational during the year with all maritime activities being continuously monitored. The Safety Management System underwent an interim audit by Maritime New Zealand in March 2009 and was commended.

RECREATION, CULTURE AND HERITAGE

The Council continued to rate to cover some of the costs for the development of Yarrow Stadium. 2008/2009 was the seventh year of the 10-year life of the targeted rate. The stadium attracted a wide range of audiences and events during the year and is widely regarded as an excellent regional venue. It was a particular thrill for many Taranaki people to be part of a capacity crowd to watch the All Blacks play their first ever test match in Taranaki.

In my report last year I noted that implementation of asset management plans for the two Council owned gardens of Tupare and Hollard Gardens had been strongly advanced. The main focus for the 2008/2009 year was the completion of the development phase of both gardens. In October/November 2008, an official launch and public events were held to present both Tupare and Hollard Gardens to the people of Taranaki.

As a result of the completion of the redevelopment of the properties, the public use of the gardens has jumped significantly.

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In 2007/2008, the Council reported visitor numbers of 4,000 for Tupare and 2,500 for Hollard Gardens. This has risen to 21,100 for Tupare and 11,600 for Hollard Gardens in 2008/2009.

The focus for the future will now move from redevelopment to a programme of maintenance of the properties and enhancing the use of the properties by the regional community.

In 2008/2009, the Council provided \$50,000 towards the management and development of the internationally acclaimed Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust Gardens.

Through these activities the Council is providing for high quality and diverse recreational experiences and is contributing towards making Taranaki a prosperous and vibrant region.

INFORMATION

The Council has continued to place emphasis on the provision of information to the public and on the development of quality information systems.

A major effort has continued to get as much of the Council's database information as possible out to the public through the Council's Regional Xplorer public enquiry website. This award-winning development, which contains a broad range of geographic and local government information, has continued to be very popular. Visits to the site averaged 105,427 per month, an increase of 51% on last year. The consistent use of the site to create map images has proved the usefulness of the site for many people in Taranaki.

Interest in the Council's website, www.trc.govt.nz, continues to grow, with monthly visits being within the range 25,000-30,000. The site provides an overview of the region and the



Council's significant activities. It also allows people to directly access information about the Council, request further information or provide feedback on issues.

Environmental awards were presented to 18 recipients during the year. A good level of applications continues to be received for these annual awards which provide an insight into the many and varied activities that dozens of people are undertaking to enhance where we live.

A continued emphasis was placed on providing educational material and other forms of assistance to schools, especially on environmental matters. Four issues of the school-oriented *S.I.T.E.* newsletter were produced. Seventy-five units of work and 98 additional resources were sent out to teachers covering topics such as weather, rivers, coast, waste minimization and recycling, sustainable land management, civil defence emergency management and trees. There were 156 class visits involving 4,657 students and a further 535 visitors to the Council's display areas.

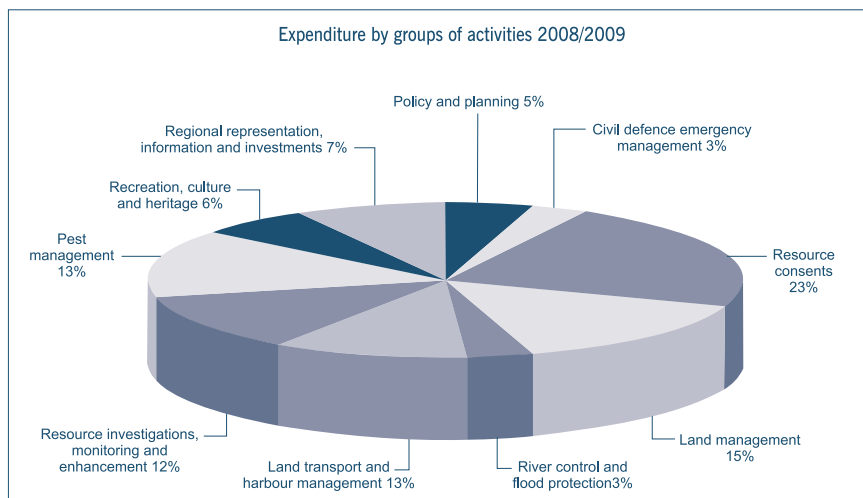


Council staff also conducted three well-attended teacher workshops on a variety of environmental-themed topics.

