

## Hopeful signs in our hills

There's sustainability in them thar hills. New evidence on two fronts indicates a rise in environmentally sound management of Taranaki's eastern hillcountry land:

- The Taranaki Regional Council has now supplied the owners of around 56% of the hillcountry's private land with detailed plans, information and analyses to help them make the best decisions about managing their properties sustainably.
- An independent monitoring exercise has indicated continued steady progress towards achieving total sustainable management of the hillcountry.

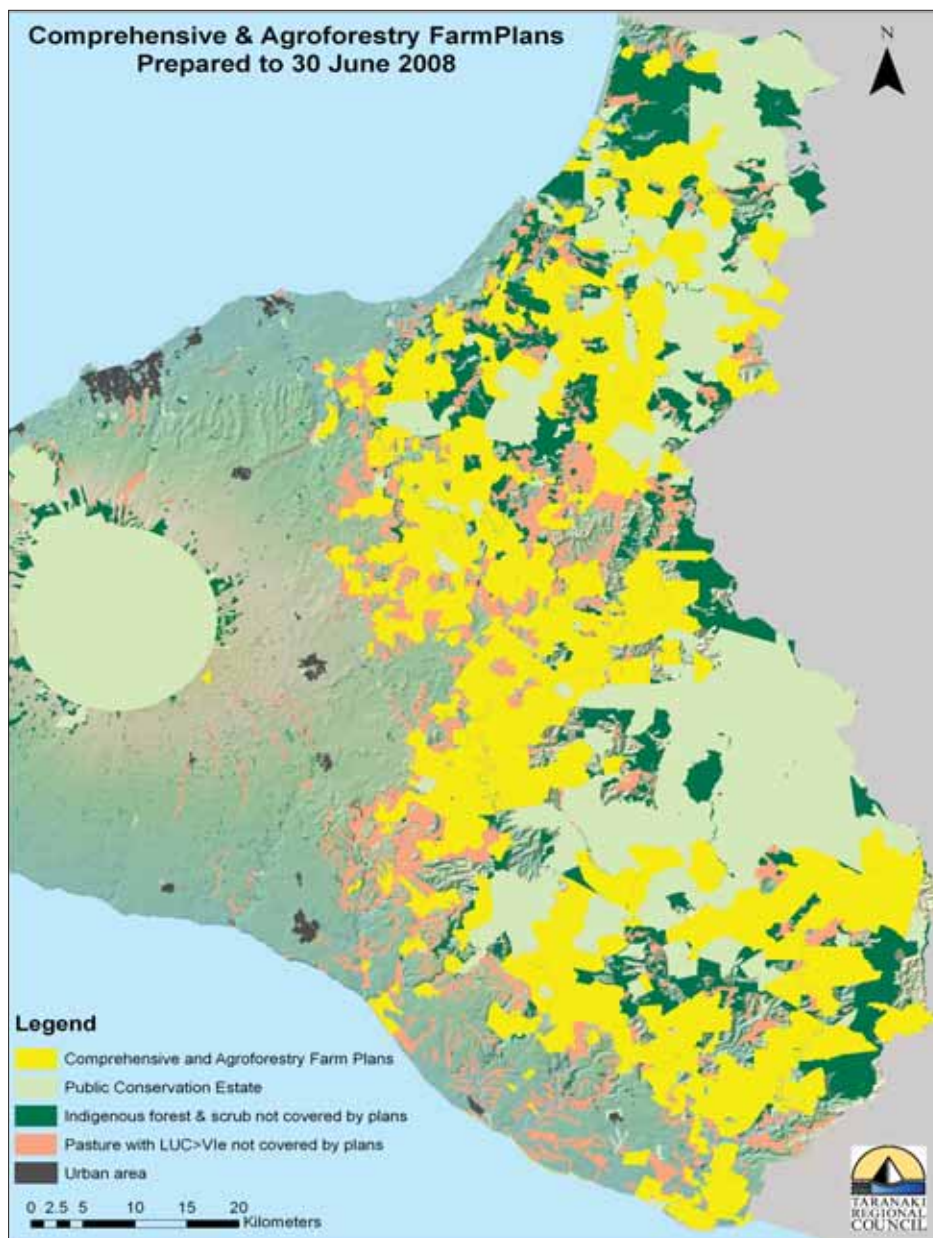
By the end of June this year, the Council's land management staff had prepared a total of 293 comprehensive farm plans and agroforestry plans covering 173,957 ha of the 308,240 ha of hillcountry land in private ownership.

