

Welcome

Nau mai haere mai

As we head into winter the Northland Regional Council is working on a wide variety of projects and issues, some of which are explained in this edition of Regional Report.

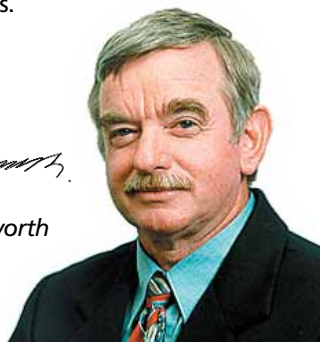
The impact of invasive weeds and pest animals is an ongoing concern for the Council. The recent release of 850 grass carp (see story this page) into a Kaipara lake is one more step in the battle to reduce invasive pest plants in Northland.

Other stories in this issue highlight our ongoing commitment to Northland's environment and some of our recent achievements.

Best wishes,



Mark Farnsworth
Chairman



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Grass carp released into Kaipara lake

More than 800 grass carp were recently released into Kaipara's Lake Roto-otuauru, in a bid to wipe out two invasive weeds threatening some of the nation's most precious dune lakes.

Don McKenzie, Biosecurity Senior Programme Manager for the Northland Regional Council, says the Council hopes to eradicate the aquatic weeds hornwort and egeria (an oxygen weed) from the 17.4 hectare lake, also known as Lake Swan, on the North Kaipara Head.

Mr McKenzie says the two species already form large, dense mats in the 5.5 metre deep lake which are smothering native plants and affecting an important habitat for fish, plants, birds and other species.

"The Regional Council, representatives from Te Uri o Hau, local landowners and community members had also become increasingly concerned about the risk of hornwort and egeria spreading to other pristine dune lakes in the area."

He says the release of 850 grass carp is seen as the most cost-effective and environmentally sustainable option to eradicate the two aquatic weeds.

"Grass carp only eat plants, are unable to breed in New Zealand waters and have already been used to successfully manage aquatic weeds in other New Zealand lakes."

All the students from Pouto School attended the release, as well as representatives from Te Uri o Hau, local landowners and the community.

"The whole day was awesome, and having the school and community involved in the release was fantastic," says Northland Regional Council Biosecurity Officer, Gail Townsend, who was on hand to oversee the transfer and check that all biosecurity measures were met.

"I helped the children to take part in the release and talked to the school and community about the weeds in the lake, what they are, why they are a problem, how they spread and so on," she says. *(continued on page 2)*



"Check out the fish" – local children get a close look at some of the grass carp released in Lake Roto-otuauru.

Photo: Mahurangi Technical Institute



Flood risk reduction plans progressing

Work is progressing on the 27 priority rivers in the Northland Regional Council's Flood Risk Reduction project, scheduled for completion in June 2010.

The project aims to reduce the flood hazard risk within the priority river catchments through the development of management plans, which will guide how and when flood risk reduction measures happen.

Substantial works have already been carried out in Kaeo, the most recent being the reconstruction of a stopbank outside Kaeo Primary School.

"The stopbank had been compromised by a large tree, which took out part of the bank," says Northland Regional Council Rivers Programme Manager, Joe Camuso.

"We opened up about 80 metres and rebuilt the bank using geotextile material, which will create a more stable stopbank and should avoid future problems," he says.

A further 300 millimetres was added to the height of the stopbank to stop flood water from going over it.

"All obvious earthworks have now been completed in Kaeo and a detailed hydraulic river model is ready, so we can try various options on it to come up with the best way to further reduce the flood risks."

Tonnes of water have also been drained from Bell's Hill, a problem area that has caused concern in Kaitiāia for some time.



Drilling work at Bell's Hill has already drained 24 tonnes of water and lowered the water table by a metre.



Poutu School children help release some of the grass carp.

"This project has been underway a long time and a lot of people have been involved in the process, so it is great to see the fish finally in the water."

The roughly \$50,000 potential solution – funded by the Regional Council – saw the grass carp, typically about 25 centimetres long, trucked up from Warkworth to the lake.

"If the eradication of hornwort and egeria is successful, we intend to remove the fish from the lake in several years' time, allowing native plants to re-establish," says Mr McKenzie.

