
Biodiversity Advisory Group Minutes – 5/08/24

Minutes of a meeting of the Biodiversity Advisory Group held on Monday 5 August 2024, in the Wakanui Room, 2 Baring Square East, Ashburton, commencing at 1.00pm.

Present

Councillors Leen Braam (Chair), Lynette Lovett (via Teams) and Richard Wilson, Alice Shanks, Adi Avnit, Edith Smith, Angela Cushnie, Kim Wall, Mike Salvesen, Val Clemens, Ian Fraser, Andy Hirschberg, Robb Stevens, Shaun Spencer, Gen de Spa, Nick Vernon, Ian Soper (Open Spaces Manager), Dr Christian Chukwuka (Ecologist/Biodiversity Advisor).

In attendance

Phillipa Clark (Governance Support).

1 Apologies

Mayor Neil Brown; Donna Field, Barry Austin, Barry Maister, Mary Ralston, Willie Leferink, Brad Edwards and Janine Holland.
For lateness: Nick Vernon (1.37pm)

2 Extraordinary Business

The Chair advised that Donna Field is unavailable today and her report will be deferred until the next meeting.

3 Declarations of Interest

Nil

4 Confirmation of Minutes

That the minutes of the Biodiversity Advisory Group meeting held on 13 May 2024 be taken as read and confirmed.

Richard/Leen

Carried

5 Pudding Hill Weed Control – project update

The first phase of the project has been completed using a grant from the Ashburton Water Zone Committee (\$8,000 + GST). The delivery was only within the approved grant. There are more weeds to be removed upstream, and we will revisit the project in Spring 2024 if funds are available.

Christian reported that the Ashburton Water Zone Committee's funding programme is open, and this project fits the criteria of the Action Plan (weed control encroaching on riverbeds), but an application may have to compete against projects with greater priority.

Officers will estimate time and cost (likely around \$6.5k) but at this stage, just looking for approval to ask for funding.

1. **That** the Biodiversity Advisory Group receives the report on Pudding Hill Stream weed control; and

2. **That** the Biodiversity Advisory Group advises the Project Team to seek more funding and continue to eradicate weeds on the Pudding Hill Stream channel.

Edith/Gen

Carried

6 Ashburton River Hakatere Shorebird Habitat Management Strategy 2023-30

This report will be presented to the next meeting on 4 November. The Group agreed it would be useful for all Councillors to be part of the discussion and an invitation will be extended.

7 Ashburton District Biodiversity Strategy Implementation – deliberation on BAG led actions in the strategy

Christian presented a progress report and advised that meetings have been held with a few stakeholders to discuss some aspects of the Strategy implementation where they have input. Going forward, updates on the Strategy actions will be presented at the Biodiversity Group meetings.

- ***Covenants and land protection***

Insufficient funding for QEII covenants and most potential new covenants doesn't fit QEII criteria. Ecologist/Biodiversity Advisor is proposing to develop a Council covenant process within section 77 of the Reserve Management Act.

Alice advised that QEII prioritise natural vegetation. Working on three covenants in the Ashburton district currently.

- ***Planting guidelines***

Christian referred to the amount of information that can be found online for people wanting advice on what to plant and where. He'll look at this and refine into a single list.

Christian confirmed that roadside planting is currently not permitted. Council is the road controlling authority.

- ***Advocate and distribute information to landowners***

It was suggested that Christian contact Mary Ralston to ask if she's interested and available to be the stakeholder lead. It was further suggested that the position be remunerated.

Representatives from Fonterra and Synlait commented that they could help with information going out to farmers using their communications.

Other suggested names / organisations were noted by Christian who will progress this.

- ***Citizen Science***

Kanuka Trust (Kim) and Ashburton Community Conservation Trust (Val) to lead the delivery of Citizen science project. Christian will oversee the program development.

- ***Regular media publication of biodiversity***

Looking for 'success' stories that can be shared. Members were asked to get in touch with Christian if they have a story or items that needs to be shared with the Community.

- ***Support school programmes***

Some funding is available for the school programme. Aim to speak to Principals Association as a group.