Comprehensive farm plans are based on a detailed land resource inventory and include an analysis of the property's soils, geology, vegetation, slope and erosion. This gives landowners a good indication of the sustainability of various land-use options, and the plans also recommend measures to stabilise and protect the soil's productive capability. More recent plans also indicate production potentials for different parts of the property and provide some basic economic analyses. The idea is to match land use to the potential of the land.

Agroforestry plans analyse a number of plantation scenarios taking into account land use capability and the size and type of forest envisaged by the landowner or occupier.

The plans are drawn up at no cost to the landowner and the Council also supplies at-cost poplar and willow plants to help stabilise land.

Landowners with comprehensive farm plans or agroforestry plans are contacted annually for information on changes to farming practices and land use as a result of the plans. Council staff are now digitising older plans, plus data on subsequent land-use changes, to bring them into current GIS formats so a more comprehensive monitoring programme can be developed.



Good progress is already being confirmed, however, according to the latest results of a five-yearly monitoring programme by Landcare Research.

Under contract to the Council, Landcare Research made a detailed analysis of 25

representative hillcountry sites, each of around 900 ha, that were also the subject of similar monitoring in 1994 and 2000. The study involved the use of aerial photography to map vegetation and land-use.

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## From the Chair

Sometimes we're so focused on our destination that we fail to notice the milestones along the journey. Or to put it another way, we see that a glass is still half empty when, of course, it is also already half full.



So it is with the sort of environmental work that forms so much of the Taranaki Regional Council's core business. With increasing awareness of the importance of environmental issues, there will always be some who say progress is too slow, or in the wrong direction.

And it is true that much remains to be done in many of the environmental projects the Council is involved in. To meet regional riparian protection targets under the Dairying and Clean Streams Accord, for example, farmers still need to plant hundreds of thousands of trees, shrubs and grasses along thousands of kilometres of riverbanks and streambanks on the Taranaki ring plain.

And in the hillcountry to the east, assessment and analysis are still needed for thousands of hectares where the soil is susceptible to rapid erosion, so the owners have the best possible information to help them manage this land sustainably.

But let's not lose sight of what's been achieved so far. This edition of *Recount* reports on a successful planting day in June involving the Council, the Fonterra Shareholders Council and others. The idea was to draw attention to progress so far in achieving regional riparian management targets, and to highlight the enormous scope of the undertaking. For example, when the project is finished there will be fences and protective plants along a distance greater than the entire New Zealand coastline.

In the hillcountry too, Taranaki can celebrate progress even as it looks ahead to what still has to be achieved. As we report on our front page, well over half the privately owned land is now covered by comprehensive farm plans or agroforestry plans, and independent monitoring shows gradual but steady progress towards total sustainable land management.

This edition of *Recount* also reports on an independent study, carried out by Business and Economic Research Ltd, that reveals a marked increase in environmental spending by Taranaki's industrial, agricultural and community sectors.

Again, that doesn't mean we can rest on our laurels. There is plenty more environmental work to be done. But it's easy to overlook the fact that in our region, sound environmental investments are already being made. That's something we should be proud of.

When a good job is being done, we should acknowledge it – if for no other reason than to encourage even greater achievement.

David MacLeod - CHAIRMAN

The new bus website, [www.taranakibus.info](http://www.taranakibus.info), has had thousands of hits.



# City Link bus service off to flying start

Bus passengers and drivers alike were praised for a largely smooth transition to a new bus operator in New Plymouth at the beginning of July.

