



BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

for the

Thames-Coromandel District Council



POLICY AND PLANNING GROUP- Adopted April 2008

1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is the Coromandel Peninsula's biodiversity – its stunning coastline, dramatic landscapes and abundant bush and wildlife that make the Thames-Coromandel District a desirable place to live and visit. From Mt Moehau at the northern end of the Peninsula to the edge of the Hauraki Plains at the southern end, the Thames-Coromandel District includes a diverse mix of ecosystems and communities of native plants and animals as well as exotic species.

Biodiversity is treasured for its inherent values, cultural importance and identity, scientific interest and recreational opportunities. The District's communities recognise the importance of biodiversity and are working towards protecting, maintaining and enhancing those biodiversity values which make the Coromandel Peninsula a special place. There are many community and iwi groups, landowners and land managers, organisations and government agencies already actively involved with biodiversity management in the District.

The Thames-Coromandel District Council has recognised that the management and maintenance of biodiversity is an important issue facing the Coromandel Peninsula. The Council's March 2005 vision statement states "*The Coromandel Peninsula will grow in a way that embraces its spirit and natural beauty, by working with our communities to acknowledge diversity, nurture ecology and value our identity.*" Although biodiversity is not explicitly mentioned, this vision is strongly linked with biodiversity.

A number of legislative requirements (e.g. Resource Management Act 1991), and national and regional strategies and policies (including the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy), provide a broad framework for the Council to contribute to biodiversity management. There are also a number of non-regulatory approaches which the Council could implement to support the wider community's contribution to biodiversity management.

The Council's objective in developing a Biodiversity Strategy is to better define its key goals and approach to working with the District's communities and other government agencies to improve biodiversity. Through the Strategy the Council aims to consolidate and re-focus many of the policies and actions already adopted by the Council (for a range of Council's ongoing service delivery functions), to identify and prioritise new actions, and to ensure that positive biodiversity outcomes are achieved. The Strategy will consolidate the strategic direction and the contribution of the

Council in regards to biodiversity management on the Coromandel Peninsula. It will also guide the development of Council's Long-term Council Community Plan (which outlines what the Council intends to achieve over ten years, the costs and how these costs will be met).

Given the Council's legislative responsibility for the protection and maintenance of indigenous biodiversity, this Strategy's emphasis is on indigenous species, particularly those plant and animal species which are special to the Coromandel Peninsula.

Biological diversity or biodiversity is the variety of all biological life – plants, animals, fungi, and microorganisms – the genes they contain and the ecosystems on land or in water where they live. It is the diversity of life on earth and includes:

- **Genetic diversity:** the variability in the genetic make up among individuals (and among populations) within a single species.
- **Species diversity:** the variety of species within a particular geographical area.
- **Ecological (ecosystem) diversity:** the variety of ecosystem types (e.g. forests, grasslands, streams, wetlands) and their biological communities that interact with one another and their non-living environments.

An **ecosystem** is an interacting system of living and non-living parts such as sunlight, air, water, minerals and nutrients. Ecosystems can be small and short-lived, for example, water-filled tree holes or rotting logs on a forest floor, or large and long-lived such as forests or lakes¹.

¹ Ministry for the Environment, 2000: *The New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy – Our Chance to Turn the Tide*.

2.0 WHY IS BIODIVERSITY IMPORTANT?

New Zealand's biodiversity includes a mixture of native (indigenous) species and introduced (exotic or alien) species. Like many countries, New Zealand has many species which have been introduced from different parts of the world – largely the result of intentional or unintentional human actions. These introduced plants and animals include house and crop plants, household pets and farm animals, invasive weed species, game fish and birds. A significant number of these introduced species have the ability to spread and invade natural or unmanaged areas, and are known as adventive or naturalised species (e.g. gorse and deer).

Biodiversity is treasured for its inherent values, cultural importance and identity, scientific interest and recreational opportunities. No longer is biodiversity generally considered as being 'something' in the environment to be appreciated when it suits. Rather, biodiversity is an inherent part of our lives, providing for the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of all humans.

2.1 NEW ZEALAND'S CONTRIBUTION TO GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY¹

New Zealand's unique biodiversity is internationally important. We boast the world's only flightless parrot (kakapo); a bird with nostrils at the end of its beak (kiwi); a primitive frog that lays eggs that hatch adult frogs (Leiopelma species); a large insect which fills a role that small rodents play in other countries (giant weta); and many other exceptional species.

High percentages of New Zealand's indigenous species are endemic – a result of isolated evolution and the diversity of New Zealand's land and coastal environments. This level of endemism is remarkable internationally. Both species of bat are endemic, as are all four frogs, all 60 reptiles, more than 90 percent of insects and a similar percentage of marine mollusks, about 80 percent of vascular plants and a quarter of all bird species. In comparison, Great Britain, which separated from continental Europe only 10,000 years ago, has only two endemic species (one plant and one animal). Six islands in the Hauraki Gulf have a greater level of endemism than the whole of Great Britain.

The ecosystems in which these species live are also highly distinctive. The kauri forests of the northern North Island, the braided river systems of the eastern South Island, and our geothermal ecosystems are some examples.

The uniqueness of much of New Zealand's indigenous biodiversity means that responsibility for its continued existence is entirely ours; it cannot be conserved in nature elsewhere in the world.

2.2 NEW ZEALAND'S BIODIVERSITY DECLINE²

New Zealand, one of the last places on earth to be settled by humans, has one of the worst records of indigenous biodiversity loss. While biodiversity varies in national cycles, nothing since the extinction of the dinosaurs (65 million years ago) compares with the decline in indigenous biodiversity in New Zealand over the last century.

The first phase of decline was the loss of New Zealand's larger bird species when humans first settled here. By around 1600, about a third of the original forests had been replaced by grasslands, although other habitats, for example wetlands and coastal areas, remained largely unchanged. From around 1850, the gathering pace of European settlement started a new wave of forest destruction. Since then, a further third of our original forests have been converted to farmland, and there has been extensive modification of wetlands, dunelands, river and lake systems, and coastal areas. Other bird species such as the huia and laughing owl also became extinct during this time.

