

Work continues on reducing Waitotara's flood risk

A proposed river control programme designed for Waitotara recommends options to help reduce the risk in the flood prone area, including a channel clearing and maintenance programme.

Over the last 15 years there have been four major storms and/or floods that have significantly damaged buildings and properties, silted the river flats, and caused slipping, channel and bank erosion and damage to the roading, telecommunication and electricity infrastructure.

The Council, along with the South Taranaki District Council, has examined the possible management options, recommending some and rejecting others. The removal of all or part of the Waitotara township, the construction of stop banks in the township and no additional action are all options that have been considered and rejected for the programme.

Reducing the Risk – Proposed Channel Clearance and Maintenance Programme for the Waitotara Catchment recommends four management options:

- maintenance and upgrading of the Taranaki Regional Council's telemetric



Channel clearing and maintenance is designed to prevent congestion and reduce the risk of flooding.



The Waitotara township was badly hit by the 2004 storm flooding.

flood warning systems in the Waitotara catchment.

Following the 2004 storm, the Council installed a new telemetric recorder in the upper catchment at Omaru to monitor rainfall. The flood warning system in the catchment has also been improved by the installation of solar panels at the Rimirui Station and Omaru sites for backup power supply and to safeguard both power supply and communications.

- targeting of farm properties in the Waitotara catchment to promote soil conservation and erosion control. Local farmers have shown increased interest in the Taranaki Regional Council's Sustainable Land Management Programme and as at 30 June last year 29 plans covering 34,902 ha (i.e. 40% of privately owned land and 58% of

'at risk' land) had been prepared in the Waitotara catchment. To further assist farmers on landslide-prone land, the Council has contributed free of charge, 3000 poplar poles for erosion control. The establishment of a community-based poplar nursery, and monitoring of sustainable land use using aerial photographs, land cover databases and farm plans are ongoing projects.

- review of and changes to building and development controls in the Waitotara township by the South Taranaki District Council.

The South Taranaki District Council is currently undertaking a District Plan change and will apply notices under the Building Act for new building work where a site has been affected by flooding.

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From the Chair

Recently the Council distributed a summary of its plans and programmes for the coming year, within the context of the next 10 years.

This 2006/2016 draft Long-term Council Community Plan



(LTCCP) summary is an important document for our community. It deals with the protection and enhancement of our natural environment and physical resources that are crucial to the future wellbeing of the region.

This is our second LTCCP. For the preparation of the first, we worked with the community and the three district councils in the region to identify the community outcomes we all most want to see. Each LTCCP that will follow every three years will build on that initial work to ensure we continue to enjoy a prosperous, healthy and sustainable community.

Most of the programmes proposed for the next ten years continue business as usual. They include however, proposed passenger transport trials and changes as a result of our current review of the *Regional Land Transport Strategy* and the *Regional Passenger Transport Plan*.

Another important issue addressed in the LTCCP is the forecast of reduced dividend flows from Port Taranaki Ltd and the Council's proposal to address this shortfall. A feature on Port Taranaki that backgrounds this situation is on pages four, five and six of this edition of *Recount*.

The reduced dividend means that the Council needs to increase general rates for the forthcoming financial year. Projections suggest that the new trade and the projects being developed by Port Taranaki Ltd should successfully underpin its medium to long-term future, and enable the dividend streams to return to where they have been.

The long-term planning process provides an important opportunity for the regional community to consider and comment on the proposed activities and programmes before the Council becomes committed to their implementation.

Copies of the summary or the LTCCP are available from the Council offices. You are invited to provide feedback before 21 April 2006.

David Walter - CHAIRMAN

Environment Court upholds Council decision

A recent decision by the Environment Court upheld the Council's decision to grant Fonterra Co-operative Group Limited an air discharge permit for its proposed dual fuel energy centre at its Whareroa site near Hawera.

While mediation resolved the concerns of other parties who had initially registered their interest in the appeal, Todd Energy Limited continued to pursue its appeal in court.