"The new operators, Tranzit Coachlines, and their staff worked hard to make it a seamless and hassle-free changeover to the City Link service, and passengers took the change in their stride," says the Taranaki Regional Council's Director-Operations, Rob Phillips.

"There were only a couple of glitches, involving school buses, and we'd like to thank the passengers and parents involved for their patience and understanding.

"Otherwise the City Link changeover went really smoothly and we're getting good feedback on the smart-looking buses now plying the streets of New Plymouth, Bell Block, Oakura and Waitara.

"There've been thousands of hits on the new bus

website, [www.taranakibus.info](http://www.taranakibus.info), and there's also a new toll-free inquiries number, 0800 872 287."

Under a new contract with the Council and using new City Link branding, Tranzit took over urban bus runs on 1 July after a two-year trial of expanded services. The trial was operated by Okato Bus Lines, which has now been bought by the new operator.

Tranzit's contract with the Council runs for three years, with a two-year rollover possible.

Mr Phillips says new early-morning and late-afternoon commuter services will be introduced in October, along with convenient new fare-paying technology.

"We're entering a new era in public transport and with fuel prices the way they are, we're expecting that interest and patronage can only grow."

For information about City Link routes, fares and timetables, see [www.taranakibus.info](http://www.taranakibus.info).



A City Link bus pulls into the Ariki Street Bus Station in central New Plymouth.

# Farmers dig in for environment

Farming, industry and other regional leaders joined forces in June to mark another milestone in Taranaki's large-scale environmental programme involving millions of plants and thousands of kilometres of streambanks.

Two national TV channels and national, regional and agricultural print media representatives were on hand as farming leaders, the Taranaki Regional Council and Fonterra representatives and staff rolled up their sleeves and planted more than 1,000 trees, shrubs and grasses alongside waterways on a dairy farm near Opunake.

This brought to nearly 1.25 million the number of plantings in an ambitious project to have all of Taranaki's rivers and streams fenced and planted to protect and enhance water quality. By the end of the project, 17,500 km of streambank will have riparian protection – more than the length of the New Zealand coastline. The project is well under way and is of international scale.

"This is a long-term project and the planting day marked an increasing focus on getting plants into the ground," says the Chairman of the Taranaki Regional Council, David MacLeod.

"Already almost 75% of the ring plain's dairy farms have had riparian management plans drawn up by Council staff working with each farmer. The Council also bulk orders plants and supplies them at cost.

"Now the focus is firmly on putting those riparian plans into action so we can meet the regional targets agreed to under the Dairying and Clean Streams Accord of 2003."

Taranaki dairy farmer and Fonterra Shareholders Council Chairman, Blue Read, is personally committed to the programme, with his own riparian management plan almost completely implemented.

"Almost half of the region's streams have riparian protection but there's a large target ahead," says Mr Read. "Local farming leaders are committed to this occurring and I am confident farmers will rise to the challenge and take ownership.



Taranaki Regional Council Chairman David MacLeod, Fonterra Shareholders Council Chairman Blue Read and Shareholders Council member Shona Glentworth get stuck in at the planting day near Opunake.

"The Taranaki environment is treasured by all who live here and farmers are conscious of the need to protect this special place."

Fonterra's General Manager of Sustainable Production, John Hutchings, says Taranaki has made outstanding progress towards regional targets set by the Dairying and Clean Streams Accord and the environmental benefits have already become clear.

"The consistent progress against targets in the region shows that a partnership between farmers, the industry and the local council is the best approach to improving environmental performance on farms."

Mr MacLeod says the Taranaki Regional Council has a tradition of environmental achievement through working alongside farmers. But it also has a record of taking enforcement action when necessary.

"Farmers are increasingly insisting that poor performers among them are weeded out."

Water quality in Taranaki is still generally good and in fact has been showing some improvement in recent years because of investments made by the farmers and the community. But with cow numbers near 500,000, the riparian project is essential to future-proof the industry.

Riparian management – the fencing and planting of waterways – is regarded by the Council as a critical strategy in protecting and enhancing water quality in the 300 rivers and streams that flow off Mount Taranaki. As well as keeping stock out of waterways, well-established riparian strips also filter contaminated run-off, provide shade, keep water temperatures down and enhance biodiversity.

