



Annual Report from the Waikato Biodiversity Forum 2012/13

Introduction

The Waikato Biodiversity Forum has been operating for 10 years and the membership is stable at around 450. The Forum's membership is comprised of research and management agencies, iwi groups, private landowners, community groups and individuals who work towards improving indigenous biodiversity in the Waikato region. The Forum believes that the combined synergies of people working together provide a valuable contribution to improving biodiversity across the region. The Forum speaks on biodiversity issues, but does not necessarily reflect the views of all forum members on every biodiversity issue.

The Forum operates independently of its constituent organisations. It is run by a part-time coordinator who receives support and guidance from a focus group. The Forum's work includes:

- encouraging agencies and groups to network, share ideas and work together to protect and enhance biodiversity
- advocating for the development of sound policy to enhance biodiversity protection at national, regional and local levels
- organising forums to discuss biodiversity issues and offer support and recommendations in relation to local projects
- organising workshops for community groups on a variety of topics such as pest management
- raising awareness of the importance of biodiversity through the media, the Forum's website, Facebook and presentations to groups
- acting as a referral agency for biodiversity information such as pest management
- providing funding advice to community groups and organisations
- maintaining a database of community biodiversity projects.

Acknowledgements

The Waikato Biodiversity Forum would like to acknowledge and thank the following organisations for their financial support: Waikato Regional Council, Department of Conservation, Thames-Coromandel District Council, Waikato District Council, Hamilton City Council, Waipa District Council and South Waikato District Council.

The Forum would also like to thank the staff from forum member organisations and community groups for their contribution and expertise during forum events, workshops and the on-going exchange of information with the public and other forum members. This collective expertise makes the operation of the Forum a success and is valued by forum members and the public.

Waikato Biodiversity Forum events

Three forum events were held over the past 12 months. The first event was a review of the Forum – Reflections and Directions.

The following strengths of the Forum were identified:

- networking
- advocacy on biodiversity issues
- having a dedicated coordinator
- running of events and workshops
- support with funding applications
- in-kind and cash support from the regional council, local authorities and Department of Conservation
- the provision of advice.

The future directions highlighted included involving youth, working with the business sector, developing a "resource person" register, developing a strategy and communication plan, growing conservation groups, education of the public, the use of raahui, wider use of social media to get messages across and facilitating community group approaches to filling in the gaps. The Forum is working towards achieving these outcomes.

In November 60 people gathered at Te Rahu Hall near Rotopiko/Lake Serpentine to network and share ideas on wetland restoration in the Waipa district. A range of organisations presented, including the Waikato Raupatu River Trust, Fish and Game, NZ Landcare Trust, Landcare Research, Department of Conservation, Robyn Irving (an environmental educator) and our youngest ever presenter Leon Mackey from Te Awamutu Primary School. Topics presented ranged from the involvement of schools in restoration work, importance of invertebrates in wetlands, iwi engagement in water quality management at the highest decision making levels, constructed wetlands, WETMAK kit for monitoring wetlands and the value of partnerships when undertaking wetland restoration. The Forum participants visited Rotopiko/Lake Serpentine to hear future plans for the National Wetland Centre. This forum day wrapped up with discussion on tips for working together to benefit new wetlands and lake projects in the Waipa district.



Reviewing the Forum

The final forum of the year was held at Te Kauhanga Nui Chambers at Hopuhopu to network and share ideas on the management of freshwater species in and around the Waikato River. Presentations included topics such as surveys of tuna with suggestions for improving their habitat (e.g. restoration of stream banks), the Waikato-Tainui (Waikato River Fisheries) Regulations 2011, whitebait management, planting guidelines for the Waikato and Waipa rivers, current problems for maintaining freshwater biodiversity within the Waikato catchment and options for potential remediation and research on pest fish removal and fish populations in shallow Waikato lakes. Field trips were held at Lake Areare and sites along the Waikato River.

0800 BIODIV

The Forum coordinator continued to operate the 0800 BIODIV number and respond or refer enquiries to an appropriate agency. The service now counts enquiries from forum members. The coordinator responded to 85 enquires from the public and forum members through the 0800 number and the website. The enquiries ranged from availability of funding, weed and animal pest management, details of community group projects, volunteering on projects, planting guides and teacher resources.

Media and publicity

Hamilton News agreed to run a forum column in their newspaper. Articles have been submitted on biodiversity and community group projects, including Ruapuke Beachcare Group and the Going for Gold group at Te Kowhai. The Forum continued to publicise its work through the website and Facebook page which was set up earlier this year. A complete review and new look for the website is planned for 2013/14.

