

REGIONAL REPORT

Issue 38

your regional newsletter

Nov/Dec 2016



Re-elected chairman Bill Shepherd and new deputy chairman David Sinclair (centre) check insect samples under a microscope during a familiarisation tour with council's monitoring staff.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

Re-elected Northland Regional Council chairman Bill Shepherd says challenges and opportunities abound as an enthusiastic newly-elected council charts a fresh course for the next three years on behalf of the entire community.

Bill, who has begun his second term as chairman, says October's local body elections delivered five new members to the nine-member council, including two female councillors for the first time in almost two decades.

He and newly-elected deputy David Sinclair say they're excited to lead a 'revitalised, keen and committed' council which is collectively relishing the opportunities – and challenges – the next three years will offer.

"Water quality will remain a major driver for the new council and some of its key work programmes in that regard are outlined on pages 3-6 of this edition of Regional Report," Bill says.

Completing the council's new Regional Plan, which will set out how the region's water, air, land and the coast are managed in future, is another crucial project. Economic development – growing the economy for the benefit of all Northlanders – remains another focus.

"My fellow councillors and I are also keen to work closely with staff to ensure our communities are better informed about the very important work council is doing on the public's behalf, and why."

"At the same time, we're also very aware of the need to keep a close eye on costs and ensure that we maximise the benefits to our ratepayers."

Bill says in that vein the previous regional council had developed constructive and productive partnerships with Far North Mayor John Carter and his Whangārei counterpart Sheryl Mai, and is looking forward to continuing and improving those.

"Similarly, we're also keen to build an effective relationship with Kaipara's new Mayor Greg Gent and his team. There's a great deal of important work happening in and around Kaipara. It's going to be great to work with an elected council there again."

Bill says each elected member of the regional council introduces particular strengths, experiences and skills which he is keen to tap into for best effect.

A "very successful" team-building exercise, including councillors and council's executive leadership team, had already been held, he says.

"Council has been working hard over the past few weeks to finalise its new governance structure and establish what worked well during the previous term, but also where there's room for changes and/or improvements to be made."

"This in turn will help us collectively agree what committees we have to oversee particular areas of work over the next three years and who is best-placed to chair them."

Meanwhile, Bill says all five former councillors who had not been re-elected had made their own important contributions and worked hard to improve the region, something he wished to publicly acknowledge on behalf of ratepayers.

Former deputy chair Graeme Ramsey had not sought re-election, while former councillors Craig Brown, Joe Carr, Monty Knight and Dover Samuels' bids for another term in office were unsuccessful.

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CONSTITUENCIES

- TE HIKU
- HOKIANGA - KAIKOHE
- KAIPARA
- COASTAL NORTH
- WHANGĀREI URBAN
- COASTAL CENTRAL
- COASTAL SOUTH

Our integrated programme for freshwater management



HEALTHY FRESHWATER RESOURCES

Having plenty of clean fresh water is something we all want in Northland. It's of critical importance to our health, our economy and our lifestyle.

Water quality has been in the spotlight for many years now. Here in Northland an enormous amount of effort is going into protecting and enhancing our precious freshwater resources.

From landowners and farmers, industry groups, Māori and local communities, to local government, our region is investing heavily in improving the way water is managed.

At Northland Regional Council, around half of all the work we do is related to fresh water.

We monitor water health, develop rules to protect and manage effects on it, and we work with farmers whose land impacts on water quality. We collaborate closely with communities and tangata whenua on how local fresh water can best be managed.

We also oversee how water is allocated around the region and how much is being used.

Waiora Northland Water is our integrated programme for improving the quality and management of our lakes, rivers, aquifers and wetlands. It's all about working together to better manage our region's precious freshwater resources.

The things most of us expect from our waterways aren't unreasonable – for example, being able to

safely swim at popular swimming spots – while still using water to enhance the productivity of our land and help our economy thrive.

Most of all, we want to leave our waterways in a good state for future generations to use and enjoy.

Managing the region's fresh water, above and below the ground, is a balancing act. It is a valuable resource for agriculture, horticulture and water supply to towns and industry.