## Signs of hope in hillcountry

• From p1

The conclusion: 87.4% of the monitoring area is now being used sustainably, up from 85% in 2000 and 83.9% in 1994.

The Council's Chief Executive, Basil Chamberlain, says it is a positive and encouraging result, with good progress towards the Regional Soil Plan's target of 89% sustainability by 2011.

"There is good basis for optimism that the Soil Plan target can be achieved," he says. "While the most recent monitoring undoubtedly shows the effects of the recent move away from sheep and

beef farming as returns have declined, the overall trend since 1994 is for an increase in sustainable land use – and that period has included good years for the meat and wool sector."

New measures in response to climate change, notably the Permanent Forest Sink Initiative, may have the potential to accelerate the trend towards sustainable land use.

For the Council's land management staff, a major focus will be on preparing plans for more of the private hillcountry land. In particular they are targeting areas where soil is susceptible to accelerated erosion (indicated with salmon pink

shading on the map on P1).

"We need to keep the momentum up if we are to meet our sustainability target," says Mr Chamberlain.

The Landcare Research monitoring exercise also covered four sites in the coastal sand country between Cape Egmont and Wanganui, finding no significant change.

The monitoring results will form part of the Council's five-yearly State of the Environment Report due for publication later this financial year.

# Region invests in its future

A study commissioned by the Taranaki Regional Council has found the region is investing much more money to ensure it stays clean and green.

The economic study found a near 250% increase in environmental capital investment in five years and the Taranaki Regional Council says this shows such spending is now firmly a mainstream concern for industry, agriculture and community organisations.

“All sectors in Taranaki have clearly taken on board the need to be environmentally responsible, which is a good sign for the future,” says the Council’s Chief Executive, Basil Chamberlain. “Taranaki people value the quality of our region and accept the sustainability concept that our economic development is tied to environmental investments.”

The Business and Economic Research Limited (BERL) economic study was commissioned for the Council’s five-yearly State of the Environment Report, due for publication later this financial year. BERL made a similar study for the 2003 State of the Environment Report.

Comparing environmental spending in 2002/2007 with the previous five years, the latest study found:

- Capital investment in environmental improvements totalling \$216.7 million, up from \$91.1 million.
- Annual operating costs of \$41.8 million, up from \$28.8 million.
- Total spending on the environment conservatively estimated at \$85.1 million a year, up by 49% from \$57.1 million a year.
- Industry was the biggest capital investor at \$109.1 million, up from \$62 million.
- Community organisations invested \$88.1 million, well up on the previous \$24 million.
- Agricultural investment totalled almost \$20 million, up from \$5.1 million. Agriculture was the major contributor to surface water quality management and land management.

The study’s authors, Jiani Wu and Kel Sanderson, suggests that operating costs did not rise as sharply as capital investment because some projects in the energy sector are still being developed or are not yet operating at full capacity.

The authors sent a survey form to 160 companies and organisations in Taranaki, of which 111 responded. They also used figures supplied by the Taranaki Regional Council, updated with a range of price indices.



All sectors in Taranaki are spending more on environmental projects.

The study does not include spending by central Government, including the Department of Conservation, or the investment and annual spending on community facilities by the region’s Councils.

“The conclusions of this study are conservative estimates but they do give a useful indication of the magnitude of environmental spending, and the increase that has occurred in the past five years,” says Mr Chamberlain.

“It shows that it’s not just by good luck that we generally enjoy a quality environment in Taranaki. Serious work and serious money are going into keeping it that way.

“While much of this spending is simply a matter of complying with the law, much of it is not – such as proactive riparian protection work by farmers.”

The report is available on the Council’s website, [www.trc.govt.nz](http://www.trc.govt.nz)



Family fun on Fitzroy Beach. The Taranaki Regional Council's summer survey found it the most popular aquatic recreation spot in the region.

## Fitzroy does swimmingly well

A major survey of coastal and freshwater recreation destinations was carried out by Taranaki Regional Council staff last summer – the first such exercise for nearly quarter of a century.