Todd challenged Fonterra's proposal to establish a new energy centre and associated storage facility. The consent to discharge emissions into the air from gas or coal boilers was granted in January last year. The appeal claimed that the proposal would have adverse effects on the existing gas fired co-generation plant through increased sulphur dioxide emissions and damage from coal gas, and would harm the environment through carbon dioxide emissions. Fonterra's proposal, the appeal claimed, was unnecessary and an inefficient use of natural and physical resources.

Todd Energy suggested that instead, the resource consent should be granted with a lapse period of two years, or upon completion of a gas supply agreement for supply to the co-generation plant. Fonterra should also pay a bond to ensure compliance, Todd claimed, and discharge limits should be set.

Fonterra and Todd both accused each other of using, or misusing, the resource management process for ulterior commercial purposes. Todd argued that Fonterra had no intention of building the plant but wanted to use the prospect as negotiating leverage when its gas supply contract expires in July this year. Fonterra made corresponding criticisms of Todd's opposition to the proposal.

The appeal was heard over three days in New Plymouth and one day in Wellington and included a separate site visit. Environment Judge C J Thompson concluded that the court had no doubt that Fonterra's proposal met the purpose of sustainable management.

"We wish to make it clear that we have not arrived at that view simply because the challenge mounted by Todd was specious and insubstantial. On its own merits, the proposal justifies approval," he said.

Todd Energy Limited agreed to meet a significant portion of the costs incurred by the Council in defending its decision.

Work continues on reducing Waitotara's flood risk (cont)

- channel clearance and maintenance works.

The Taranaki Regional Council has completed a \$100,000, four kilometre trial to determine the cost effectiveness of channel clearing and maintenance in the catchment and proposes to extend the work, along with tree planting for river bank stabilisation. A \$700,000, ten-year staged programme with maintenance estimated at \$20,000 per year has been proposed and funding is being sought. The river control programme proposes that the Taranaki Regional Council and the South Taranaki District Council will each contribute up to \$40,000 per annum for 10 years, and that landowners adjacent to rivers and streams in the catchment will contribute works and services in kind. Funding to accelerate the implementation of the programme is being sought from Central Government.

The potential upgrading and improvement of storm water drainage systems is a further management option being investigated by the South Taranaki District Council.

For a copy of *Reducing the Risk – Proposed Channel Clearance and Maintenance Programme for the Waitotara Catchment* telephone the Council 06 765 7127 or email publications@trc.govt.nz.

Good environmental performance in Lower Waiwhakaiho

The Waiwhakaiho River catchment is a significant area for the Taranaki region. It is used for domestic, agricultural and industrial water supply, hydroelectric power generation, recreation and waste assimilation, and is important to local Maori. In 1991, the Council adopted a water management plan for the region.

At June 2005, 18 consents were held to discharge wastewater, stormwater and leachate from the industrial area at Fitzroy, New Plymouth to the lower Waiwhakaiho River and Mangaone Stream and an overall good level of environmental performance was noted.

As in recent years, in the 2004/2005 period the Council's comprehensive monitoring found an improvement in the state of the aquatic ecosystems in the Lower Waiwhakaiho River. In the Mangaone Stream, however, the macroinvertebrate community was not as diverse or abundant as could be expected. Investigations are continuing into the possibility that a pesticide used in timber preservation at



Management of the Lower Waiwhakaiho area has ensured good environmental performance.

the Taranaki Sawmills site is responsible. Stormwater from Ravensdown Fertiliser Co-operative Limited is still a major source of nutrients that may also affect fauna in the lower Mangaone Stream.

The annual monitoring report notes a continued decrease (improvement) in ammonia levels in the groundwater bore

adjacent to Katere Road, and only one isolated and marginal exceedence of consent limits of groundwater and leachate in the old landfill off Bewley Road. Nutrient enrichment in groundwater under the Ravensdown site may be contributing phosphorus but a review of the existing landfill consent is not considered necessary.

Quarries generally doing well

The Council's recent annual – and sometimes biennial – environmental monitoring programme reports for various quarries in the region show that generally they are performing well.