What we use must be weighed up against the environmental impacts of using it, while preserving the life-supporting capacity of our aquatic ecosystems.

Northland Regional Council has been monitoring the state of our waterways for many years and, while there's always room for improvement, generally trends over the last decade are encouraging.

For most monitored rivers there has been no significant change. In the remaining rivers, more have shown improving water quality than declining water quality. Our treasured Kai Iwi Lakes remain in good condition. Data shows that our most popular swimming spots are suitable for swimming all or most of the time.

But there's still much to do – improving water quality and the way water is managed is a marathon, not a sprint, and we all have a part to play. Some of our main work in this area is outlined on the next three pages.

QUICK STATS

- 970 dairy farms in council's annual effluent monitoring programme
- \$1.25 million to be allocated this year through council's Environment Fund
- More than 400 Farm Water Quality Improvement Plans developed with landowners
- \$180,000 expansion of council's poplar and willow nursery, taking it to 8.5ha
- 12 lake management plans being developed
- Five locally-tailored plans for priority catchments nearing completion
- 52% of schools involved in council's Enviroschools programme
- 60 popular swimming sites monitored over summer
- 104 river, lake and coastal sites regularly monitored for water quality.



UNDERSTANDING OUR FRESH WATER

Alongside its comprehensive water quality monitoring programme, council is involved in scientific research projects to better understand water quality.

“We need good science informing our resource management decisions and the programmes we invest in, and there’s some really interesting research going on at the moment,” says Environmental Services Manager Bruce Howse.

One example is a recently-commissioned \$250,000 study looking at sources of sediment in the Kaipara Harbour catchment and different options for managing it. The study is a partnership with the Ministry for the Environment (which contributed \$200,000) and Auckland Council. It also involves developing a tool to help landowners identify sediment management options and cost effectiveness.

Another example is a sediment source-tracking project in the Waitangi catchment. This, in effect, ‘fingerprints’ different sources of sediment to help better understand where it is coming from and what measures might be most effective for reducing it.

“Monitoring and research helps the council better understand long-term trends in water quality, where contaminants are coming from, and how we can best look after the quality of our waterways,” says Bruce.

Find out more about council’s published research at:

www.nrc.govt.nz/research

View water quality monitoring reports at:

www.lawa.org.nz

SOIL CONSERVATION

Keeping valuable soil on the hills and out of our waterways is the driver behind two significant council initiatives.

Land Manager Duncan Kervell says council is now one year into a four-year project funded by Ministry for Primary Industries’ Hill Country Erosion Fund. Through the project, council is providing advice and support to Kaipara hill country landowners to reduce the impacts of erosion on waterways.

“A whopping 23 percent (102,000 hectares) of Kaipara’s land area is highly erodible. It’s a major contributor to sedimentation issues in the catchment’s waterways and harbour. This project is one of the ways we can help turn off the sediment tap.”

Council is part of the Integrated Kaipara Harbour Management Group (IKHMG), established in 2005 to promote integrated management and inter-agency coordination and kaitiakitanga of the Kaipara Harbour and its catchment.

Meanwhile, a \$180,000 expansion for council’s poplar and willow nursery, which was established three years ago due to a lack of supply in Northland, also links in well with council’s increased focus on soil conservation.

“We set up our own nursery because we just couldn’t get the supply we needed locally,” says Duncan.

“The expansion will take the nursery to 8.5 hectares, providing us with the means to better support the Kaipara project and work we’re doing with owners of other highly erodible land around the region.”

Find out more at: www.nrc.govt.nz/soilerosion



GROWING THE NEXT GENERATION

The WaiRestoration project is all about supporting farmers and engaging young people and local communities in the restoration of waterways and biodiversity.

It has been rolled out under the council’s Enviroschools programme, which involves over half of Northland’s schools.

Now in its fourth year, WaiRestoration brings together a range of initiatives for improving fresh water and preserving the region’s native species.

Susan Karels, Enviroschools Regional Co-ordinator for the council, says the project aligns with the council’s strong focus on freshwater quality through its Waiora Northland Water programme.

“As well as being a valuable education tool, school and community involvement with WaiRestoration can make a real difference to the quality of our waterways.”