The survey was carried out in two parts:

- A postal questionnaire filled out by 418 Taranaki people chosen at random.
- Repeated visits to 32 coastal, lakeside and riverside locations by Council staff to record the number of people present and the activities they were engaged in.

The last survey was carried out in 1984 and not surprisingly, some new patterns have emerged.

Among the latest survey's findings:

- Fitzroy Beach, followed by Ngamotu Beach, Opunake Beach and the Coastal Walkway were the most frequently visited locations. Opunake Beach had increased in popularity and Oakura Beach had decreased in popularity (the latter being the most popular in 1984).
- Ninety percent of respondents had visited a river, lake or beach for recreational purposes in the previous year, compared with 99% of respondents in 1984.

- Of the 10% that had not made a visit, ill health, mobility issues and lack of transport were cited as reasons. Less than 2% were not interested in visiting any of these locations.
- Walking, swimming and relaxing were the most popular activities at beaches and rivers. Walking, relaxing and scenic appreciation were the most popular activities at lakes.
- Proximity to home was ranked as the main reason for visiting a location. Peace and quiet, and suitability for specific activities were ranked 2nd equal.
- Most people were prevented from visiting river, lake or coastal locations more often by work commitments, family commitments and cost of travel.
- Ninety percent of respondents rated water quality good or excellent at beaches, 77% rated river water quality and 71% rated lake water quality good or excellent.
- Approximately 90% of respondents thought public access to rivers lakes and the coast was about right. Eight percent thought it was inadequate and 2% thought there was too much

access. One percent of respondents had been denied access by the land owner or occupier.

- New Plymouth residents visited sites primarily in the central New Plymouth district, but overall they visited the greatest range of sites. Stratford residents travelled the greatest distances but visited fewer sites. South Taranaki residents travelled region wide, but showed a distinct preference for the main local beaches.
- Men spent more days per year at beach, river and lake recreation sites than women. Younger people spent more time at central New Plymouth and Opunake beaches and older people preferred Ngamotu beach and the Coastal Walkway.

The survey was prompted by much more than idle curiosity. Under the Resource Management Act, the Taranaki Regional Council must take into account amenity values, including recreational use, as it maintains and enhances public access to rivers, lakes and the coast.

Results from the latest survey will be incorporated into the Council's five-yearly State of the Environment Report due for publication later this financial year.

## Tree planters do whitebait a favour



Photo courtesy of DOC

Fifteen people turned out in soggy conditions early in August to plant 1,000 trees alongside the Hutiwai Stream near Tongaporutu.

The planting day was organised by the Taranaki Tree Trust, with trees provided by the Honda TreeFund. Taking part were locals and whitebaiters and staff from the Trust, the Taranaki Regional Council and the Department of Conservation. Also there was Taranaki Regional Councillor Roger Maxwell.

The Taranaki Tree Trust Co-ordinator, Rachel Stewart, says the event was part of the ongoing Hutiwai Stream Whitebait Restoration Project aimed at restoring the habitat and encouraging whitebait to continue to spawn in the area.

"Trees are the foundation of these kinds of environments. Aside from working as a natural ecological sponge absorbing CO<sup>2</sup> emissions, trees provide important shelter and food for wildlife, birds, and even fish as small as whitebait," she says.

In all, the Honda TreeFund will provide 1,850 native trees for projects throughout Taranaki this year. The car company and its dealers fund 13 trees for every new vehicle sold, with plants distributed within the regions where the money is generated.

"We're very proud of Honda TreeFund generally and our work with the Taranaki Tree Trust specifically," says Honda New Zealand Managing Director Graeme Seymour.



Members and directors of the Taranaki Regional Council inspect progress on the Bell Block bypass project in July. They were told that work is going well and the bypass may be open by Christmas 2009.

## Shakeup for transport planning

Strategic planning for transport in Taranaki is being reorganised under new legislation.

A new Regional Transport Committee with enhanced functions is being established to replace the former Regional Land Transport Committee.

