



Date: 21 April 2024

To: Greater Wellington Regional Council

From: Te Awa-o-Porirua Catchment and Community Trust and
The Guardians of Pāuatahanui Inlet

Contacts: *Michael Player and Lindsay Gow*

Submission: Greater Wellington Regional Council's Long-Term Plan 2024-2034

Overview of the submitters

This submission is made jointly by Te Awarua-o-Porirua Harbour and Catchments Community Trust (PHACCT) and the Guardians of Pāuatahanui Inlet (GOPI). Both trusts have a strategic and long-term interest in the council's responsibilities and stewardship of the environment, especially harbours and their contributing water bodies. The harbours and catchments are a community commons and PHACCT/GOPI are catalysts for the community and public involvement in the long-term management of Te Awarua-o-Porirua and its catchments.

Support for GWRC's environment work

We support and thank the Council for including Whaitua related funding in the 2021 Long-Term Plan. We note a significant improvement by the current catchment team in our Whaitua area in reporting on progress over Whaitua implementation. But business as usual and activity rather than outcome reporting will not bring about the desired results of environmental restoration and improvements of water quality in natural water courses and the harbour. In relation to this, we thank the Council for carrying over recommendations in the Whaitua report into the proposed Plan Change 1 to the Natural Resources Plan. We are frustrated, however, on the time being taken to get substantive action happening.

Hearings are not scheduled on the Natural Resources Plan Change until 'mid-late 2024' and so any significant consequential actions to implement those recommendations are unlikely until well into the life of the long-term plan.

Catchment approach, NRP/RPS changes and Whaitua Implementation Programmes

As stated above, **we support implementation of changes to the Natural Resources Plan and Regional Policy Statement to realise better freshwater and environmental outcomes, and meet community and mana whenua aspirations.**

The pace of work on these, however, is too slow. Page 38 of the consultation states: that work is ongoing in terms of completing internal changes to support the catchment approach, then testing and agreeing priorities with Mana Whenua and communities. This means it could be 9 years since the commencement of the Porirua Whaitua project before communities see any substantive action, let alone outcomes (3 years for the committee's work, 3 years to design the current internal structure and then another 3 years to complete that work and determine priorities.)

This snails-pace progress is further underscored by reference on page 38 of the consultation document to just two financial years: 2024-2026 and 2027-2028 related to the NRP/RPS changes and with no indication of dollars attached. It makes us wonder what 'implementation' means in detail? There is a large number of matters to implement in order to reach the standards set for water quality improvement by 2040. Activities will be required in each and every year of the long-term plan if the standards are to be reached. This will include the provision of well devised and resourced incentives to get rural land owners to retire pasture land in high erosion prone areas.

Of concern is that officials at Porirua City advised late last year that the flow on costs of implementing all the required changes in the Natural Resources Plan would lead to double-digit city rates increases on top of projected rate increases. This brings into question the affordability of the standards, even though we are among the strongest supporters. This underscores the need for the Regional Council to work hand in glove with local authorities, iwi and central government to ensure that progress continues to be made without stalling due to overwhelming cost pressures on multiple fronts.

Harbours

We note very little reference to harbour management and stewardship matters in the consultation document.

There is a dire need for a joint governance arrangement to create an agreed multi-council and iwi strategy for Te Awarua-o-Porirua. Since the demise of the joint harbour committee years ago there has been much reference to development of a harbour accord involving all the parties. We get frequent commentary to the effect that such an accord is on the cusp of being signed but to date this has not happened.

The absence of joined-up leadership and a harbour strategy means that our local government, collectively, is not well placed, nor nimble enough, to secure central

government funding, should such opportunities arise. We hope this will be remedied early in the life of the new long-term plan.

Other than the CentrePort ownership issue, the only other reference to harbours of interest is that on Page 43: Harbours Channel Risk Review implementation, with \$558K set down for implementation in 2024-26. We assume this refers only to Wellington Harbour's 2022 channel review rather than other regional harbours. Discussion from time to time arises with regard to channel siltation in Te Awarua-o-Porirua harbour and the possibility of dredging the channels. We wish to flag to the Council that, other than limited maintenance dredging of the channel leading to the entrance and sea floor within the Mana Marina, PHACCT/GOPI are opposed to dredging as an option for channel deepening in the twin arms of the harbour. We support the findings of The Stimpson Report from 2017 when the then Joint Harbour Committee articulated the extreme difficulty, from a variety of consenting, cost and environmental grounds, for successful dredging operations to enhance the harbour.