Find out more at: www.nrc.govt.nz/enviroschools

RECORD FUNDING FOR LANDOWNERS

A record amount of nearly \$1.25 million is expected to be allocated this year through council’s Environment Fund, much of which will support water quality-related projects. The fund has been helping Northlanders enhance and protect the region’s environment since 1996.

Bruce Howse, council’s Environmental Services Manager, says that a major focus right now is supporting landowners to get their waterways fenced, to improve the health of our freshwater resources for everyone to enjoy.

“With new region-wide stock exclusion rules proposed in the Draft Regional Plan, we’re really encouraging landowners to get their waterway fencing sorted.

“Through the Environment Fund we can pay a contribution of up to 50% towards your fencing costs,” Bruce says.

Find out more at: www.nrc.govt.nz/environmentfund

MANAGING OUR WATER

Better freshwater management is the basis for a number of the key changes proposed in council’s Draft Regional Plan – both the amount that is available for public use and its quality.

Key water-related proposals the council recently consulted on included new limits on taking water from rivers, lakes and aquifers; new stock exclusion rules for rivers, drains, wetlands and lakes; and protecting places of significance in water identified by tangata whenua.

Locally tailored catchment plans are now nearing completion for five of Northland’s priority catchments – Doubtless Bay, Poutō, Waitangi, Whangārei and Mangere.

Council’s integrated programme for fresh water management, Waiora Northland Water, has been looking at our waters at a local catchment level and bringing together local stakeholders to help decide how they’ll be managed.

In each catchment, a group formed from community, industry and tangata whenua representatives has been working to develop a plan to address issues related to local fresh water.

Feedback received on both the Draft Regional Plan and the local catchment plans is now being worked through.

Find out more at: www.nrc.govt.nz/newregionalplan

and: www.nrc.govt.nz/waiora

LANDOWNER ADVICE

More than 400 Farm Water Quality Improvement Plans have been developed with landowners over the last three years to improve sustainable land management practices.

“There are lots of ways that landowners can improve the quality of water in streams, drains and wetlands on their properties – like fencing off waterbodies and doing riparian planting,” says Land Manager Duncan Kervell.

“Farm water quality improvement plans offer free, no-obligation advice specific to each property.”

The plans identify recommended actions for reducing sediment, nutrients and pathogens going into waterways, and are generally required for landowners to get funding assistance under council’s Environment Fund.

Find out more at: www.nrc.govt.nz/fwqip

REDUCING FARM DAIRY EFFLUENT

A new Farm Dairy Effluent Reduction Project is proving a success, with significant reductions in both water use and effluent volumes for the first two farms.

Council is working with farmers to improve water use efficiency, reduce effluent volumes and lessen the risk of non-compliance with regional rules and/or resource consent conditions. Excessive effluent volumes can also cause over-investment by farmers in capital and operating costs for effluent disposal.

Under the project, Mayflower Farms Ltd reduced water use by 49% and effluent volumes going to the ponds by 54%. Waiotu Farms Ltd saved 38% and reduced effluent going to the ponds by 46%.

Additional staff resourcing is now in place to enable the successful project to expand across a number of other farms, while allowing the farm dairy effluent team to continue its comprehensive annual monitoring programme of 970 dairy farms across the region.

The innovative project was specially commended at the recent 2016 Westpac Northland Business Excellence Awards.

Find out more at: www.nrc.govt.nz/farmdairyeffluent



Surveying at Lake Waikare, which is part of the Kai Iwi group.

OUR LAKES

The council has 26 lakes on a quarterly monitoring regime, including the biggest and most outstanding lakes along with smaller 'representative' lakes.

Monitoring results show that lake health at 16 sites has not shown any significant change or has improved over the last decade, and four sites have shown a significant improvement.

The highly-valued Kai Iwi Lakes remain our healthiest lakes, with good water quality, low nutrients and algal production, and very clear waters.

Our largest lake, Lake Ōmāpere (north of Kaikohe) showed a significant improvement in health over the last decade. However, lake health at five sites has deteriorated over the last decade.