Under the Land Transport Amendment Act passed by Parliament in July, the new Committee's duties will include the preparation of a new three-yearly Regional Land Transport Programme, prioritising major capital roading projects for Taranaki.

This programme will feed into a three-yearly National Land Transport Programme, and will also be aligned with the Long Term Council Community Plans of the Taranaki Regional Council and the region's three District Councils.

The new Committee will also be the forum where

any proposal for a regional fuel tax is debated and voted upon. The new legislation allows for a regional fuel tax to fund priority projects that cannot reasonably be funded from any other source within the timeframe wanted by the region. This would involve extensive public consultation and discussion.

Another change is in the composition of the Regional Transport Committee, which will be smaller than the previous Regional Land Transport Committee.

The Chair and Deputy Chair will be the Hon Roger Maxwell and Brian Jeffares respectively, both Taranaki Regional Councillors. There will be four other full voting members – one from each of the three District Councils in the region, and one from the New Zealand Transport Agency.

Other members of the Regional Transport Committee will not be able to vote on the Regional Transport Programme but will have speaking rights.

Nominations have been called for these members, who will be drawn from groups representing broad objectives of the NZ Transport Strategy, rather than the specific organisations represented on the former Regional Land Transport Committee.

The objectives to be represented are: Safety and Personal Security; Public Health; Economic Development; Access and Mobility; Environmental Sustainability.

There will also be one member representing cultural interests.

The new Committee's first meeting is scheduled for 9 October.

## Stronger measures proposed for water management

Public consultation is about to start on a stronger national regime being proposed for the protection and enhancement of rivers, lakes and waterways.

The proposed National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management identifies water quality and the need to manage increasing demands for freshwater as matters of national significance, says the Minister for the Environment, Trevor Mallard.

"New Zealand's water is not a limitless resource," he says. "It needs protecting and sustainable management, and we must step up our actions to stop its degradation in rural and urban areas."

An independent Board of Inquiry will run the consultation process, calling for and considering submissions on the proposed national policy.

Regional Councils manage fresh water under the Resource Management Act. The proposed national policy would direct Councils to take action to:

- Address existing and future constraints on the availability of freshwater resources.
- Address the effects of existing and future discharges of contaminants to freshwater resources.

- Provide more certainty in the face of competing demands on freshwater resources and facilitate opportunities to increase benefits from the use of freshwater resources.
- Meet the recreational aspirations of New Zealanders, including that freshwater resources are swimmable.
- Address matters of national significance relating to the sustainable management of freshwater resources.
- Improve the integrated management of freshwater resources by territorial authorities, regional councils, and others whose activities affect the resources.

The proposed National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management was unveiled in July as one of three major measures to emerge from the Sustainable Water Programme of Action that was established in 2003.

Other measures include a new National Environmental Standard for Measurement of Water Takes, currently being drafted into regulations, and a National Environmental Standard on Ecological

Flows and Water Levels, for which the public submissions process is drawing to a close.

Work is also being done to enhance Maori participation in freshwater management.

The Taranaki Regional Council's Chief Executive, Basil Chamberlain, chairs the Ministerial Advisory Group for the Sustainable Water Programme of Action.

Mr Chamberlain says the release of the proposed policy statement offers an opportunity for a calm national discussion of issues surrounding water quality and water allocation.

"These can be hot topics but this consultation process is a chance for all parties to be involved in some constructive dialogue – which of course involves listening as well as talking."

For full details of the proposed National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management, and the Sustainable Water Programme of Action, see the Ministry for the Environment's website, [www.mfe.govt.nz](http://www.mfe.govt.nz).

# Answers found at Patea site

One of the most extensive and complicated site investigations ever carried out by the Taranaki Regional Council has helped to define a way forward in dealing with the old Patea Freezing Works.

The Ministry for the Environment, the Taranaki Regional Council and the South Taranaki District Council funded the 10-month project to assess contamination at the site. However, an unexpected and serious interruption came on Waitangi Day, when a major fire left the site a tangled and hazardous mess. Many townsfolk were evacuated as a safety precaution during the blaze, a move which attracted widespread media attention and prompted much public discussion and debate on the state and future of the old works.