Northland has a large number of lakes and they are vulnerable to the impacts of invasive aquatic pests, he says.

"The most common way for aquatic weeds to spread is by human activities, and these weeds will grow from small plant fragments. We encourage all users of freshwater areas to check, clean and dry all of their gear to help stop the spread of aquatic pests."

Mr McKenzie says dune lakes are especially important as a habitat for nationally threatened and regionally significant species of fish, plants, birds, and invertebrates, and Northland has some of the best examples of these ecosystems in the country.

He says aside from the threat to other lakes, the Regional Council is also concerned that the existing dense growth of hornwort and egeria in Lake Roto-otuaūru may cause the eventual collapse of other underwater plants in the lake. This in turn could provide ideal growth conditions for algae, which could relatively quickly dominate the lake and also adversely affect other aquatic life.

For more information on pest management strategies, go to: www.nrc.govt.nz/pestmanagement

To view the YouTube video on the grass carp release, go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2wTM47OJnk>



“There have been concerns in some quarters that the hill could collapse, posing a risk to Kaitaia, especially if the river was in flood at the time,” says Mr Camuso.

About 24,000 litres of water has already been drained from the site after work carried out in April and the water table has been lowered by about one metre.

Meanwhile survey work continues on all 27 priority rivers as land surface data is collected of over 470 square kilometres of land. More than 50 percent of aerial surveys have been completed so far.

The survey data – along with rainfall and river flow data already held by the Council – will be used to model and develop an understanding of the frequency, depth, duration, and velocity of flood flows.

“The development of plans for Kaihu, Kaeo, Awanui and Kerikeri-Waipapa are progressing well, with detailed hydraulic river models built and calibrated and flood hazard mapping mostly complete,” says Land and Rivers Senior Programme Manager, Bruce Howse.

Residents in the Kaihu River catchment are being asked for input on future plans for the Kaihu River scheme.

“Work has been ongoing in the Kaihu valley for many years and we are looking to the future to develop long-term, sustainable management plans for the area,” says Mr Howse.

Flood hazard maps are completed and modelling is being done to look at the effects of the existing stopbanks and channel improvements.

All other communities within the priority river catchment areas will also be consulted, starting in late June with a



Work to rebuild the Kaeo stopbank is one of a number of flood risk management strategies completed in the past year.

series of public meetings – see the schedule below.

“From there we will move into the next phase of the project, developing models and flood information systems and finally river management plans, which will again be taken to the community for consultation,” he says.

“It is a lengthy process but it will enable us to prioritise work and produce long-term management plans for our most flood-prone rivers.”

“The Council can not stop the flooding, but it is working with communities to reduce the risk to people, buildings, access, public infrastructure and primary production from these natural hazards. The ‘Priority Rivers Flood Risk Reduction Project’ is a major part of this process.”

PUBLIC MEETINGS

AREA:	Date/time:	Venue:	Effected Areas:
Whangarei	Monday 29 June, 6pm	Northland Regional Council	Waiarohia-Raumanga, Otaika, Hatea & Whangarei Heads
Ruakaka	Tuesday 30 June, 6pm	Ruakaka Recreation Centre	Ruakaka
Paihia	Wednesday 01 July, 6pm	Paihia Memorial Hall	Waitangi
Kawakawa	Thursday 02 July, 6pm	Ngati Hine Health Trust	Kawakawa
Helena Bay	Friday 03 July, 4pm	Helena Bay Gallery	Helena Bay
Kaikohe	Monday 06 July, 4pm	Mid North Motor Inn	Waihou, Waima & Punakitere
Opononi	Tuesday 07 July, 4pm	South Hokianga War Memorial Hall	Awapokonui, Whirinaki & Waimamaku
Totara North	Wednesday 08 July, 1pm	Totara North Hall	Pupuke, Totara North & Taupo Bay
Whangaroa	Wednesday 08 July, 6pm	Whangaroa Big Game Fishing Club	Whangaroa Streams (Te Ngaire, Wainui & Mahinepua), Tauranga River & Matangirau
Panguru	Friday 10 July, 1pm	Panguru School Gym	Rotokakahi & Pawarenga Streams and Panguru Rivers (Panguru & Lower Waihou)
Maungaturoto	Monday 13 July, 6pm	Maungaturoto Community Centre	Wairau (Maungaturoto)
Ngunguru	Tuesday 14 July, 6pm	Ngunguru Memorial Hall	Ngunguru

For more information go to: www.nrc.govt.nz/priorityrivers



Photo: Otamatea High School



Otamatea High School students check out some of the land available for their next ambitious project.