In addition to the above activities, five issues of the Council's newsletter *Recount* were published and widely distributed and, as always, requests for information on a wide range of topics were responded to.

The Council also engaged in a number of significant public information campaigns during the year, the most notable being campaigns promoting riparian management, civil defence and awareness of the aquatic pest *Didymo*.

The Council undertook a number of sponsorship activities in 2008/2009 to promote sustainable resource management and environmental education in the region. Sponsorship was provided for the Fonterra Taranaki Science and Technology Fair, Taranaki Young Enterprise Scheme Environmental Award, Regional Dairy Industry Awards and the New Zealand Coastal Society and Fresh Water Science conferences.



CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

The Council's partnership with Puke Ariki continued, including funding two major projects: the *Amazing Backyard Adventures exhibition* and a publication on water quality in Taranaki.

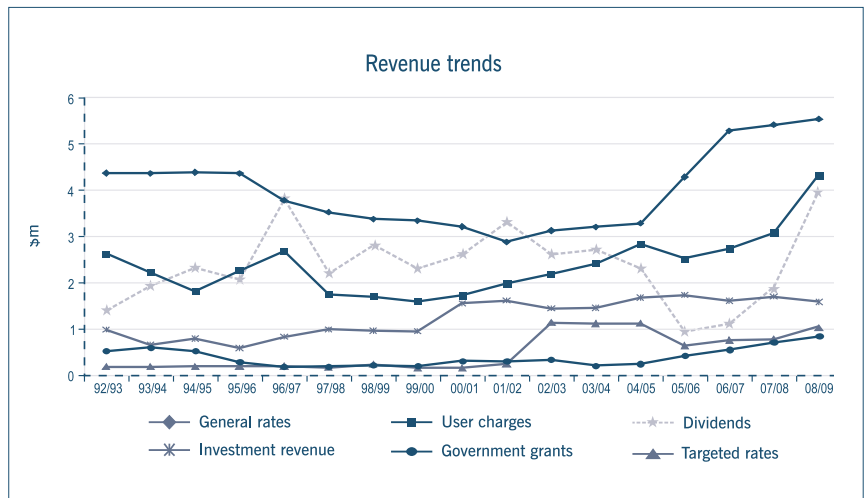
INVESTMENTS

Port Taranaki Ltd experienced a positive upturn in trade and revenue. Operational revenue rose 9% to \$46.6m associated with an increase in total trade to 3.52m tonnes. Accordingly, after tax profit increased by 13.8% to \$5.42m. This is an excellent result for the region as dividends from profits are returned to the community through reduced regional council general rates. However, Port Taranaki continues to operate in a highly competitive and volatile industry. Its ability to continue to generate profits and dividends at current levels is not guaranteed.

The Council acknowledges the public's support for its ownership of Port Taranaki Ltd and is committed to supporting the Company in its commercial aspirations. That includes a periodic examination and re-examination of the port company's leadership, its capital structures and strategic value to the region.

FINANCIAL

The Council finished the year with a surplus of \$1.3m which was \$0.028m below budget. In the current financial environment this is a very satisfactory result. The operating surplus would have been much higher if the budgeted increase in the value of investment properties (budgeted revenue of \$737,000) had eventuated rather than the actual loss in value of these properties (expense of \$745,000). Operating expenditure, excluding property revaluation losses, was \$15.22m, which was



\$0.34m less than programmed. As for most businesses, the Council has worked especially hard during the last period on cost control.

The Council's financial position remains strong with no public debt. Total public equity increased to \$71.5m.

This is the third annual report in which the Council has been required to comply with new international standards (NZ IFRS). This transition to NZ IFRS has been a significant imposition on all local authorities with questionable benefit to the public. The significant impact on the Council's operating surplus from the loss in value of investment properties is a case in point. Under the prior accounting rules this type of transaction would not have been shown as income or expenditure and therefore would not have impacted upon the operating surplus.

The Controller and Auditor-General has reported to Parliament on his concerns about NZ IFRS. The Council shares many of these concerns.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND OUTLOOK

The efforts and achievements of Council staff are gratefully acknowledged. They are skilled and positive in all they do and are a pleasure to work with.

Regional Councillors have continued to provide clear and consistent direction in a way that is constructively focussed on Taranaki's future.

The Council is financially and operationally sound. Like the region we serve, we move forward with a determined confidence to make our region positively 'like no other'

Basil Chamberlain
Chief Executive