Of particular note is Murray Brothers Limited whose Manaia quarry discharges stormwater into the Waiokura Stream. As in previous years, the quality of stormwater is considered to be maintained to a high standard and the company seen to be demonstrating a high level

of environmental performance and compliance.

Hurlstone Earthmoving Limited's Egmont Road, Egmont Village, Freight and Bulk Transport Limited's Okato, Vickers Quarries Limited's Waitara and L H Taunt's Stratford quarries all achieved a good level of performance, and the activities of Winstone Aggregates Limited's Wiremu Road quarry were assessed as satisfactory.

The A B Pennington quarry at Uruti closed in 1998 and has been satisfactorily reinstated. It is now almost covered in vegetation and achieved a high level of performance for July 2003-June 2005.

Two quarry companies required to improve their environmental performance are New Plymouth Quarries at sites off Hydro and Waiwhakaiho Roads, New Plymouth (cleanfill pits) and Hurlstone Earthmoving Limited at Kaipi Road Egmont Village (stormwater discharge).

Council hearing allows changes to Okaiawa consent

A resource consent held by Taranaki By-Products Limited has been changed to allow spray irrigation of treated wastewater onto land near the Inaha Stream following six pre-hearing meetings and a hearing late last year.

Ten submissions opposed the application and one was received in support.

The changed resource consent with 25

conditions enables Taranaki By-Products to increase its daily discharge rate of treated wastewater from a rendering operation from up to 900 cubic metres to 1400 cubic metres. The change includes increased land area available to be irrigated, and the discharge of treated farm dairy effluent.

In summing up, councillors David MacLeod (Chairperson) and Donald McIntyre acknowledged the disagreement

of Okahu Hapu to the application and noted that the effects of the activity could be satisfactorily remedied or mitigated by the special conditions. The consent requires extensive compliance monitoring and, if required, consent review. It also includes a liaison process between Taranaki By-Products Ltd, Council staff and interested parties in order to facilitate ongoing consultation.

Port Taranaki meets chall

Regional communities that don't have ports often don't realise how valuable they can be, Port Taranaki's Chief Executive Roy Weaver believes. In effect, a port is a gateway to around 30% of a regional centre's GDP in the form of associated offshore and inshore industries and business.

To illustrate his point, he cites Timaru where he worked before taking over at Port Taranaki. On the highway between Christchurch and Dunedin, there are three rural servicing towns fairly evenly distributed. Ashburton and Oamaru don't have commercially active ports and have populations around 15,000. Timaru with its active port has a population of 25,000.

An economic impact report by McDermott Fairgray for Port Taranaki in 1997 bears this out. It measured Port Taranaki's export and import trades and port related activities, then immersed in the activities of the Maui gas field, as nearly 38% of Taranaki's regional GDP and almost 2% of the national GDP. Total port-related activities were helping to sustain over \$1 billion in added value and 9,510 jobs to the region.

Having a port is one thing. Keeping it working at maximum potential, however, is a challenge.

This challenge is shared by the Taranaki Regional Council as the single shareholder in Port Taranaki Ltd. The 2006/2007 dividend forecast from Port Taranaki is \$800,000, ascribed to a fall off in trade in the petrochemical industry with the wind down of Maui gas, and leaving the Council with a revenue shortfall of \$2.7 million compared to past expected levels. As a result, the Council will draw on its reserve funds built up in expectation of Maui's demise, and implement a general rates increase next year.

For Port Taranaki Ltd's part, the answer to the challenge, Roy Weaver says, is change. He points out that where there were once several thriving ports in Taranaki, there is now only one.

"In this business, if you don't change, you die," he said. "The whole world scene of transport is changing and everybody is



The Machiavelli dredge arrives at Port Taranaki to begin its \$25 million deepening project.

In this business,
if you don't
change, you die
– Port Taranaki
Chief Executive,
Roy Weaver

looking at economies of scale. In the past 15 years, ships have increased in size by 50% and this trend is expected to continue for the next 15 years. Where we were once using hooks, derricks and wheelbarrows to load and unload ships, we are now using machines that lift 100 tons at a time. There were 750 workers at Port Taranaki once, now there are 110 directly employed and 40 contracted."