As far as we know, in the last 700-800 years, humans and their accompanying pests have made extinct:

- 32 percent of indigenous land and freshwater birds;
- 18 percent of sea birds;
- three of seven frogs;
- at least 12 invertebrates such as snails and insects;
- one fish, one bat and perhaps three reptiles; and
- around 11 plants³.

Today, about 1000 of our known animal, plant and fungi species are considered threatened. And it is likely that many presently unknown species are also threatened. Many populations of these threatened species have disappeared from areas where they were once found. This pattern of local loss is the forerunner to species extinction.

² Ministry for the Environment, 2000: *The New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy – Our Chance to Turn the Tide*.

³ Ministry for the Environment, 1997: *The State of New Zealand's Environment*.

2.3 REGIONAL AND LOCAL FOCUS – THE COROMANDEL PENINSULA'S BIODIVERSITY

The Coromandel Peninsula is a 'hot spot' for biodiversity, being of both regional and national significance.

Approximately 20% of the Waikato Region's total area of remaining native vegetation is in the Thames-Coromandel District, which is significant given that the District accounts for only 9% of the Region's land area⁴. Of the nine major ecosystems found in the Region, the Coromandel Peninsula includes six of them, being:

- native forest and scrub;
- swamps and bogs;
- streams, rivers and lakes;
- beaches and dunes;
- marine and estuarine ecosystems; and
- coastal islands⁵.

The northern end of the Coromandel Peninsula is a unique area which contains a dynamic mix of ecosystems all found within a remarkably short distance – from the peak of Mt Moehau down to the coastal waters of the Hauraki Gulf. The Peninsula's ecosystems include a diverse mix of habitats and communities of native plants and animals, as well as exotic species. A number of coastal islands, managed by the Department of Conservation, provide predator-free habitats for a number of endangered species. The District also incorporates the Waikato Region's only marine reserve (Te Wahanganui-a-hei), and is also adjacent to one of five internationally significant wetlands, the Firth of Thames.

Although it is difficult to determine the full extent of the Coromandel Peninsula's remaining indigenous biodiversity, it is known that there are a large proportion of threatened species currently managing to survive on the Peninsula, while elsewhere in New Zealand they have become extinct. Some of the threatened plants and animals for which the Coromandel Peninsula is a regional (and in some instances national) stronghold for, include:

- world's only populations of Moehau stag beetle and Middle Island tusked weta;
- only place in the Region where tuatara are found (on offshore islands);
- Region's stronghold for Archey's and Hochstetter's frogs;

⁴ Information sourced from unpublished presentation to the Thames-Coromandel District Council on 14 July 2005 (Karen Denyer – Environment Waikato).

⁵ Waikato Biodiversity Forum, 2005: *Restoring Waikato's Indigenous Biodiversity: Ecological Priorities and Opportunities* (Environment Waikato in association with the Waikato Biodiversity Forum).

- Many other threatened animals including North Island brown kiwi, wrybill, Auckland green gecko, New Zealand dotterel, brown teal, short jawed kokopu, saddleback, etc; and
- Many other threatened plants including Cook's scurvy grass, Kirk's daisy, sand tussock, Coromandel daisy, pale flowered kumarahou, etc⁶.

2.4 THREATS TO BIODIVERSITY

Today, the most common pressure affecting New Zealand's biodiversity is change in land use including clearing bush, draining wetlands, subdividing land, building roads and settlements⁷. These activities put pressure on biodiversity by:

- destroying habitat;
- isolating and fragmenting habitat;
- introducing predators and plant and animal pests;
- using and harvesting species; and
- grazing other species.

As human pressure on the coastal and rural environments increases, the fragmentation, degradation and loss of biodiversity is likely to continue unless proactive steps are taken to avoid these effects⁸.

On the Coromandel Peninsula, the main threats to biodiversity are animal and plant pests (which some would include humans as being a part of this category). Land clearance and subdivision also contributes to the destruction and/or fragmentation of habitat (particularly wetlands and marsh areas) and the loss of species. Land uses such as agriculture and forestry are also impacting on down stream values (such as rivers, streams and harbours), water quality and the capacity to provide habitat to support species. Certainly, given the nature of the Coromandel Peninsula with its diverse landscapes, climate and the impacts of urbanisation and land use, the key to protecting the Peninsula's biodiversity values is the integrated management of catchments and a collaborative approach between agencies who have a responsibility or interest in these issues.

⁶ Information sourced from unpublished presentations to the Thames-Coromandel District Council's Policy and Planning Committee on 15 March 2005 (Moira Cursey – Waikato Biodiversity Forum Coordinator, Judy van Rossem – Environment Waikato) and the Thames-Coromandel District Council on 14 July 2005 (Karen Denyer – Environment Waikato).

⁷ Environment Waikato, 1998: Waikato State of the Environment Report.

⁸ Waikato Biodiversity Forum, 2005: *Restoring Waikato's Indigenous Biodiversity: Ecological Priorities and Opportunities* (Environment Waikato in association with the Waikato Biodiversity Forum).

3.0 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

There are a number of legislative requirements, and national and regional policies which provide a broad framework for the Council to contribute to biodiversity management as outlined below. The Council's requirements include the protection of indigenous vegetation and habitats of indigenous fauna; controlling the effects of the use of land on the maintenance of indigenous biodiversity; and working in partnership with other agencies to achieve sustainable management of biodiversity. Given that New Zealand's key biodiversity legislation specifies having particular regard and provisions for native biodiversity, agencies contributing to biodiversity management should focus on protecting, maintaining and enhancing, and enhancing native biodiversity, especially endemic or threatened native species and their habitats.

3.1 INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS TO BIODIVERSITY

The Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty which was adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Convention has three main goals, being conservation of biological diversity (biodiversity), sustainable use of its components, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources. New Zealand ratified the Convention in 1993 and as a signatory nation is required to prepare national strategies to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity.

New Zealand is also a signatory to the Ramsar Convention (1971) which promotes the conservation and sustainable utilisation of wetlands. There are six wetlands located in New Zealand which are included on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance, one being the Firth of Thames.