Water meters and water storage lakes

When it comes to ensuring sufficient provision of potable water for the region, **we support the introduction of water meters.**

Based on the experience of Kapiti and other councils in New Zealand, it appears that much, if not all, of the Greater Wellington area's water needs could be accommodated through a combination of fixing the many hundreds of leaks in the system (40+% leakage), and through behavioral change from households, if water supply was metered.

In regard to exploring further water storage, we would only support this if it was necessary to provide extra resilience to the supply system after water metering has been introduced. We agree that further public consultation should take place prior to any construction of further water storage.

Reclothing Papatuanuku

We support the work to reclothe with construction in previously grazed areas in the five regional parks. This ticks positive boxes for both restoration of the environment and protection of waterways but also in providing carbon sinks. We are particularly keen to see this happen in the Belmont Regional Park. We note with enthusiasm the intention to increase finance for this work from the current \$830K to \$29.3m (opex). We caution, however, that planting is not the whole answer and hope that sufficient resources will be allocated to maintain the new plantings and to limit weed regrowth. We note opposition from adjoining landowners, who often complain that they are admonished by GWRC for insufficient weed control, when rogue plants sometimes run amok in Council land and seed into private property.

Nature based flood protection

The intention to explore nature-based solutions to flood protection is fully endorsed by PHACCT and GOPI. The science behind such solutions continues to provide evidence that

working with, rather than against, nature is a good path to sustainability and one that is likely to save money in the longer term. We would urge particular attention to the Porirua Stream and its catchment. Over the last century the Porirua Stream has been constricted and reshaped into what is little more than a drain, especially in its lower reaches. The continually growing delta of sediment at the mouth of the stream is testament to poor sediment control practices throughout the stream's catchment.

Climate Change challenges

We note on page 41, a long-term view is being taken well beyond the next decade of the LTP to 30 years out. The consultation document claims that challenges, including climate change, have all been taken into consideration and 'We have made plans with these significant challenges in mind'. While very significant investment is to be made in flood protection infrastructure, the LTP is fairly silent on other climate change adaptation initiatives.

We have commended the Council in the last year for its submissions related to environmental conditions that should be attached to development of green fields in the Northern Porirua Growth area. We note that the Council has been a signatory to the Regional Development Committee's intentions to provide housing for a further 164,000 residents over the next 30 years. While providing housing opportunities is important, **we urge the GWRC to make sure any development does not compromise its primary responsibilities to sustainably protect and enhance the natural environment.**

Bus depot and plant ownership, and CentrePort ownership

Both matters are outside the remit of our organisations. Our only comment is that we would seek assurances from the Council that expenditure on these assets would not reduce expenditure on environmental management.

Proposed rates increases

While we support the notion of an upper dollar limit for rates increases over the decade, we suggest that front-end loading the increases from 19.8% in 2025 and dropping it to 1.9% in 2034 is insufficiently taking into account citizens ability to absorb double digit increases especially when set alongside similar proposed rate increases from local authorities.

We would ask the Council to look again at how it might structure it's proposed expenditure to smooth out the currently suggested peaks in 2025, 2026 & 2027.

Conclusion

The Te Awarua-o-Porirua Harbour and Catchments Community Trust and Guardians of Pāuatahanui Inlet view the Greater Wellington Regional Council as a key organisation with responsibilities for both freshwater and coastal water health management. The Long-Term Plan is vital in enabling the Council to allocate resources and prioritise both capital and operating expenditure across its multiplicity of functions.

The next ten years will be particularly challenging in ensuring fulfilment of the water quality

standards recommended by the Whaitua Implementation Programme of 2019 and proposed to be adopted in the recent Plan Change 1 of the Natural Resources Plan. We urge the Council to maintain its resolve and step up its leadership to protect and promote sustainability of the natural environment in the face of countervailing pressures such as the proposed Fast Track Approvals legislation, reduced central government support and rising costs for ratepayers and taxpayers.

We wish to be heard on our submission

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