Alongside updating regional rules for fresh water and supporting landowners to reduce impacts on water quality, council is currently working with local communities to develop plans for better managing 12 of our outstanding lakes. This will set priorities and targets for work in lake catchments.

SWIMMING

Each summer the regional council tests water quality at a number of Northland's most popular coastal and freshwater swimming sites.

The vast majority of Northland's most popular coastal swimming spots – and most of their fresh water equivalents – are suitable for swimming all or most of the time, according to council's monitoring data.

Last summer, 99.1 percent (606 out of 611) samples at coastal sites and 89.4% (161 out of 180) samples at freshwater sites over summer met national 'guideline values', meaning they were considered suitable for swimming.

Generally, where results had exceeded guideline values many had occurred after moderate to heavy rain, and had been attributed to run-off from land contaminated by faecal material – typically either from wild birds or stock.

This summer's swimming water quality monitoring programme is due to begin at the end of November.

Find out more at: www.nrc.govt.nz/swimming



OUR RIVERS

Like the rest of New Zealand, our river water quality varies greatly. In general terms, water is pristine in native forested headlands and then becomes increasingly impacted as it flows through modified lowlands.

Northland Regional Council has been monitoring water quality in our rivers for many years, and most results are encouraging.

Nitrogen results are good, and phosphorus has improved at nearly half the sites. For *E.coli*, most sites score reasonably well; the three worst sites are in lowland pastoral sites with high-intensity land use. Turbidity (an indicator for sediment) is higher than guidelines at nearly a third of the monitored sites, though some sites have shown some improvement.

Over the last decade there has been a real improvement in 'point-source discharges', which are single sources of pollution from specific locations.

The number of significant non-compliance events with council's annually-monitored resource consents has been steadily decreasing over time. Likewise, the 2015/16 farm dairy effluent compliance results were the best yet in Northland, reflecting the ongoing drive for improvements in this sector.

Sediment and bacteria remain the most problematic contaminants for Northland's rivers, some of which originates from surface run-off.

These contaminants occur naturally, but when too much washes off the land it is damaging to both water quality and ecosystem health.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Fence waterways** to keep stock off stream banks and out of the water. We can help with the cost through our Environment Fund – call 0800 002 004.
- **Get planting.** Plant along stream banks and erosion-prone land to reduce sediment and nutrients getting into our waterways.
- **Report pollution.** Call our 24/7 Environmental Hotline on 0800 504 639 if you spot a potential pollution threat.
- **Keep pollutants and rubbish out of stormwater drains.** What goes down these drains goes into our waterways.

Northland isn't alone in this challenge – managing surface run-off is something that is being grappled with throughout the country.

Environment Minister Nick Smith acknowledged in a recent speech that diffuse run-off is difficult to regulate, and the biggest policy challenge in improving freshwater quality is finding credible and workable ways to reduce it.

Here in Northland, landowners are making real and sustained efforts to reduce soil, effluent and nutrient losses off agricultural land.

The council is supporting these efforts in a number of ways, working at a local and regional level to ensure further protection and enhancement for Northland's waterways.

RIGHT BALANCE THE KEY TO NEW REGIONAL PLAN

Striking the right balance between protecting the things Northlanders value – like clean water and air – and providing for important economic activity is at the heart of our new Regional Plan.

The plan is effectively a rule book designed to replace three existing regional plans and when formally notified next year will indicate how our water, air, land and coast will be managed.

Policy Development Manager Ben Lee says nearly 300 submitters – almost 200 individuals and more than 80 organisations, companies or agencies – took up a recent opportunity to make early comment on an initial draft of the plan.

A proposal to allow the burning of silage bale wrap had attracted more than 90 submissions (most opposed) and the highest number of comments on any topic. Next most popular topics were stock exclusion and genetically modified organisms (48 and 47 submitters respectively).

Ben says the previous council's Regional Policy Committee had released an early draft of the plan to 'road-test' it with the community well before the new council will need to move into a more formal process next year.

As well as the submissions, more than 150 people had attended an associated series of drop-in sessions around Northland, and two subsequent hui had also been held in mid-October.

Ben says the previous committee's road test could be considered a success and staff are now busy analysing and summarising all the feedback for the newly-elected council.