3.2 THE NEW ZEALAND BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY – OUR CHANCE TO TURN THE TIDE 2000

In February 2000, the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy was released by the Ministry for the Environment, to establish a strategic framework for action to conserve and sustainably use and manage New Zealand's biodiversity. The Strategy aims to action New Zealand's commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity through identifying action plans for managing New Zealand's biodiversity and identifying priorities for implementation. The Strategy emphasises that successful implementation will require a coordinated effort across central and local government, working in partnership with iwi, the community, the private sector and landowners.

In late 2006, the Government decided not to pursue with a National Policy Statement (NPS) originally planned as part of the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy. A NPS would have seen the protection of remaining indigenous biodiversity become subject to central government regulations. Matters relating to biodiversity are now to remain with local councils and their communities as part of a non-statutory approach.

In its place was the release of a "Statement of National Priorities for Protecting Rare and Threatened Native Biodiversity on Private Land". The statement identifies four national priorities for the protection of native vegetation:

1. Land areas with only 20 percent of their native vegetation cover left;
2. Wetlands and sand dunes;
3. Ecosystems that have always been limited in extent such as in geothermal areas, along coasts and on limestone formations; and
4. Protection of the habitats of New Zealand's most threatened species.

This information is intended to provide councils with biodiversity guidance from a national perspective about what the most threatened and at risk ecosystems and habitats are. The rationale behind this is that councils tend to focus on what is endangered or special to their area. However, if we are serious about halting the decline in biodiversity under the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy, then we need to also consider the national perspective to ensure ecosystems and habitats that are nationally rare and threatened are considered even though they may not be regionally rare and threatened. The Government is encouraging local government to integrate these priorities into biodiversity decision-making both through statutory and non-statutory programmes.

3.3 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACT 1991

The overarching purpose of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA 1991) is the promotion of the sustainable management of natural and physical resources. Under the RMA 1991, both regional and territorial local authorities are required to, as a 'matter of national importance', recognise and provide for "*The protection of areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna*" (s.6(c)).

There are also other provisions relating to the preservation of natural character, natural features, landscapes, ecosystems and heritage values that devolve resource management responsibilities to both regional and local authorities that are relevant to biodiversity management. The Council implements the provisions of the RMA 1991

through the Thames-Coromandel Proposed District Plan which outlines the significant resource management issues of the District and includes a package of objectives, policies and rules to enable the sustainable management of natural heritage resources, including biodiversity.

Amendments to the RMA in 2003 introduced a definition of 'biological diversity' which is broadly consistent with the definition set out in the Convention on Biological Diversity. Sections 30 and 31 now state that it is a function of both regional councils and territorial authorities to provide for the maintenance of biodiversity in regional and district plans. Further amendments in 2005 provide for more leadership from central government to guide decision making at the national, regional and territorial levels.

3.4 NEW ZEALAND COASTAL POLICY STATEMENT 1994

The New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS) is the only mandatory national policy statement under the RMA 1991. The purpose of the NZCPS is to state policies to achieve the purpose of the RMA 1991 in relation to the coastal environment of New Zealand. In regards to biodiversity, the NZCPS includes the policy "*It is a national priority for the preservation of the natural character of the coastal environment to protect areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna*" (Policy 1.1.2). Both regional and local authorities are required by the RMA 1991 to give effect to the NZCPS through their policy statements and plans and resource consent decision-makers must also have regard to relevant NZCPS policies.

3.5 WAIKATO REGIONAL POLICY STATEMENT 2000

The Waikato Regional Policy Statement, prepared by Environment Waikato in 2000, aims to achieve sustainable management of the natural and physical resources. The statement identifies significant resource management issues, objectives, policies and methods for the Waikato Region including the Firth of Thames, the Coromandel Peninsula and off-shore islands.

The Policy Statement seeks to maintain or enhance the biodiversity of the region. Methods to achieve this include identifying areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna, using existing information to develop and maintain a regional database and maintaining a regional database of threatened species in the Waikato Region.

Many of these policies and associated implementation methods involve actions that are of direct relevance (e.g. appropriate land use rules/provisions, use of incentives, education, provision of information, provision of works and services, etc). The Council's District Plan gives effect to a number of the Policy Statement's policies through the objectives, policies and rules of the Plan. Currently, there are two provisions in the District Plan that give effect to the Policy Statement – one on clearing indigenous vegetation and the other on conservation lot subdivisions which will be explained further on in the Strategy.

3.6 WAIKATO REGIONAL COASTAL PLAN 2004

The Waikato Regional Coastal Plan, which is required to be prepared under s64 of the RMA 1991, details how Environment Waikato will carry out its resource management responsibilities in the coastal marine area. The Plan contains objectives and policies which seek to protect significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna from adverse effects. The Plan also implements the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement and the Waikato Regional Policy Statement by detailing rules and other methods for managing the coastal marine area. The entire Coromandel Peninsula and off-shore islands are subject to the Regional Coastal Plan, and the Thames-Coromandel Proposed District Plan must have regard to any matter of regional significance as outlined in the Plan.

3.7 BIOSECURITY ACT 1993

The Biosecurity Act 1993 has two basic purposes, being border control and surveillance to keep harmful organisms out of New Zealand and the control and management of harmful organisms. Under this Act, national and regional pest management strategies can be developed for each of the important pests. These define the role and responsibilities of pest management agencies (including regional and local authorities) in the control of pests, the procedures to be followed, and how pest management is to be funded. The Council's District Plan includes some methods and rules around the keeping of animal pests (e.g. mustelids, goats, deer).

3.8 WAIKATO REGIONAL PEST MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2002-2007

Within the Waikato Region, the Department of Conservation largely manages and controls pests on Crown land and Environment Waikato manages pests on rateable land. Environment Waikato's Regional Pest Management Strategy 2002 identifies 85 plant and 22 animal pests which require management programmes in order to protect the environment. Although the Thames-Coromandel District Council is

currently not actively involved in pest management (except on Council-owned land), Environment Waikato is required to consult with the Council as part of a proposed review process of the Strategy (Biosecurity Act 1993, Section 73).