Kim advised that Kānuka Trust are working alongside 7 schools currently and looking how they can extend that. Forest & Bird are working with Wakanui, Staveley Camp with one school on a regular basis, and others from time to time, and Synlait are working with Lauriston School.

- **Water races**

Edith asked whether a particular goal has been identified for water races and if various aspects of the Strategy have been used.

Richard reported that Council is now looking at protocols for the new Stockwater Working Group and they will include race biodiversity values. Once Council's position is clear, it will be shared with the Biodiversity Group.

8 **Ecologist / Biodiversity Advisor's Report**

- **Plantation Road Investigation**

Christian presented the outcome of the investigation to the group for deliberation. This is one of the few sites on the Plains where original remnants of plants remain and currently a significant site in the District Plan but not an area of significant conservation value (ASCV).

Post meeting, Christian further comments:

In summary, the road is used by both landowners to move stock to another paddock, which will be difficult if the road is closed. Due to that, we agreed with the landowners that the road would remain open as an unformed legal road. Suggestion was made by the landowners and agreed by us to extend the fence line up to 6 metres from the shelterbelt to merge all the native vegetation into one single-fenced area. The fenced area will also be elevated and included in the district plan ASCV layer. However, recognising the site as an ASCV does not affect an existing activity, sheep grazing, cattle movement, irrigation, farming and adjoining shelterbelt. Adverse effects from these activities will be managed voluntarily with the landowners.

Alice suggested that the existing fence shouldn't be removed but be reinforced with a new fence. Between that area and the new fence, people may plant but there needs to be a barrier to prevent people spraying and damaging the native vegetation.

Open Spaces Management agreed on this cause of action.

That the Ecologist/Biodiversity Advisor's report be received, and the investigation outcome is accepted by the group.

Val/Richard

Carried

8 **Group activity updates**

- **Forest & Bird**

The annual Winter bird count was recently undertaken – the 40th year of doing this so a good milestone. Edith noted that 3,160 birds were counted in total in 1984 – and this year the count was 5,675.

Another wilding day was held at Lake Heron. Last year around 11,000 wildings were removed, and a large number were removed again this year. They noted that a number are coming from land belonging to DOC.

Invites will be sent for the planting day on 8 September at Harris Reserve.

- **Methven Birdsong Initiative**

Gen spoke on behalf of the Group, reporting that the project is going well and they hope to start trapping soon.

- **Upper Rangitata Gorge Landcare Group**

Sally provided an overview of the Group's project and their involvement with planting and fencing of water ways. They're in the fourth and final year of that programme. All the plants have been sourced from the Gorge (initially via Orari Nursery and then Te Arowhenua's nursery).

- **Kānuka Trust**

Kim commented on the good traction the Trust is getting with schools. They are also connecting with the Methven Birdsong project.

- **Department of Conservation (DOC)**

Thanked the Upper Rangitata Landcare Group for the work they're undertaking.

Funding ended in June and DOC are reducing the scale of trapping.

DOC's role includes preparing response plans in the event that bird flu should break out. While its not in the country yet, they are remaining vigilant.

- **Synlait**

Synlait is emphasising "right place, right plant". The company despatched 60,000 plants in Autumn and are on track for more in the Spring. Working closely with catchment groups.

- **Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective**

Angela commented that geese are becoming an increasing pest (urban and rural). A landowner in the Rakaia Gorge is doing work with ECan on this.

Would like an update from Rakaia on work being done in the corridor, and also an update on planting that's being undertaken on the banks of the Ashburton River.

Lynette will follow up the Rakaia request at the community meeting this week and ask if a report can be provided to the Biodiversity Group.

- **Staveley Camp**

Gen reported that volunteers undertook significant weeding in the forest over a period of 18 days (366 volunteers including school children).

Looking to publish a book on the social / ecological aspect of Staveley forest. Have an event coming up which will be publicised.

- **Fonterra**

Robb spoke briefly about a Trust that Fonterra is involved with in Southland that could be of interest to the Biodiversity Group. He will report further on this.

9 **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday 4 November 2024.

The meeting concluded at 3.50pm.