The fire also resulted in further questions and uncertainty over ownership of some parts of the site.

Through it all, Taranaki Regional Council staff persevered with the site investigation until its conclusion in May – on budget and only slightly delayed.

The investigation found that the major environmental and public health issues are asbestos and PCBs. Analysis of soil, groundwater, ash debris and buried wastes, and marine ecological surveys of the Patea River and adjoining estuary found no evidence of other potential problems.

The asbestos fibres contaminate the ash and debris left by the fire. As reported in the April edition of *Recount*, this problem is being kept at bay in the medium term by the innovative use of a polymer binding to coat the ash and debris. The PCBs are in old switchboard equipment, some of which has already been removed from the site and disposed of safely.

Also contained in the report was an estimate from a specialist environmental contamination and remediation company that the total cost of completely demolishing and cleaning up the entire



Taranaki Regional Council staff in protective clothing as they investigate contaminants at the disused and fire-ravaged Patea Freezing Works site.

site would be \$1.6 – \$2 million, substantially less than the \$5 million initially suggested.

Subsequently, the Minister for the Environment, Trevor Mallard has announced a \$1.5 million allocation to help with cleaning up the site.

“This clean-up is a good example of how central and local government can work in partnership to rid New Zealand of the worst abandoned contaminated sites,” Mr Mallard says.

The South Taranaki District Mayor, Ross Dunlop, welcomed the findings of the site investigation.

Mr Dunlop says now that the scope of the contamination problem is known, plans can be made to clean up the site.

Mr Mallard says the clean-up could take 40 weeks. The project will be managed by the local councils and will involve input from health authorities and the Labour Department.

## Revamped properties to spring into prominence

A busy springtime is coming up for Tupare and Hollard Gardens, the two heritage properties owned by the Taranaki Regional Council on behalf of the people of the region.

Extensive refurbishments at both properties will be unveiled at a series of events in late October and early November, with much of the activity incorporated into the annual Taranaki Rhododendron and Garden Festival.

Besides official launches for invited guests, there will be public events including farmers market days at Hollard Gardens, an antiques roadshow event at Tupare, and talks and guided walks.

Work at both properties over the past year has included garden refurbishment, improved visitor facilities and new opportunities for visitors to learn about the lives of people in days gone by.

Both properties have new gatehouses and extensive new interpretive displays. The

Chapman-Taylor house at Tupare has been refurbished, while Hollard Gardens has a new events pavilion on the main lawn.

The Council's Regional Gardens Manager, Greg Rine, says a major aim of the work at both properties has been to ensure they each authentically reflect the vision of their founders, Sir Russell Matthews (Tupare) and Bernie Hollard.

Meanwhile, gardening apprentices are being taken on at each of the properties.

“We are taking on promising people to give them a good grounding in gardening's arts and techniques, so these properties will in future years continue to get the care and attention they deserve,” says Mr Rine.

“This is the first time the Council has taken on apprentices and we are working closely with a training provider. The apprentices will work towards a National Certificate in Horticulture.”

## Taranaki Regional Council Facts File

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### North Taranaki Constituency:

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David MacLeod (Chairman)	0-6-278 5577
Neil Walker	0-6-278 7541

### Stratford Constituency:

Brian Jeffares	0-6-765 7773
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## MEETING SCHEDULE:

The Taranaki Regional Council operates a six-week committee and Council meeting cycle. Meetings are held at the Council chamber, 47 Cloten Road, Stratford, unless otherwise stated.

### Wednesday 3 September, 10.30am:

Consents and Regulatory Committee

### Thursday 4 September, 10.30am:

Policy and Planning Committee

### Monday 8 September, 10.30am:

Regional Transport Committee  
(differs from original schedule)

### Tuesday 9 September, 10.30am:

Civil Defence Emergency Management Group (differs from original schedule).  
Venue: Stratford District Council chamber, Miranda Street, Stratford

### Monday 15 September, 10.00am:

Executive Committee

### Tuesday 23 September, 10.30am:

Ordinary Council meeting

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# Nature's might leaves big mess



Erosion high on Mount Taranaki is causing problems in the Stony River.