Otamatea High School leads the community down a wetland path

Plans to develop a community walkway on land opposite Otamatea High School are the next step in an environmental initiative that has taken over the local community.

The school’s environmental group – founded in 2005 – has been working for the past four years to improve the water quality of the local Wairau River.

A group of Year 9 boys started the project with the vision of enhancing one main tributary to the river – which crosses the Maungaturoto Country Club – situated on a 62 hectare farm across the road from the school.

“The students have received funding from the Northland Regional Council’s Environmental Curriculum Awards fund and the Environment Fund for the project, which has included fencing off a wetland area and the estuary,” says Northland Regional Council Environmental Education Officer, Susan Karels. The group has also received funding from the Kaipara District Council.

“The current walkway project has become a community initiative, driven by the students and is in answer to the local community’s cries for somewhere safe to walk that is not on the road side,” she says.

“The project is a great example of the main aims of the Enviroschools programme, as the students’ achievements have spurred the wider community to establish a new environmental group, with the vision of improving the quality of the Kaipara Harbour.”

Otamatea teacher – and one of the driving forces behind the school’s Environmental group – Stella Clyde says the students involved in construction for the project are enthusiastic about the work being taken on by the community.

“They feel it’s great to work on projects that are of benefit to the whole community and will be there for the future, outside the classroom,” she says.

Enviroschools is part of a growing community of more than 700 schools in New Zealand and internationally who want to make a difference to the environment.

“Enviroschools aims to empower students to create sustainable communities, so what the children learn within their school – whether that’s recycling, worm farms, or large-scale environmental restoration projects like Otamatea’s – is taken back into the community,” says Mrs Karels.

Otamatea High School is one of more than 30 in Northland currently on the pathway towards creating sustainable school environments. Another 14 are emerging as Enviroschools.

The Regional Council encourages environmental education in the north through its \$20,000 annual Environmental Curriculum Awards fund, which recognises achievement of environmental education in, about, and for, the environment.

The Enviroschools programme is supported by three local organisations; Northland Regional Council, The University of Auckland and the Department of Conservation. The national Enviroschools Foundation has also recently employed a Kaitakawaenga – facilitator for Kura Kaupapa.

The Northland Enviroschools team works to provide Enviroschools with on-going support, resources and professional development for teachers as well as action-orientated events for students.

TEACHERS: Sign up for email updates
Keep in touch with environmental education news
www.nrc.govt.nz/subscriptions



\$500,000 for 2009 NRC Environment Fund

Applications are now open for a \$500,000 Northland Regional Council fund designed to help people protect and enhance the region's precious natural environment.

Applications for the 2009 Environment Fund – now in its 14th year – can be made right through until April 2010.

Regional Council Environmental Management Committee Chairman Craig Brown says since 1996 the fund has provided more than \$2.5 million to help people improve and protect Northland's natural environment.

Councillor Brown says, as proposed, about \$500,000 is expected to be available for this year's fund, which in a change from previous years, can now be applied for – and will be allocated – over a 10-month period.

He says changes to the fund are designed to enable people to apply for worthwhile projects almost year-round, rather than within a previously much smaller 10-week application window.

"In the past people who missed that deadline were effectively forced to wait another 12 months to apply for Environment Fund support or – in some cases – had to secure funding from alternative sources altogether."

"The new system allows Council to process and approve applications – in particular for seasonal projects like native tree planting and pest control – much closer to the time the assistance is actually required. It makes it more efficient for both applicants and Council staff."

Kathy Mortimer, the Regional Council's Environment Fund Coordinator, says to that end, the Council is currently inviting expressions of interest in projects that aim to enhance the environment with native tree planting over the coming winter.