At the same time, Port Taranaki is diversifying its activities. Roy Weaver speaks of the Port five years ago having only "one leg" – Maui. At the time, 93% of the cargo moving through the Port was Maui-related. Now, he says, it is accessing new petrochemical options, and is in the process of growing another two legs – containers and bulk dry cargo such as coal.

Several multi-million dollar petrochemical development projects are currently being pursued. The \$1 billion Pohokura development is on track for first gas delivery in the second half of this year and will be followed closely by Kupe, Tui and Maari field developments during the next three years. If New Zealand does not find sufficient quantities of domestic gas to replace Maui's product, LNG (liquefied natural gas – natural gas chilled to minus 161°) may well become a viable, economic alternative on-stream some time after 2012.

The Company has been developing its container terminal, growing from 5,000 to 50,000 containers per year, increasing its share of Taranaki's dairy output from 10% to 80% and showing encouraging signs of a growing trade in containerised meat exports. Recently the Port was named by Maersk Line in both of its upgraded New Zealand/Asia services improving the

enge with change



The dredging programme to a depth of 14 metres is aimed at establishing Port Taranaki as the country's "west gate" and the international hub for other New Zealand ports on the western seaboard that are all physically constrained from becoming deeper – Onehunga in Auckland, Nelson, Greymouth and Westport. The greater draft means that the Port will be able to handle 'panamax'-sized ships that are the largest vessels that can travel through the Panama Canal and can carry up to 65,000 tonnes of cargo. Only four other New Zealand container ports are panamax capable – Auckland, Lyttelton, Tauranga and Otago.

Council addresses shortfall

In its community plan for the next 10 years, the Taranaki Regional Council addresses the short-term reduced dividend flows from Port Taranaki Ltd.

The draft *2006/2016 Long-Term Council Community Plan* outlines how, between 1997/1998 and 2004/2005 the Council used dividends from the Port to substantially reduce general rates. To fund the \$2.7 million dividend shortfall for 2006/2007, the Council proposes to increase the general rates take by \$1 million. The remainder will be drawn from dividends saved in previous years in anticipation of the current situation.

Most of the general rates increase will come from the annual general charge increasing from \$23.80 to \$38.25 per ratepayer. The overall effect on rates will be in the order of \$25 to \$35 per ratepayer per annum.

Council Chairman David Walter says that Port Taranaki is integral to the region's infrastructure, and the Council remains committed to keeping it in public ownership.

"Forecast dividend returns from Port Taranaki are predicted to rise back to former levels in the medium to long term as a result of development the Company is currently undertaking," he said.

frequency of ship calls to New Plymouth to twice per week and reintroducing the Brisbane/trans-Tasman link. During the last financial year, container revenue earned by Port Taranaki exceeded that of oil and gas for the first time.

The third 'leg' is the transportation and shipping of premium Pike River coking coal for export to world markets in an 18-year contract bigger than those for both the container trade and the existing oil and gas. To secure the Pike River Coal Company Ltd contract, Port Taranaki Ltd formed a consortium with Transport Nelson Ltd and Wendell-Jebesen to build two specialised ships for \$50 million that can negotiate the bar in Greymouth's harbour and transport 1.3 million tonnes a year to Port Taranaki for export.

All the projects rely on the Port successfully completing its current \$25 million deepening project that will also future-proof the Port as New Zealand's multi-purpose deepwater west coast port.

The decision to spend \$25 million to dredge the port was a bold move for the Board to make, Roy Weaver says. Without it, the Port would not have been able to bid for the Pike River Coal deal or bid for the LNG or other future trade. Furthermore, as the Port is currently on the edge of the required container draft limit, it was in danger of losing container trade.

The decision to spend \$25 million to dredge the port was a bold move – Roy Weaver

"We have to be prepared to invest and we need to have the courage to make sure the Port is well prepared for the future. Our success relies on vision and planning."

A lucky port

Port Taranaki Ltd considers itself to be very fortunate not only because it has the only container port in New Zealand with 15 metres of water depth just 500 metres off the end of the main breakwater, but also because it has room to expand.