Work has begun on clearing channels and repairing river control structures in the Stony River and Kaihihi Stream in the wake of heavy rain and large-scale erosion in their headwaters on Mt Taranaki.

The Taranaki Regional Council has allocated \$50,000 for work on the two waterways, and up to \$50,000 for further channel clearance projects where the cost will be shared with private land owners.

The Council is also examining longer-term options for the Stony, given the large amount of material naturally eroding into it from the mountain.

The immediate focus, though, is to clear channels and repair banks, groynes and walls that were originally built to divert or deflect channel flows at various points on both the Stony and the Kaihihi.

Some of these structures suffered severe damage during heavy rains at the end of April, when the downpour peaked at 55mm an hour at the Council's raingauge at the Mangatete Bridge over the Stony. There have since been four other significant, although smaller, downpours.

On the Kaihihi, the repair work will include sites upstream of the Corbett Reserve, around the swing bridge and further downstream.

The repair work may continue into the summer, intermittently as weather allows.

The Council's Manager – Special Projects, Dex Knowles, says the Stony's channel is significantly congested downstream of Ngaweka Pa and there is concern about the possibility of the river leaving its channel during high flows.

Farmland downstream of Wiremu Road may also be at risk of overflows during heavy rainfall.

Mr Knowles says only localised channel clearing is practical, because of the high volume of gravel and boulders eroding into the river from high on Mount Taranaki.

“With inputs at a faster rate than the material can be transported through the system to the sea, increased channel build-up will occur,” he says.

## Clean-up operation halts after eight months

The Taranaki Regional Council called a halt in June to its clean-up on the Okato coastline, nearly eight months after crude oil washed ashore from a spill from the offshore Tui field.

Only tiny amounts of oil remain along the 14 km of affected coastline but a monitoring programme is continuing and the Council will reactivate the clean-up operation if necessary.

Meanwhile, Nga Mahanga are maintaining a rahui on the beaches at Kaihihi, Komene Road and Paora Road. The rahui, which prevents the gathering of mataitai and other seafood, will remain in place until the Iwi are satisfied that pupu are in the same state as before the spill.

The pupu and other kaimoana were due to be re-tested during August.

A major clean-up operation was carried out within days of the spill from the Tui oilfield's floating production, storage and offloading (FPSO) vessel, Umuroa, in October last year. But in the weeks and months following, remaining oil that spread intermittently from rocks to the sandy beaches has been cleaned up by staff provided by oilfield operator Australian Worldwide Exploration and directed by the Council.

The Council's Compliance Manager, Bruce Pope, says it was fortunate timing that the oil came in on a spring tide and most of it settled high on the shore, generally away from important marine habitats.



The clean-up operation along the Okato coastline last October.

“While residents, iwi and surfers were concerned about the effects of the spill, samples of water and kaimoana tested by Council scientists and others indicated that the environmental impact was low and no long-term effects are likely.”

He says the Council has consulted a community liaison group of Iwi, residents and interested parties about its clean-up and monitoring programme, and the consultation will continue.

Because the spill occurred outside the 12 nautical mile limit, enforcement action is the responsibility of Maritime New Zealand, which has brought charges against AWE and its contractor Pro-Safe which operates the Umuroa.

“AWE deeply regrets the Umuroa incident and

will accept any penalties imposed as a result of the Umuroa incident while striving to prevent any reoccurrence,” the Managing Director of Australian Worldwide Exploration Ltd, Bruce Wood, said in a statement to Australian Stock Exchange on 22 May.

On 10 June, the Company pleaded guilty in the New Plymouth District Court to breaching the Maritime Transport Act by spilling 23,000 litres of oil off the Taranaki coastline. Prosafe also faces a charge.

Sentencing was due in mid-August but after hearing submissions, Judge Stanley Thorburn reserved his decision on a penalty. The maximum fine is \$200,000.