Networking and advice

Forum members received four newsletters to inform them of biodiversity related information. The Forum continued to provide a link for community group members and management agencies through email dissemination of information and communication with individual members in answer to queries about biodiversity. Funding advice was the major theme of enquiry from forum members.

Advocacy

The Forum provided advocacy for biodiversity on a range of district plans, including South Waikato, Waipa, Thames-Coromandel and Hamilton City. Assistance was provided to Thames-Coromandel District Council for the consultation meetings for community groups. Written and oral submissions were made on the Waikato Regional Council's Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan and the Waikato Conservation



Management Strategy. Forum members were supplied with comments and encouraged to submit to strengthen the voice for biodiversity. The Forum provided the text and photos for a biodiversity pamphlet to South Waikato District Council and is providing articles on biodiversity for the council's ratepayer newsletter. The coordinator attended Sustainable Business Network gatherings and also represented the Forum on the Advisory Committee for Regional Environment (ACRE) to advocate for biodiversity protection and enhancement.

Community groups

The Forum maintains a database and map of community group projects which highlights the contribution that these groups make to biodiversity protection and enhancement across the region. At present the database has 155 groups working on over 183 project sites. Three groups have gone into recess or folded and nine new groups have been registered on the database. The regional council, district councils, and other agencies and community groups request information from the database. This has proven to be a valuable service for forum members.

Workshops and presentations

The Forum ran a workshop at Te Mata in partnership with the Te Mata Landcare Group for community groups and members of the public with a focus on weed and pest management. The workshop was offered with the assistance of the regional council and Department of Conservation biosecurity officers on the Coromandel Peninsula. The annual Regional Council Landcare Networking day was held at Pukemokemoke this year and the Forum coordinator was present to provide support and advice.



Te Mata weed management workshop

Three Kauri Dieback workshops were facilitated by the coordinator on the Coromandel in May working with the National Kauri Dieback team and Kauri 2000 Inc. The workshops took place in Thames, Coromandel and Whitianga and approximately 100 people attended. The workshops provided information about the disease and the response so far. Lots of ideas were gathered from participants on actions that could take place to prevent the disease spreading to kauri trees on the Coromandel Peninsula.

The Forum coordinator presented at the Flaxroots Community Group Conference in Tauranga on growing and sustaining volunteers.

Fieldays and other events

The Forum set up a display area at the Waikato Show in partnership with the Waikato Environment Centre and helped out community groups with their display areas. There was a steady flow of foot traffic with people stopping and discussing the community group biodiversity projects on the large map of Hamilton City.

The Forum also had a presence at Fieldays and helped out in the partnerships section of the Department of Conservation display area. The Department of Conservation printed out large copies of the Forum's endangered fauna and flora maps and these were a real draw card to start conversations with people about biodiversity.

The coordinator helped out at the Miranda BioBlitz which was held in February to identify as much indigenous biodiversity as possible in the Taramaire-Miranda area. The Forum also had a presence at the World Wetlands Day event at the Rotopiko complex (Lake Serpentine). Activities were available for children and conversations were had with adults about the Rotopiko Complex and future plans for the site.



Children identifying insects

Childrens' activities

The Forum coordinator ran an invertebrate activity for children attending a WILSS school holiday programme in April. This took place at the Mangakotukutuku Stream with staff from the regional council and streamcare group members. The children took part in a hunt for insects followed up by identification and sharing with the group. A similar activity was run for the Waipa Youth Earth Champions day at Te Awamutu and a Hamilton Junior Naturalists' (JUNATS) gathering at the Hamilton Gardens. A session on animal pests and making a tracking tunnel was also run for JUNATS.



Waikato Show display area



Budding scientists identifying the insects

Summary

In summary the Forum has continued to provide support and advice to community groups and forum members through networking, workshops and forum events. The provision of advice to community groups and the links that can be made between forum members to help each other is always a highlight plus seeing the work on the ground as a result of funding assistance. Submissions continued to be made on plans and policies with four district plans receiving biodiversity input from the Forum. The work with children was rewarding and it was heartening to see the enthusiasm for exploring and learning about nature that the groups of children such as JUNATS displayed. Having a presence at the Waikato Show and Fieldays plus articles in the media continued to be a way of highlighting the value of biodiversity and action on the ground.

Moira Cursey, Coordinator, Waikato Biodiversity Forum

