

COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS: HOW CAPITALISING ON RELATIONSHIPS AT BOTH LEVELS CAN IMPROVE OUR ENVIRONMENT

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Working with landowners at a catchment community level and one-on-one through farm plans allows a two-pronged approach to fostering behaviour change and action towards environmental improvement and protection.

Setting the regional scene

The regional plans in the Greater Wellington region have rules that set out the bottom line for activities and impacts on the environment, and methods to encourage behaviour above the minimum required. This is the case for both the first generation of plans and the second generation plan, the Proposed Natural Resources Plan. The Land Management department operates largely within this Methods space, and historically has been the only arm of council to do so.

The Land Management Department of the Greater Wellington Regional Council has traditionally been in the business of administering non-regulatory programmes and working one on one with landowners. The department's work has been about administering voluntary programmes, backed by funding assistance, to achieve specific goals above the minimum behaviour required under the rules. This focus has been on soil conservation, which is largely managed through planting, retirement, and advice on paddock subdivision based on Land Use Capability. As a result, this work has almost exclusively focused on the eastern hill country of the Wairarapa.

More recently, the Land Management work has expanded into more areas, both physical areas and subject matter. Land Management Advisors have started working with farmers undertaking more intensive farming operations in the Wairarapa and have also started working with farmers and lifestyle block owners on the west coast of the region. Farm plans are becoming more sophisticated, including discussion on nutrients as well as soil erosion, and biodiversity and water quality benefits. Issues are being tackled at a farm systems scale, and non-point source or diffuse nutrient loss is being addressed. This is all being addressed not just through planting works but through changes in practices and more education on farm systems issues and good management practices.

The job of a Land Management Advisor has expanded to focus more on leveraging the relationships developed with farmer clients to foster behaviour change and encourage action

beyond what would have otherwise occurred. A large part of this involves supporting individuals through the change process and working to move attitudes through the behaviour change stages before actions even occur. This means that the department has moved from measuring the physical – the works budgets and hectares of land treated – to identifying and measuring actions and behaviour changes. These new measurements include using the Farm Environment Plan to identify potential changes in management practices and actions to take and then monitoring those changes as they take place. It also means acknowledging and recording people's movement through the behaviour change steps that have not yet resulted in any actions or changes to practice. These new measurements are more in line with the approach being taken by industry partners.

So what does this mean for Land Management? Land Management has achieved much over the past 50 or more years. Our one on one approach has succeeded in establishing significant relationship capital while keeping soil on the hills and out of waterways. The key for Land Management now is to change from solely working one on one to working more with groups such as catchment communities, which will require a broader skill set and competency base moving more towards facilitation, coordination, and perhaps even mediation. This means a lot of change for the organisation.

Change and our response

Everyone lives with constant change and the pace and complexity of that change is increasing. This is as much about change for our organisations as it is for the communities we support. Some of the drivers for change in the Wellington region are:

- Climate change. Projections for the Wellington region suggest a possible 28cm rise by the middle of this century. The lower Wairarapa valley sits at or below sea level and is highly dependent on pump drainage and irrigation. This is also where the bulk of the region's dairy farms are located. Climate change is also expected to increase floods, drought, and extreme weather events
- Community expectations. Communities are becoming more aware of environmental issues and expecting a higher level of environmental and social quality
- Treaty settlements. Local iwi have signed a deed of settlement recently, which may bring into being co-governance and statutory boards. This could impact on the way water quality issues are managed for the region
- Central government regulation and the National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management
- Catchment communities. This is not just a phenomenon unique to the Wellington region, but we have a lot of catchment communities that are self-initiated, self-defined, and motivated.

Greater Wellington Regional Council is responding to many of these drivers for change through the statutory regional plans. The first generation of regional plans were five plans which each covered the different resources – soil, air, water, land, and the coast. The second generation plan combines these into one document, where there are region-wide rules with bottom lines for environmental quality, as well as a suite of non-regulatory methods. There are also five chapters which are currently blank, and this is where the five Whaitua Implementation Programmes will sit once they have been through the statutory process to be added to the regional plan.