3.9 HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES AND NEW ORGANISMS ACT 1996

The purpose of the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996 is to protect the environment, and the health and safety of people and communities by preventing or managing the adverse effects of hazardous substance and new organisms. The Act established the Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA) to assess and decide on applications to introduce hazardous substances or new organisms into New Zealand, including anything that could be a potential threat to New Zealand's indigenous biodiversity. Under the Act, territorial authorities have the mandate to ensure that the provisions of the Act are enforced, particularly around resource management issues. The Council's District Plan identifies hazardous substances as being a significant resource management issue of the District and lists a number of objectives, policies and rules relating to hazardous substances.

3.10 HAURAKI GULF MARINE PARK ACT 2000

The Hauraki Gulf Marine Park 2000 was established to promote the conservation and sustainable management of the natural, historic, and physical resources of the Hauraki Gulf for the benefit and enjoyment of the people and communities of the Hauraki Gulf and New Zealand.

The entire sea surrounding the Coromandel Peninsula is subject to the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000. The Thames-Coromandel District Council is an active member of the Hauraki Gulf Forum which was established, amongst other purposes, to facilitate communication, cooperation and coordination in the integrated management of the Hauraki Gulf, its islands, and catchments.

The Act states that a territorial authority must ensure that any part of a district plan that applies to the Hauraki Gulf, its islands, and catchments, does not conflict with Sections 7 and 8 of that Act (the national significance and management of the Gulf). The Council has identified that the District Plan is not inconsistent with the provisions of the Act.

3.11 RESERVES ACT

The purpose of the Reserves Act 1977 is to provide for the preservation and management of reserves for the benefit and enjoyment of the public, including areas possessing recreational use or potential, wildlife, indigenous flora or fauna, environmental and landscape amenity or interest, or other special features.

Some reserve classifications relate specifically to biodiversity, including historic, nature and scientific reserves.

3.12 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2002

The Local Government Act 2002 (LGA 2002) provides a broad mandate for local authorities to work towards achieving economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing. The LGA 2002 is outcome focused and the main instrument the Act uses to promote outcomes by local authorities is the Long-term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) which provides the framework for the direction and priorities of each local authority, including the Council's role in biodiversity management.

3.13 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (RATING) ACT 2002

The Local Government (Rating) Act 2002 enables local authorities to set, assess, and collect rates to fund local government activities. In regards to biodiversity management, the provisions of this Act recommend local authorities do not charge rates on particular land used for conservation or preservation purposes. The Council implements this Act through the Revenue and Financing Policy and the Rates Relief Policy, both contained in the 2006 LTCCP.

4.0 THE COUNCIL'S ONGOING CONTRIBUTION TO BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

The legislation and national and regional policies listed in the previous section provide a broad framework for the Council to contribute towards biodiversity management. This section outlines the Council's key planning documents, strategies and policies which detail what the Council is currently doing to contribute to biodiversity management on the Coromandel Peninsula.

4.1 COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

As a requirement of the Local Government Act 2002, the Council facilitated a process to identify community outcomes, which are statements of what the District's communities want the District to be like in the future. The outcome statements which directly relate to the District's biodiversity are:

- *Our communities will recognise and value the natural environment.*
- *The natural values of our coast and beaches are respected and enhanced.*

Other outcome statements which also relate to the District's biodiversity include:

- *The Peninsula's long and rich history is valued and preserved.*
- *The diversity and character of our communities and the uniqueness of the Peninsula is a valued part of our lifestyle.*
- *The needs of both local and visitor communities is met through sound planning, ahead of growth and development.*

Through the Council's strategic work programme, core business functions and levels of service, the Council is contributing to the achievement of many of the District's community outcomes. However, to achieve the community outcomes, the whole community must play their role by working together, including the Council.

In regards to biodiversity management, the Council has identified that over the next three to five years it will work in accordance with the following key work programme (amongst others):

- *Safeguarding our environment and ensuring the sustainability of the District's natural and physical assets.*

Key goals which relate to this work programme include:

- *Maintain a planning and regulatory framework that achieves community environmental outcomes and values.*
- *Improve the biodiversity of the Peninsula and management of rivers and their catchments.*
- *Ensure that Council activities are undertaken in an environmentally sustainable manner.*

The development of a Biodiversity Strategy was identified as a specific initiative in the Council's work programme to address these goals.

A number of key projects identified through the 2006 LTCCP also signal the Council's current and ongoing contribution to biodiversity management including the Peninsula Project (includes river and catchment management in conjunction with Environment Waikato), the Coromandel Peninsula Blueprint Project (Growth Strategy), District Plan Review and the development of a Biodiversity Strategy. It is anticipated that initiatives included in the Biodiversity Strategy's action plan may be included in future LTCCPs.

The LTCCP also includes an overview of the key financial expenditure over the next 10 years, including funding tools to assist with biodiversity management. These funding tools include the Rates Relief Policy which has provisions for land held for conservation or preservation purposes, the Development Contributions Policy which enables the Council to collect the appropriate funding to provide reserves, District-wide community grants and Community Board Treasure Chest Funding for initiatives which benefit individual communities.

4.2 THAMES-COROMANDEL PROPOSED DISTRICT PLAN (1999)

The Council implements the purpose and provisions of the RMA 1991 through the Thames-Coromandel Proposed District Plan. The District Plan identifies biodiversity as one of the 'significant resource management issues' for the Thames-Coromandel District. The Plan summarises the issues as follows:

"Indigenous vegetation, wetlands, and indigenous fauna are natural resources which have been significantly depleted in the Waikato Region. The biological diversity or life-supporting capacity of ecosystems and natural resources and their quality and intrinsic values can be lost or degraded when they are fragmented, isolated or damaged. This can occur by way of inappropriate subdivision, use of development

and the introduction of pests and weeds. The sustainable management of natural resources in the District cannot be achieved if biodiversity is not recognised and protected." [abridged]

The Plan goes on to list the resource management objectives, policies and rules to enable sustainable management of natural heritage resources of the Thames-Coromandel District. The relevant resource management objectives are:

"1. To protect and enhance the quality, extent and biological diversity of significant indigenous vegetation or fauna in the District.