"Public feedback like this is invaluable and our new councillors will carefully consider it and make any necessary changes before formally notifying the plan, which at this stage looks like it will probably occur around August 2017."

Ben says the plan aims to strike a balance between protecting the things Northlanders value – like clean water and air – and providing for important economic activities including farming, horticulture, forestry, tourism and marine enterprise.

"It reflects better knowledge of our region's environment and factors in important changes over the past 10 years or so, including new national direction and policies from central government."

Information about the Draft Regional Plan is available online. Go to:

www.nrc.govt.nz/newregionalplan

NEW PEST MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

New options for managing plant, animal and marine pests across land, freshwater and marine environments are under consideration as part of the development of two new plans.

The existing Regional Pest Management Strategies have been under review and are to be replaced with a 10-year Regional Pest Management Plan (RPMP). This will be accompanied by a Marine Pathways Management Plan – a new and complementary option under the Biosecurity Act.

Biosecurity Manager Don McKenzie says Northland's warm wet climate, wide range of habitats and biodiversity status make the region vulnerable to the impact of both new and established pests.

He says the development of the two plans has been guided by a series of workshops, meetings and surveys that have been carried out with key stakeholders since 2014.

The plans also take into account the National Policy Direction on Pest Management, which specifies the types of programmes that can be included within pest management plans.

Options currently under consideration to form part of the RPMP include:

- The addition of some new species and new categories of management, and the removal of some species covered by the existing strategies
- The opportunity to introduce 'good neighbour' rules to help reduce costs to neighbours from the spread of unmanaged weeds on property boundaries, road and rail corridors



Effective pest management requires partnerships with our communities and other stakeholders. Council is a partner in the Warawara Whakaora Ake project at Warawara Forest, which is driven by the nine marae surrounding the forest, and supported by Te Rūnanga o Te Rarawa, DOC and Reconnecting Northland.

- Possible bans on the sale and distribution of specific plants and animals.

Community pest management programmes are likely to be managed outside of the RPMP, which allows for greater flexibility in the types of programmes and the pests targeted.

Meanwhile, the Marine Pathways Management Plan will focus on human activities that may transport marine pests. Given that biofouling (marine growth) on vessel hulls is the main way that marine pests

ANNUAL REPORT 2016



Our Annual Report 2016 and Annual Report Summary are now available from our website.

The Annual Report looks at what we have achieved over the past year, how we paid for it, and how it stacks up against our planned performance and budget.

Among major milestones was the completion of Whangārei's \$11.9 million Hopua te Nihotetea detention dam, designed to help reduce flood impacts on the city's CBD and one of the biggest engineering projects our council has ever embarked on. A revamped Whangātane spillway and associated 54-metre long stock bridge were also completed, which should reduce flood risk in urban Kaitiāia.

We've also been working with Northland's three district councils on ways to deliver better outcomes for our communities, including the 2016 launch of 'Northland Forward Together', a collective plan for improving efficiency and effectiveness through joint delivery of services and infrastructure. Go to:

www.nrc.govt.nz/annualreport

MID NORTH PASSENGER TRANSPORT SERVICE

– Trial needs your support –

Mid North residents are being urged to support a trial passenger transport service designed to assist them to get to work and make shopping and other appointments easier.

The trial 'Mid North Link' service is due to start operating in December and, depending on the number of passengers carried, is hoped to run for up to two years over three routes. Two of those routes are primarily aimed at workers; a third route is for shoppers.

Kaikohe Bus Company will operate the service, but Northland Regional Council – which is funding the \$280,000 trial – says it's important to note its success lies squarely in the community's hands.

"Essentially, it's a 'use it or lose it' situation with any continuation beyond the first 12 months of the trial very much dependent on how well it's patronised," says the council's Transport Strategic Planning Officer Sharlene Selkirk.

She says the council recognises that many jobs in the Mid North extend beyond the traditional 9am-5pm Monday to Friday working week.

"With that in mind, we've agreed that a seven-day workers' service to both Kerikeri and Waipapa (Route 1) and one to Paihia and Waitangi (Route 2) should be initially trialled."