Chief Executive Roy Weaver says it is one of few ports in New Zealand where the shareholder owns the surrounding buffer zone that is vital for development. Other ports are choked by residential areas and face issues of incompatibility between landowners who want peace and quiet, and port activities that operate 24 hours a day.

Through a third stroke of serendipity, he says, the Company enjoys an association with the Taranaki Regional Council as its single shareholder.

“We are very fortunate to have a commercially minded shareholder. The Council has experienced the Think Big projects and is not afraid of big business and, at the same time, laying down environmental law. It has put clear systems in place, such as using independent commissioners for consideration of consents to address potential conflicts of interest.”

It's an advantage also to have a single shareholder, Roy Weaver believes. Because the shareholding is not publicly listed on the stock exchange, ratepayers are spared additional expenses and the Council can have a stronger bottom line. The Council also has a long-term outlook and is familiar with planning for 20 years ahead.



Port Taranaki Ltd's plans aim to establish the port as the country's west gate and the international hub for other New Zealand ports on the western seaboard.

“This was particularly evident with the Maui field. In the 1980s more than \$50 million was spent preparing for Maui and associated developments. We've gone through that 20 years now, Motunui has come and gone and Maui has almost gone. It's a very cyclic business. Now it's time to plan again,” Roy Weaver says.

Planning is very important to the security of the Port, he says. The mix of residential and commercial use on the single road to and from the Port is causing some concern. The Council's Regional Land Transport Plan and the New Plymouth District Council's Coastal Strategy are both influential documents for its future.

Ten-year plan available for comment

The Council's second Long-term Council Community Plan sets out the proposals and programmes for the year ahead within the bigger picture of the next ten years.

A summary of the *2006/2016 Long-term Council Community Plan* (LTCCP) has been prepared and distributed for public comment.

Most of the Plan deals with the everyday activities of the Council – ensuring good water quality, healthy rivers and streams, flourishing biodiversity, fresh, clean air, productive land and soils, quality coastal environments and clean industries for the region. There are some changes to passenger transport, however, following the review of the Regional Land Transport Strategy and the Regional Passenger Transport Plan.

For copies of the summary or the LTCCP telephone the Council on 06 765 7127, email publications@trc.govt.nz or visit www.trc.govt.nz. Submissions must arrive at the Council offices before 4.00 p.m. on 21 April 2006.

Pasture irrigation performance good overall

The Council's monitoring data for the dry 2004-2005 season shows that more than 91% of resource consent holders assessed for pasture irrigation compliance met their consent requirements. Consent holders who exceeded their allocations or failed to provide information on how much water they took will be required to improve their performance in the current year.

Forty-two of the 47 resource consents to abstract water for pasture irrigation draw on surface water, while five abstract groundwater. Thirty-five of the consents were exercised during the year. Of the 12 remaining consent holders six had not yet commissioned their irrigation systems.

Records based on consent holder records show that the actual volume of surface water abstracted between 1 July 2004-30 June 2005 was more than twice that used the previous year (3,107,000 cubic metres compared to 1,320,000 cubic metres). The abstracted total actual volume of groundwater recorded almost doubled (92,500 cubic metres compared to 54,000 cubic metres).



This aerial shot of an irrigation circle in South Taranaki shows the effects of pasture irrigation.

Environment Minister appraises region



Environment Minister David Benson-Pope (pictured third from right with STOS, Ministry, iwi and Council representatives, and MPs Maryan Street and Harry Duynhoven) took time out to comment on the success of the Council's riparian management programmes and sustainable management of farming land during a whistle-stop tour of the region. During the visit he saw how the Council is working with the community to manage our natural resources, protect biodiversity and control pests. The Minister also viewed projects of national interest such as the Pohokura Production Station and the development of Port Taranaki.

Pandemic planning under way

A Taranaki Pandemic Influenza Strategy will be prepared by 1 July this year. A planning group of 13 working groups – including a tailored rural/animals group to suit the region's specific needs – is working on plans with the Medical Officer of Health.

Business continuity is a priority, and planning will assist businesses to continue to trade rather than shut down. Taranaki's infrastructure and essential industries also have developed contingency plans to ensure they can continue their operations.