Whaitua means a space or catchment, and the Whaitua Committees are groups of local people (not stakeholder groups) tasked with recommending ways to maintain and improve the quality of our freshwater through the development of a Whaitua Implementation Programme. The five Whaitua cover the ‘super catchments’ of the region – Ruamahanga, Porirua, Wellington Harbour and Hutt Valley, Kapiti Coast, and the Wairarapa Coast. The establishment of the Whaitua Committees have been staggered, with the Ruamahanga Whaitua Committee and Porirua Committee currently in progress, and the other three due to start over the next few years.

The role of the Whaitua Committees is to give effect to the National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management. They will be doing this by setting freshwater objectives and limits for water takes and discharges. These objectives and limits need to maintain or improve water quality, meet national bottom lines, achieve the requirement for 90% of waterways reaching swimmable status by 2040, avoid over allocation, and reflect mana whenua values and interests.

It is important to note that because each whaitua goes through its own programme development process and may have different values and goals, the way each whaitua chooses to manage their water resources could be very different to other whaitua.

The Ruamahanga Whaitua Committee was the first committee to be established, in 2013, and has discovered a lot about the process that the remaining whaitua can learn from. The Ruamahanga Whaitua Implementation Programme is due to go to the council to start the statutory process later this year. The Whaitua has taken a values approach and recognise that the vision is broader than just water quality. The agreed values for the Whaitua are broader than traditional natural resource management. They are:

- Maori use – mahinga kai
- Te Mana o Ruamahanga – mauri, habitat, biodiversity, and natural character
- Our Ruamahanga river culture
- Ruamahanga economic use, resilience, and prosperity
- Ruamahanga community public health and wellbeing
- Ruamahanga recreation

The Ruamahanga Whaitua has taken a ‘non-allocation’ approach to managing water quality. The Whaitua will be divided into Freshwater Management Units and limits on sediments, nutrients, and pathogens will be set for each of the Freshwater Management Units rather than for individual properties, although there is an ability to set limits at the property scale if limits are not being met.

Water quality objectives and nutrient limits will be set for each Freshwater Management Unit, which the community within that Freshwater Management Unit will have to show they are meeting. This will be done using land use data, modelling, and monitoring of point sources. Each Freshwater Management Unit will have a state of the environment monitoring site which will measure progress towards the Freshwater Management Unit’s water quality objective.

The three major focus areas for implementation are non-regulatory methods, catchment community groups, and farm scale planning.

The cross-cutting themes that the Whaitua Committee have discovered throughout their process are the importance of good management practices and planning at a farm scale, efficient water use, and effective implementation.

Greater Wellington Regional Council is responding to the need to change both internally and externally. Internally we are still grappling with how to change the organisation to deliver what the community wants, so it is very much a work in progress. We are looking at how we can work in a more coordinated way and remove the conflict with Business as Usual workloads. For effective implementation an enabling organisation:

- Values what is important to others
- Supports people and community to identify, manage, and lead their own change
- Encourages innovation and adaptation
- Commits to work in partnership
- Is agile, adaptive, and responsive.

Externally, Greater Wellington Regional Council is looking at how we can work with other organisations to provide the service that catchment communities need. Again, this is still a work in progress. Wairarapa Catchment Communities – Pukaha to Palliser is the start of this process. This is a working group that is made up of the regional council, primary industry groups, DOC, iwi, and the local community. The goal is that this working group will develop into a separate entity that is a locally owned integrated service delivery programme. The working group is currently speaking to catchment community group members to develop insight into what their needs are. There is strong feedback that this is a whole landscape issue, and not just about the Ruamahanga but the Wairarapa as a whole. This is reflected in the closely connected community of the entire Wairarapa region. The critical success factors that have been identified for a catchment community service provider are:

- Wairarapa owned
- Catchment community driven
- Mana whenua mandated and integrated
- Service providers are working together
- Wairarapa priorities are aligned and connected
- Innovation occurs ahead of and beyond regulation
- Effective delivery occurs that avoids duplication
- A sustainable resource base for the service provider is secured

Conclusion

There are worldwide and national drivers for change in the water quality space. The Land Management Department at Greater Wellington Regional Council has a long history of strong individual relationships with farmers to leverage off for encouraging this change. We are now moving into encouraging and supporting community action.

Water quality and how to manage it is an emerging and complex space. When working with complexity there is no magical answer, but we do know that organisations have to change alongside the community. We need to find the balance between being flexible and adaptive, and providing certainty for the community. We also need to find the balance between encouraging behaviour change through intensive one on one relationships and facilitating community-led action so that organisations, communities, individuals, and the environment all win.