2. To safeguard the life-supporting capacity of ecosystems.

3. To promote the sustainable management of natural resources."

In order to achieve these objectives the Plan has a list of policies. The policies make reference to: the need to control pests; enhance public access; ensure protection, restoration and regeneration; and to recognize the quality and intrinsic values of ecosystems in relation to indigenous vegetation and fauna habitat. Policies also relate to the provision of linkages, buffering and corridors and to ensure biodiversity is not adversely affected by subdivision, use and development.

In terms of practical measures, there are only two main provisions within the Plan and the current effectiveness of these is questionable. The first measure sets out the rules, standards and activity status for the 'clearance of indigenous vegetation, wetland and dune vegetation'. There is also provision within the Plan to carry out 'conservation lot subdivisions'. This involves the creation of additional lots in exchange for the protection of an area of existing native bush, the protection of a natural feature such as a landscape or wetland, the retirement from primary production (including the regeneration) of an area of land or an area of land containing a site of cultural or historical significance. The Council has an obligation under the RMA to monitor these covenants to ensure compliance with the resource consents under which the Council granted them.

Because the Council has not completed a State of the Environment monitoring exercise on the current District Plan, it is not clear whether these provisions are effective or adhered to. However, in late 2006, a contractor was employed by the Council to visit and inspect each of the 203 conservation covenants (covering approx 1,300ha). The resulting report revealed low levels of landowner commitment to maintaining conservation covenants and covenant condition was anticipated to fall in around 70% of covenants unless landowner commitment improved. The report

was presented to the March 2007 Council meeting and the following resolutions were made:

- Include a review of the conservation covenant subdivision rules contained within the Proposed District Plan as a 2nd tier priority for the District Plan Review.
- Develop an inter-departmental approach to the on-going establishment and monitoring of conservation covenants.
- That funding be set aside for the regular (i.e. every three years) monitoring of all conservation covenants.
- All new covenants shall be subject to conditions requiring monitoring fees to be paid once inspections have been undertaken.

These new initiatives have been incorporated into the development of the Action Plan and will strengthen the role conservation covenants have in protecting and enhancing the District's biodiversity, particularly on privately owned land.

4.3 RESERVES STRATEGY 2002 AND RESERVE MANAGEMENT PLANS

The Council developed a Reserves Strategy to provide a reserves planning framework and to identify District-wide issues and relationships in regards to Council-owned parks and reserves. The Strategy identifies a number of strategic objectives and issues and also includes community checklists for reserve management plans in regards to each of the objectives. Strategic objectives which relate directly to biodiversity management include *"maintain and enhance biodiversity, habitat buffering and ecological corridors"* and *"enhance public access (to the extent that is consistent with biodiversity objectives) to fulfill social and cultural needs"*.

Under the Reserves Act 1977, the Council has the responsibility to prepare reserve management plans for the reserves and parks that it manages. At the time of writing, the Council was currently in the process of either reviewing, developing and consulting on, or awaiting Council adoption of a number of reserve management plans for the various areas in the District.

4.4 THAMES-COROMANDEL DISTRICT TREE STRATEGY 2003 AND TREE MASTER PLANS

The purpose of the District Tree Strategy is to provide a consistent framework for managing trees on Council-owned land throughout the District. The District Tree Strategy contributes to biodiversity management through promoting the planting of trees which will significantly improve ecological processes and natural landscape patterns, and the use of tree species which are native to each area.

A key policy in the Strategy is to prepare tree master plans for each of the District's five wards. It is intended that these Plans are designed to give effect to a number of principles, including "*strengthens natural landscape patterns and ecological processes.*" Tree master plans have been developed for a number of areas in the District and largely focus on street tree plantings which consequently include a variety of exotic tree species as well as a small selection of native tree species which are appropriate for planting within urban areas.

4.5 COMMUNITY PLANS

More and more communities want to have a say about how they want to see their community develop, what they want to see retained, and the future outcomes they wish to achieve - social, economic, cultural and environmental. Community plans can guide and assist the Council in determining the priorities for the future planning and development of the District's communities. There are currently a number of communities in the District which have developed or are currently drafting community plans. Although none of the community plans specifically use the term 'biodiversity', they all include similar terms such as environment or ecosystems which capture the same principles and ideas. The current community plans indicate that the wider community recognises the importance and places high value on the Coromandel Peninsula's biodiversity including bush, streams, coastline and harbours and the plants and animals which reside there. Each plan contains action plans and in many instances the Council has been identified as being the lead agency to address these issues in conjunction with other key agencies. The Council is currently implementing a number of actions through its work programme to address some of these issues (e.g. implementation and review of the District Plan, wastewater treatment plant upgrades, policy development addressing coastal erosion, Coromandel Peninsula Blueprint Project, etc).

5.0 ROLES OF OTHER STAKEHOLDER AGENCIES IN MANAGING BIODIVERSITY

There are many stakeholder agencies and groups active in the District which may be making either a specific or broad contribution to biodiversity management. The Council is only one agency involved in promoting positive biodiversity outcomes. It is important to identify and recognise who is involved in delivering biodiversity outcomes and the respective roles of each stakeholder to ensure successful biodiversity management on the Coromandel Peninsula.

5.1 MINISTRY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The Ministry for the Environment provides advice to the Government on the New Zealand environment and international matters that affect the environment, all within the context of sustainable development. The Ministry advises on number of environmental laws and policies, standards and guidelines, monitors their implementation and recommends actions needed to improve them. The Ministry has identified biodiversity (and its decline) as being one of the 'key environmental issues' in New Zealand. The Ministry is currently working with other government agencies and local authorities to address this issue, as well as to address a number of other key environmental issues. In particular, the Ministry is heavily involved in implementing the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy in coordination with the Department of Conservation.

5.2 DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

The Department of Conservation is the central government organisation charged with conserving the natural and historic heritage of New Zealand on behalf of and for the benefit of present and future New Zealanders. The Department's mission is "*to conserve New Zealand's natural and historic heritage for all to enjoy now and in the future*". Four key areas the Department is involved in are community relations, visitor assets (e.g. recreation and tourism), historic and biodiversity.