The Environment Fund typically contributes up to 50 percent of the total cost of a project, with most grants for between \$500 and \$5000. Applicants must be able to provide the remainder of the cost with time, cash, other funding or in-kind contributions such as voluntary labour and donated materials.

Mrs Mortimer says projects must be of long-term benefit to the local environment and show clear evidence of good resource management. Projects designed to generate personal or commercial profit, required under a resource consent, or to simply beautify a site, are not eligible for funding.

The fund is open to individuals and voluntary groups for eligible projects on private land. Landowners, community

and conservation organisations, local Maori groups and schools have all successfully applied to the Environment Fund in the past.

Councillor Brown says the largest grant awarded last year was almost \$17,000 to continue fencing a large Bay of Islands wetlands system. The smallest grant – just \$200 – was destined to control pest animals in the Far North.

Meanwhile, Mrs Mortimer says this year's fund will once again be split across a number of areas:

- General biodiversity protection
- Wetland protection and enhancement
- Pest animal and plant control
- Revegetation and enhancement with native plants
- Excluding stock from the Coastal Marine Area
- Coast care projects (mainly sand dune stabilisation projects)

Mrs Mortimer says people wanting to check whether their project might qualify for funding should contact Regional Council Land Management staff on (0800) 002 004 as it is important to consult with Council staff before filling in an application form.

"Council staff can assist with applications and will visit project sites to assess whether they meet the criteria," she says.

Application forms and guidelines are available from all Regional Council offices, by calling (0800) 002 004, sending an email to nolas@nrc.govt.nz or by visiting Council's website www.nrc.govt.nz/environmentfund



Photo: Honda NZ

NRC Environment Fund applications for planting projects – like this one at Ocean Beach – are currently being sought.



July deadline to keep stock out of tidal areas

Northland farmers have until July – when changes to the Regional Coastal Plan take effect – to ensure their stock is kept out of the region’s tidal areas.

The change is designed to minimise the environmental effects – especially on water quality – from stock grazing below the high tide mark in estuaries and harbours.

Jacque Reed, the Northland Regional Council’s Monitoring Programme Manager – Coastal, says unauthorised stock access to, and use of, the Coastal Marine Area (CMA) becomes a ‘prohibited activity’ on 1 July.

She says the Council changed its Regional Coastal Plan to ban stock from tidal areas in 2004, but allowed a five-year grace period for its implementation.

“Council has been warning of the Plan change for several years now, including writing to landowners and working with them to exclude stock from the CMA.”

“Many people have already taken steps to comply with the new rules and we’re pleased by that.”

However, with the 1 July deadline fast approaching, the Council is writing to about 2000 affected property owners around Northland to remind them of their new obligations.

“Initially we’ll be focusing on those people whose stock still has access to areas close to traditional seafood harvesting grounds, popular swimming areas or marine farms.”

She says those who continue to breach the ban will risk penalties ranging from a \$750 instant fine through to prosecution.

“However, despite these new penalties, the Regional Council would much prefer to continue to work with landowners and will typically take enforcement action as a last resort.”

To that end, the Council has set aside about \$100,000 from its 2009 Environment Fund to help landowners meet some of the costs of keeping stock out of the CMA.

Jacque Reed says the cost of complying with the new rules will depend on a variety of factors including terrain and stock type and numbers.

“However, these costs don’t need to be prohibitive and in many cases a simple one or two wire electric fence is all that will be needed.”

She says those keen to know more about the new rules – including fencing options and possible Council funding assistance – can contact Council Land Management staff on (0800) 002 004 or [visit www.nrc.govt.nz/environmentfund](http://www.nrc.govt.nz/environmentfund)

Meanwhile, the Council also produced a brochure in mid-2006 outlining the stock in the CMA issue. It’s available from Regional Council offices or can be downloaded at www.nrc.govt.nz/stockexclusion



Stock in the Whangarei Harbour – the plan changes aim to keep stock out of Northland’s tidal areas to protect shellfish, water quality and coastal vegetation.



Environmental Monitoring – find out more

Northland’s natural environment is something special. We have more than 3000kms of coastline, 1.26 million hectares of land, excellent air quality and plenty of freshwater – but our environment is fragile and always at risk.