Like other organizations, the Taranaki Regional Council is developing its own pandemic contingency planning to ensure that business continues as usual, and to safeguard the health of staff.

Argentine ants

Recent discoveries of Argentine ants in confined parts of Waitara, Bell Block, New Plymouth, Patea and Oakura have prompted much interest in the unwanted visitors.

Argentine ants are not a declared pest in Taranaki and therefore are not included in the region's pest control strategy. However, the Council will provide information to commercial pest control operators and households in known areas of infestation. An effective ant bait is available at cost from the Council.

The ants were first found in New Zealand



The Argentine ant at work

16 years ago in Auckland. They are now in Northland, Coromandel, Bay of Plenty, Waikato, Hawke's Bay, Wellington, Nelson and Christchurch.

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MEETING SCHEDULE:

The Taranaki Regional Council operates to a six-weekly committee and Council meeting schedule.

Wednesday 26 April, 10.30 a.m.,
Consents and Regulatory Committee

Thursday 27 April, 10.30 a.m.,
Policy and Planning Committee

Monday 8 May, 10.00 a.m.,
Executive Committee

Monday 8 May, 10.30 a.m.,
Ordinary Meeting

Tuesday 16 May, 10.30 a.m., Civil
Defence Emergency Management Group

Wednesday 17 May, 10.30 a.m.,
Ordinary Meeting

Thursday 25 May, 10.30 a.m.,
Regional Land Transport Committee

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Student researches water quality tests

New Plymouth Girls' High School student Diana Cheyne spent her summer holiday working with Council Education Officer Kevin Archer (both pictured measuring flow in the Waingongoro Stream) to trial a Stream Health Monitoring and Assessment Kit (SHMAK).

The Council obtained the comprehensive kit from NIWA for use by year 12 and 13 students to monitor the health of the region's rivers and streams. An opportunity to trial and modify the kit was presented when the Royal Society sponsored Diana Cheyne for a six-week project.

Testing was carried out at 15 sites, and the test results of the SHMAK kit were compared with the results gathered by customary Council monitoring procedures. Tests included measuring water temperature, water flow, habitat, water depth, pH levels, conductivity, and assessing invertebrate and algal communities.

As a result of the research Kevin Archer



will work with the region's science teachers to determine how best the customised kit can be used by secondary schools. A more comprehensive stream health monitoring study for year 12 and 13 students will then be offered to secondary schools later in the year as part of the Council's environmental

education programme. The kit will build on the river study that is currently widely used by primary schools throughout the region, and will provide more consistent and long-term data about Taranaki's rivers and streams.

World Wetlands Day



World Wetlands Day was celebrated this year with a field trip (pictured above) on Lake Rotokare organised by the Council and Taranaki Fish and Game.

Members of the Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust, the Taranaki Tree Trust and the Ornithological Society shared their knowledge with visitors during a walk around the 18 hectare lake in 212 hectares of native bush.

Lake Rotokare is one of the few large wetlands in Taranaki remaining in its original, natural state. Wetlands are unique and valuable ecosystems providing rich habitats for a diversity of plants and animals. However, for many years the value of wetlands was largely ignored and many were drained or filled for agricultural development.

Seventy-six wetlands in Taranaki are identified as regionally significant, and over half of these are legally protected by a covenant or Council memorandum of understanding, or are in public conservation estate.

Future plans for Lake Rotokare include the erection of a predator proof fence and establishment of the area as an ecological island.

Environmental awards nominations required

Nominations are invited for this year's Taranaki Regional Council Environmental Awards.

Each year since 1993, awards have been presented for outstanding environmental projects in the region to community groups, industries, schools and individuals.

Projects suitable for selection must make a practical contribution to the sustainable management of the natural resources of the region or promote community awareness of the need for sustainable management through a promotional or educational programme. All the projects must be sustainable over time and not dependent on a continuing subsidy larger than the benefit to the community. They must be current, ongoing or nearing completion, and be carried out in Taranaki.

Nominations close at the Council's office on Friday 14 April 2006.