Public conservation lands administered by the Department include national parks, conservation parks, reserves and conservation areas, historic places on conservation land and marine reserves – many of which include large tracts of indigenous forest and vegetation and/or indigenous wildlife. In the Thames-Coromandel District, the Department of Conservation administers approximately 36% of the land area (including offshore islands).

From a practical perspective, the Department initiates a wide range of contributions to biodiversity. These include managing and controlling threats to biodiversity (for example oil spills, possums, weeds), creating nesting sites for endangered wildlife and nurseries for endangered plants, restoration programmes, education programmes, community conservation funds for community groups involved in conservation projects and creates partnerships with associations and communities for conservation on private land. At the District level, the Department plays a key role in biodiversity management.

5.3 ENVIRONMENT WAIKATO

Environment Waikato (EW) manages and protects the Region's water, soil, air, geothermal areas and coasts, as well as administering biosecurity programmes. The Council's mission is "*to manage the sustainable use of our Region's resources, working with the community to benefit present and future generations*". EW has particular regard to biodiversity, and is working with many community partners to protect and enhance the plants and animals that make the Coromandel Peninsula a special place so the wider community can enjoy these precious resources for generations to come.

Practical initiatives Environment Waikato undertakes include controlling plant and animal pests, partnerships within the community to protect beaches, rivers, lakes etc, research into stopping the decline of biodiversity and soil conservation projects.

Enviroschools is also a major EW education project based on sustainability. Schools are encouraged to integrate environmental education into the whole of school life using practical examples which benefit the wider community.

EW has an increased focus on biodiversity in its Annual Plan for 2007/08. Included are new initiatives that seek to explore the development of agreements, memoranda of understanding and assorted cooperative arrangements with other organisations (including TCDC) to promote biodiversity. Practical initiatives include a five year plan to reduce pests and restore biodiversity through a review of the Regional Pest Management Strategy, the expansion existing biodiversity programmes, the expansion and increased enforcement of current weed rules and more direct weed control by Environment Waikato contractors.

5.4 ENVIRONMENTAL, CONSERVATION AND LAND CARE GROUPS

Given the significant amount of indigenous biodiversity on the Coromandel Peninsula, there is also a large number of environmental, conservation and land care groups (75+) actively protecting, maintaining and enhancing biodiversity at the community level. Together, these groups contribute to the overall state of the Peninsula's biodiversity through projects such as riparian planting, pest control and weed clearing. A number of these groups are supported by government agencies.

5.5 LAND OWNERS

Land owners have the responsibility for managing their own land and its resources in accordance with the Thames-Coromandel District Plan. A number of land owners participate in environmental, conservation and land care groups or carry out their own biodiversity initiatives on their land (ie removing weeds, pest control, fencing). Dairy farmers on the Coromandel Peninsula, as suppliers to the Fonterra Co-operative Group Ltd, are signatories to the Dairying and Clean Streams Accord which aims to minimise the impact of dairying on New Zealand's streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands so they are suitable (where appropriate) for fish, drinking by stock and swimming.

5.6 PLANTATION FORESTRY COMPANIES

The Coromandel Peninsula has large tracts of plantation forestry located between Coromandel and Mercury Bay and also between Tairua and Whangamata. This Crown-owned land, which is currently leased to forestry companies, also includes the Waingaro and Duck Creek wetlands and pockets and corridors of indigenous vegetation, much of which borders Department of Conservation owned land. These forestry companies, by membership of the New Zealand Forest Owners Association, are signatories to the New Zealand Forest Accord 1991, which includes the objective to "*value, protect and conserve New Zealand's indigenous forests*". This objective is achieved through forestry companies avoiding the removal of native bush and trees.

In the future, there is the possibility that this Crown land is reverted back to iwi ownership through resolution of a Treaty of Waitangi claim. This could potentially result in a desire to change the current land use and has implications for future biodiversity management.

5.7 MAORI

The traditional relationship developed over centuries of close interaction by Maori with New Zealand's native biodiversity remains an important focus in the lives of

many. As well as being traditional users of biological resources, Maori have interests in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, aquaculture and ecotourism – all of which revolve around biodiversity. Maori are involved in all aspects of biodiversity management, including conservation, customary and commercial uses. They are kaitiaki (guardians) for the biodiversity of tribal areas and holders of traditional tribal knowledge.

Working relationships and partnerships in biodiversity management between Maori (iwi and hapu) and management agencies have the potential to be further improved. Factors that currently constrain the development of effective relationships include the resolution of Treaty of Waitangi claims, insufficient capacity and resources within iwi and hapu, and poor understanding of Maori priorities and cultural values.

There may be other initiatives in place that the Council is not aware of.

6.0 ISSUES WITH THE COUNCIL'S CURRENT CONTRIBUTION TO BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

This section outlines the issues around the Council's current contribution to biodiversity management. These issues were identified through discussions with Council staff and a number of key stakeholder agencies and groups.

- **The Council is not aware of the state of the Coromandel Peninsula's biodiversity and only holds limited biodiversity information.**

A key step in contributing to biodiversity management is to determine the state of the Coromandel Peninsula's biodiversity. The Council currently does not hold a specific Council database or inventory on biodiversity. However, it does have access to a number of sources of information including national and regional reports, local knowledge and supporting documentation required for resource consent applications. Agencies such as Environment Waikato and the Department of Conservation hold a number of sources of biodiversity information which the Council could tap into. Accessing such information would assist with current Council projects (e.g. Biodiversity Strategy, Coromandel Peninsula Blueprint Project) and provide technical support to Council decision-making processes such as processing resource consent applications.

- **Lack of certainty around protection of native vegetation e.g. trees.**

Trees make up a significant proportion of biodiversity on the Coromandel Peninsula, as well as providing habitat and food for other species. Currently, the District Plan does not have a definition of a 'tree' which means that there is no certainty to the Plans rules regarding trees and vegetation management.