Environmental monitoring is a core part of Council business and the results of this monitoring are available in various forms to keep you up to date with the issues.

Two key reports are the State of the Environment Report – a five-yearly assessment of Northland’s environment – and the Annual Environmental Monitoring Report, which presents a snapshot of Council’s annual monitoring activities.

State of the Environment Report Cards

A series of report cards – to make it easier to find key information from the 500-plus page report – will be released at the end of June, summarising the key points from the 2007 State of the Environment Report.

The Report is produced once every five years and aims to inform both the Regional Council and Northlanders of the human pressures acting on the environment, the current state of Northland’s environment, and the Council’s and communities’ response to environmental issues.

“Where possible this report also presents information on whether the state of the environment is getting better, getting worse or staying the same,” says Environmental Monitoring officer Sophie Tweddle.

“The report brings together the information we gather from a variety of monitoring programmes including state of the environment monitoring and resource consent and compliance monitoring,” she says.

“It also includes relevant information collected by other agencies – such as the District Councils, Department of Conservation and the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research.”

The report cards provide a summary of the highlights from the main sections of the full Report – air, coast, freshwater quality and quantity, land and people – and are available as a set or individually.



The full Report and report cards will be available on the Council’s website at the end of June – www.nrc.govt.nz/soe – and the report cards will also be available by calling the Council on 0800 002 004.



Northland Regional Council staff monitoring aquatic weeds in Lake Omapere as part of an ongoing, joint community project to improve the water quality in the lake.

2007-08 Annual Environmental Monitoring Report

As part of the Council’s ongoing commitment to monitoring and reporting on the state of Northland’s natural environment, the 2007-08 Annual Environmental Monitoring Report is available on the Council website www.nrc.govt.nz/environmentalmonitoring

The report provides a summary of the Council’s environmental monitoring activities for the 2007-08 financial year, including the results of air and water quality monitoring programmes, progress with biodiversity and biosecurity projects, compliance monitoring of resource consents, and feedback on environmental incidents reported to the Council throughout the year.

The report can be viewed online or downloaded in PDF format. For further information, contact Sophie Tweddle or Emma Simpson on 0800 002 004.



Praise for NRC consents

Environment Minister Nick Smith has congratulated the Northland Regional Council for its "excellent" handling of resource consent applications.

The Council processed 99 percent of the 904 resource consent applications it received in the 2007/08 financial year inside the time limits imposed by the Resource Management Act (RMA).

"Your Council is to be congratulated for its high level of compliance and efficient systems," Dr Smith says.

He says the NRC's excellent performance comes at a time when latest Ministry for the Environment figures show record numbers of Councils nationally are not meeting consent processing deadlines.

The Ministry surveys local authorities' performance on key aspects of RMA implementation every two years and has just released the results for 2007/08. The NRC is ranked 7th of the 84 local authorities surveyed.

Councillor Lorraine Hill, who chairs the NRC's Hearings Committee, says the NRC's processing times compare well to other local authorities in Northland, despite the Regional Council processing significantly more consents.

She says the NRC has consistently been one of the country's best performing local authorities when it comes to consent processing times.

Further information on the survey is available from the Ministry's website:

www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/rma/annual-survey

NRC site nets two awards

The Northland Regional Council's award-winning website has won national and international acclaim.

The website – www.nrc.govt.nz – was recently awarded bronze status in the United States-based Horizon Interactive Awards, a global competition recognising outstanding achievement among interactive media producers.

This year's awards saw more than 2000 entries from 32 countries, with the NRC receiving one of 13 bronze awards issued in a Government website category.

Meanwhile, the NRC website was also recently ranked second of New Zealand's 85 Council sites by the Association of Local Government Information Management. (The site won the award last year.)

The website contains a comprehensive online library including detailed environmental monitoring reports, daily river and rainfall data, Council agendas and minutes, and a suite of publications and plans.

It also has an email subscription service which allows users to stay in touch about consultation, job vacancies, events, Council meetings and news.



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Visit: www.nrc.govt.nz/subscriptions

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Caring for Northland and its environment