Those services will also operate on public holidays, excluding Christmas Day and Good Friday.

"Another aim is to offer a shopper-type service which could help with access to medical appointments, hairdressers, banking services and general shopping – basically, just getting out and about," Sharlene says.

"These trips would also be of use to backpackers and other tourists who have limited options to get from the east coast to the west, and return, but unlike the workers services it will not operate on public holidays."

Fares will vary from \$3 to \$8.50 one-way with 10-trip concession tickets available for regular commuters – tickets can be purchased on board – and all three services will offer the opportunity to connect with some inter-regional services, such as InterCity and ManaBus.

Sharlene says at the time this article was being written operator details and timetables were still being fine-tuned; however, these should now be available online at: www.buslink.co.nz



The three trial routes are:

Route 1 - Northern Workers

Aimed at those working in the horticultural industry. Departs Kaikohe at 6.35am, to Ōkaihau, Ōhaeawai, Pakaraka, Kerikeri and Waipapa. Return trip leaves Waipapa 5.15pm.

Route 2 – Southern Workers

Aimed at those working in BOI tourism. Departs Kaikohe at 7.35am to Ōhaeawai, Pakaraka, Moerewa, Kawakawa, Paihia and Waitangi. Return trip leaves Waitangi 5.15pm.

Route 3 – Southern Shoppers

Twice-weekly, leaving Kaikohe at 10am on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Follows the Southern Workers route to Waitangi, arriving about 11am. Continues to Kerikeri and Waipapa, leaving Waipapa at 2pm for the return leg.

Sharlene says the regional council and NZ Transport Agency also provide services in the Hokianga, Kaitiāia and Whangārei:

- Hokianga Link, which connects Ōmāpere with Kaikohe and Kerikeri;
- BusAbout Kaitiāia, connecting Ahipara, Pukenui and Mangonui to Kaitiāia
- CityLink Whangārei, servicing urban Whangārei.

More information on these services can also be found on: www.buslink.co.nz

Northland CoastCare turns 10

From small beginnings just 10 years ago, our CoastCare programme now boasts 31 groups with more than 200 active members working on dune restoration projects at local beaches.

These dedicated members have spearheaded dune restoration planting and other work at 43 sites, boosting dunes with more than 100,000 native plants provided through council's Environment Fund.

Council CoastCare Co-ordinator Laura Shaft says the programme was set up in 2006 to help protect and restore Northland's coastal sand dunes by supporting community groups to undertake dune restoration activities – planting, fencing, weed and pest control, and education.

Since then, CoastCare has amassed a great track record, including:

- 115,000 plants put in the ground over 10 seasons

- Nearly 80,000 spinifex, plus pingao and backdune plants, including Muehlenbeckia, flax, knobby clubbrush and kanuka, all provided through the Environment Fund
- Currently 31 active CoastCare groups Northland-wide and, in the 2015/16 year, 1152 volunteers participated in the CoastCare programme.

Laura says the programme also has its own newsletter, 'CoastCare News'. First printed in December 2006 as a hard copy, it has been published twice a year since. This year it became an e-newsletter. A celebratory pre-Christmas edition is planned to mark the past decade's work.

Information on CoastCare – including dune planting factsheets and other CoastCare resources – can be found online via:

www.nrc.govt.nz/CoastCare



Waipu is among many communities which have contributed to an impressive regional dune planting programme. Waipu Primary School is pictured here planting at Waipu Cove's iconic dunes in September 2014.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Our offices will be closed from 2pm Friday 23 December until 8am Wednesday 04 January 2017 for the Christmas-New Year break.

The closures apply to our Whangārei, Kaitiāia and Ōpua offices. Dargaville staff (who share offices with Kaipara District Council) will also be on leave from the afternoon of 23 December until 04 January 2017.

Environmental or maritime incidents can be reported to our 24/7 Environmental Hotline 0800 504 639 over the break. Maritime, environmental response, Civil Defence and hydrological staff will remain on-call and our annual summer swimming water quality monitoring programme will continue.

Councillors, management and staff wish Northlanders and visitors a merry Christmas and a safe and happy New Year.