- **Lack of recognition and consideration of special biodiversity qualities worthy of protection and/or enhancement, particularly on private land.**

The District Plan has a number of objectives, policies and methods for achieving sustainable resource management outcomes including the management of biodiversity. Where the Council may exercise its discretion on resource consent applications, the Council currently has limited assessment criteria in terms of implementing development controls in relation to protection of biodiversity. To ensure effective regulatory methods, the Council needs to review its current District Plan provisions in relation to biodiversity outcomes being achieved.

- **Unclear whether the Council's conservation covenants are achieving positive biodiversity outcomes.**

Until recently, the Council did not have the staff resources to monitor conservation covenants entered into by landowners and the Council. While the Council has recently monitored the state of the covenants in relation to their consent conditions, the Council is yet to monitor the policy effectiveness of this District Plan rule. Thus, it is unclear whether the conservation covenants are achieving positive biodiversity outcomes.

The Council's endorsement of the several recommendations resulting from the conservation covenant monitoring initiative should remedy many of the weaknesses identified. This should, in the long term, mean positive biodiversity outcomes are improved as covenants on their own will not achieve positive outcomes.

- **Debate over whether the Council provides financial incentives to assist community groups and landowners to carry out biodiversity enhancing initiatives, and if so, to what extent?**

Financial incentives can be used as a non-regulatory approach to encourage landowners and community groups to adopt recommended measures for the protection of biodiversity values. These incentives can include rates relief, a 'biodiversity fund' and grants.

As part of the 2006 LTCCP submission process, the community was asked to comment on the Rates Relief Policy proposal to provide rates relief on covenanted land. Although there was a lot of support from the community, the Council decided this should be reviewed as part of the development of this Strategy as opposed to amending the policy.

The Council could adopt a package of financial incentives which both assist particular individuals or groups and provide the most cost-effective benefit to the District's biodiversity. However, given that approximately 36% of the District is Department of Conservation-owned land which already provides significant biodiversity values, and that there are already a number of competing demands on ratepayer money, the Council needs to determine what financial incentives are appropriate (if any).

- **Having regard to biodiversity initiatives for particular parks and reserves, in keeping with the Reserves Strategy.**

Arguably, there are minimal links between the objectives in the Reserves Strategy which directly relate to biodiversity management and the aims, objectives and reserve management policy in the reserves management plan which are meant to give effect to these objectives (except in stating that "general reserve objectives and policies apply"). There would be some merit to re-focus the reserve management plans to give more regard to biodiversity and specify biodiversity initiatives for particular parks and reserves in consultation with the community.

- **Opportunities for further involvement in non-regulatory methods e.g. advocacy, information sharing and education, networking, etc.**

The informal meetings held with key stakeholders as part of the discussions informing this project identified that there are opportunities for the Council to provide support for other efforts that it is currently not active in. For example, Council does not generally involve itself in non-regulatory methods including advocacy, information sharing and education, networking and supporting other agencies and groups who contribute to biodiversity management. Compared to other key agencies on the Coromandel Peninsula (such as Environment Waikato, Department of Conservation, QEII, etc), the Council's non-regulatory role in biodiversity management is not easily defined. However, the Council could look to support these agencies that have clear mandates for the protection of biodiversity.

7.0 STRATEGIC APPROACH

This section outlines what the Biodiversity Strategy's goals could be once implemented.

7.1 VISION

As mentioned earlier, in March 2005, the Council endorsed its Vision Statement, which reflects and spirit of the Coromandel Peninsula and the Council's role in recognising this spirit.

The Council's Vision is that:

The Coromandel Peninsula will grow in a way that embraces its spirit and natural beauty, by working with our communities to acknowledge diversity, nurture ecology and value our identity.

Although not explicitly mentioned in the Vision, the words 'spirit and natural beauty', nurture ecology, and 'value our identity' are all closely associated with biodiversity values on the Coromandel Peninsula.

7.2 MISSION STATEMENT

Recognising the Council's statutory role in biodiversity management, and the issues outlined in section 6.0, the following mission has been identified:

The Council will support the wider community and contribute to the protection, maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity, particularly native species and their habitats, which are special to the Coromandel Peninsula.

Underlying the mission are two main themes of supporting the wider community and making a contribution.

7.3 GOALS FOR THE THAMES-COROMANDEL DISTRICT COUNCIL'S CONTRIBUTION TO BIODIVERSITY

The Council aims to deliver this mission through achieving the following goals:

GOAL 1: Determine the state of the Coromandel Peninsula's biodiversity.

GOAL 2: Contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of the District's native biodiversity.

GOAL 3: Promote the restoration of native species to the District.

GOAL 4: Advocate for, collaborate with and support the wider community in the protection and enhancement of native biodiversity.

GOAL 5: Provide ongoing monitoring of the Council's contribution to biodiversity management.

8.0 ACTION PLAN

This action plan details how the Council can contribute to biodiversity management on the Coromandel Peninsula. This contribution can be made through a mix of legislative requirements, existing work programme commitments, and new initiatives, all of which broadly fall within two methods of action, being regulatory and non-regulatory.

The delivery of these actions will be considered through the Council's delivery of 2009 LTCCP process where they have not been planned for in existing budgets.

GOAL 1: DETERMINE THE STATE OF THE COROMANDEL PENINSULA'S BIODIVERSITY

Determining the state of the Coromandel Peninsula's biodiversity will be the first step in determining what the Council's priorities will be in implementing the Strategy and contributing to biodiversity management.

Action	How could it be done?	Priority Status	Costs
Establish information sharing protocols with Environment Waikato and the Department of Conservation.	Building and strengthening relationships with agencies. Considering how the information can be shared.	High	Staff time setting up systems.
Collate and summarise existing information on the state of the Coromandel Peninsula's biodiversity.	Research including collating local knowledge. Summarising information into user-friendly documents.	High	As above
Prepare a database of the District's biodiversity which is threatened or at risk.	Establish database - input collated information above into database.	High	As above
Make biodiversity information available to all Council staff and the wider community.	Make database available to Council staff. Make summarised information available on Council website. Using data to identify what the Council's priorities are.	High	As above

GOAL 2: CONTRIBUTE TO THE MAINTENANCE AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE DISTRICT'S NATIVE BIODIVERSITY

The second goal aims to improve Council's contribution to the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity management through improving current policies and practices or introducing new measures.

Action	How could it be done?	Priority Status	Costs
Review District Plan provisions relating to vegetation including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation covenants • Vegetation management 	Research and community consultation	High	\$40,000 - \$60,000
Long-term monitoring of conservation covenants on a three-year rotation with a target of 90% in 'good' condition over a 5 year period.	Establish an on-going monitoring programme	High	\$10,000 per annum
Implement monitoring fees to be paid once inspections have been undertaken on all new covenants.	Establish a fee framework that is implemented on new covenants.	High	Staff time
Develop an inter-departmental approach to the on-going establishment and monitoring of conservation covenants.	Establish a regular briefing and sharing of information between the two departments.	High	Staff time
Investigate the implementation of a Biodiversity Overlay and/or Landscape and Environmental Enhancement Zone in conjunction with the District Plan.	Research and community consultation	Medium	\$40,000-\$60,000
Review Rates Relief Policy in regards to land held for conservation or preservation purposes.	Research and community consultation	Medium	Staff time
Investigate the creation of a Biodiversity Officer position in collaboration with Environment Waikato.	Discussions with Environment Waikato	Medium	\$100,000
Review the Reserves Strategy to ensure biodiversity is provided for.	Review and community consultation	Low	\$5,000
Ensure biodiversity is provided for in review of Reserve Management Plans.	Review and community consultation	Low	Staff time
Contribute further to the implementation of the NZ Biodiversity Strategy.	Review current contributions and establish new policies/programmes.	High	Staff time

GOAL 3: PROMOTE THE RESTORATION OF NATIVE SPECIES TO THE DISTRICT

Goal three has the specific focus of restoring native species to the District through new Council initiatives.

Action	How could it be done?	Priority Status	Costs
Implement appropriate restoration planting programmes on Council-owned reserves.	Native plantings on reserves in accordance with Tree Strategy.	Ongoing	Staff time plus the cost of native plants.
Promote the planting and protection of native plants.	Leading by example on Council-owned land through implementing Tree Strategy. Conditions on resource consents. Protection through regulatory methods. Media releases.	Ongoing	Staff time.
Increase the use of eco-sourced plants.	Leading by example on Council-owned land. Media releases.	Ongoing	Staff time.
Provide a consistent framework for managing trees on Council owned land.	Tree Master Plans. Reserve Management Plans.	Ongoing	Staff time.
Implement a Biodiversity Fund considering collaboration with Environment Waikato.	Discussions with Environment Waikato	Medium	\$10,000
Prepare and implement recovery plans for threatened species.	Once the biodiversity database has been established, work in conjunction with other agencies (DOC, EW) to implement recovery plans for threatened species.	Medium	Staff time and resources associated with implementing recovery plans.

GOAL 4: ADVOCATE FOR, COLLABORATE WITH AND SUPPORT THE WIDER COMMUNITY IN THE PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF NATIVE BIODIVERSITY

Looking to provide more support for existing initiatives and community efforts is addressed in the fourth goal.

Action	How could it be done?	Priority Status	Costs
Help lead agencies which support the wider community in participating in biodiversity enhancing initiatives on privately owned land through providing education and advice.	Networking with lead agencies and act as an advocate.	Ongoing	Staff time and potentially funding of lead agencies.
Strengthen partnerships with other lead agencies.	Networking and participation in forums/meetings identify opportunities for partnerships as appropriate.	Ongoing	Staff time.
Encourage reserve management groups to adopt biodiversity goals.	Provide support and advice.	Ongoing	Staff time.
Advocate for the provision of further marine reserves on the Coromandel coastline.	Lobby central government agencies.	Ongoing	Staff time.
Where appropriate, promote the development of ecotourism in conjunction with Tourism Coromandel.	Through the Council's Economic Development activity.	Ongoing	Staff time.
Provide an annual grant to the EnviroSchools programme.	Through working with EW's established EnviroSchools programme.	Ongoing	Minimum \$5,000

GOAL 5: PROVIDE ONGOING MONITORING OF THE COUNCIL'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

The final goal of this Strategy is to put in place a monitoring system to ensure Council's contribution to biodiversity management is meeting anticipated objectives.

Action	How could it be done?	Priority Status	Costs
Monitor and review the Council's contribution to biodiversity management with emphasis on promoting positive biodiversity outcomes.	Monitor and review the Strategy's action plan.	Ongoing	Staff time.
Provide feedback to elected members and the wider community on the Council's contribution to biodiversity management.	Develop a biodiversity reporting programme including, for example, media releases, information on Council website, work programme reporting such as quarterly reports.	High	Staff time.
Recognise the ongoing commitment of community groups and landowners who contribute to the protection, maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity on private land.	Develop a biodiversity reporting programme including media releases, information on Council website, nominations for Environment Waikato's environmental awards.	High	Staff time.
Establish a criteria and budget for an annual biodiversity award(s).	Establish a biodiversity award scheme.	High	\$10,000

SUMMARY OF COSTS

The table below is an estimate of the both the financial and staff costs involved with the initial implementation of the draft Strategy based on the priority of the project. Please note that these figures are only estimates only but they do provide some idea as to what the costs might be.

Priority Status	Staff Costs	Financial Costs
Ongoing	420 hours	\$25,000
Lower	100 hours	\$5,000
Medium	200 hours	\$200,000
High	400 hours	\$70,000
TOTAL	1120 hours	\$300,000

In summary, if all the recommendations of the draft Biodiversity Strategy were approved, the cost to implement it would be one new full time equivalent (FTE) position (Biodiversity Officer), another \$300,000 in funding and over 1100 additional staff hours (over half a FTE position)

9.0 MONITORING THE STRATEGY

One of the actions detailed in the Strategy is to monitor and review Council's contribution to biodiversity and also to provide both the Council and the community at large with feedback through organisational performance monitoring and reporting. It is anticipated that reviews of the Strategy would regularly take place during the three yearly LTCCP cycle, to inform priority and service-level setting. The next review then will be completed in approximately 2010-2011.