



## STAFF REPORT

**TO:** Environment & Planning Committee

**FROM:** Lindsay Vaughan, Policy Planner

**REFERENCE:** B122

**SUBJECT:** **INVESTIGATION INTO SIGNIFICANT NATURAL AREAS IN TASMAN DISTRICT - REPORT EP08/08/08** - Report prepared for meeting of 28 August

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### 1. PURPOSE

The paper provides Council with an update on the significant natural areas work programme involving a number of parties who had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Council last year. The parties include Federated Farmers, the Department of Conservation, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, and Friends of Nelson Haven and Tasman Bay. Fish and Game NZ was not a party to the MOU but have joined the Project Oversight Group.

### 2. BACKGROUND

This report follows three reports (EP07/05/04, EP07/06/03 and EP07/12/06) that were presented to the Environment & Planning Committee in 2007. The **May** report described the biodiversity work being undertaken by the Council, outlined its legislative responsibilities, and the background in relation to Plan appeals. It also noted that the TRMP included a provision (S 10.1A.20 b (i)) to undertake an investigation into remnant areas of indigenous vegetation to assess their significance.

The **June** report described the key features of the proposed SNA investigation process and recommended the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding. The Committee agreed, noting that the programme will be subject to the availability of funding and any additional funding would need to come through a request during the annual budget cycle for 2008/2009.

The **December** report summarised ongoing developments with the project and placed the budget into the Draft 2008/09 Annual Plan. Councillors Borlase and Ensor have been involved on the Project Oversight Group.

### 3. FEATURES OF THE PROJECT

1. The assessment will include natural areas on private land, council land and crown land outside the conservation estate (e.g. crown forest licence land).

2. Landowners with natural areas on their land will be invited to participate on a voluntary basis. They will receive a brief report on the ecological values of their natural area(s) and an assessment of their ecological significance. No assessment will be undertaken without the landowner's permission.
3. Landowners will be encouraged to meet with the ecologist at the time of the survey.
4. The assessment will include terrestrial sites and freshwater wetlands but exclude riverine and estuarine ecosystems.
5. A Landowner Assistance Package (Appendix 1) has been developed to encourage landowner participation and assist with the ongoing management of important sites.
6. A Project Oversight Group has been meeting regularly to provide oversight and governance to the project. The Group involves the MOU partners and Fish and Game NZ.
7. A Communications Strategy and a media plan have been developed to manage communication with landowners, community and the public and a number of brochures have been prepared. The brochures will be tabled at the E&P Committee meeting.
8. We have engaged Philip Lissaman as Community and Landowner Liaison Contact (a part-time role) to liaise with landowners, communities and the management team.
9. A robust framework for assessing the ecological significance of natural areas has been developed by a Technical Working Group.
10. The project has been branded as Native Habitats Tasman and the sites that are assessed as being significant will be described as Significant Native Habitats.
11. There have been a number of meetings with Federated Farmers to work through the issues associated with the determination of significance and the confidentiality of the property reports. They are keen to apply the principles from this process to Significant Natural Area projects with other councils.
12. The Programme was accepted for co-funding from the Department of Conservation's Biodiversity Advice fund...
13. There will be ongoing contact with participating landowners to provide technical advice, assist with management plans, provide other forms of assistance (where appropriate), and monitor progress.
14. The project is expected to take between five and ten years to complete the assessment. It will start in eastern Tasman (Waimea-Moutere-Motueka), continue in north-west Tasman (Golden Bay) and finish in southern Tasman (Murchison – St Arnaud).
15. Council will receive an annual report on the programme and its achievements. Regular updates will appear in Newsline and other media.

#### 4. RESOURCING

In addition to the biodiversity package budgeted for this year (\$54,000 of TDC funding and \$39,500 from the Biodiversity Advice Fund), we have integrated the project with other related Council activities to obtain maximum benefit. Other activities include pest management advice, fencing assistance under our riparian land management works programme, and wetland inventory work under our environmental monitoring programme, the value of which could be around \$17,000.

#### 5. NEXT STEPS

The project continues to have widespread support from all participating parties and we now wish to engage directly with landowners. We would encourage Council to support the ongoing involvement of Crs Borlase and Ensor in this project.

#### 6. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee **receive** the Report

Lindsay Vaughan  
**Policy Planner**

## **Appendix 1 Landowner Assistance Package**

The Landowner Assistance Programme will be available to landowners on freehold land with natural areas that have been assessed as being Significant Native Habitats who have already received an ecological report. Further assistance will be offered to assist landowners with protecting and enhancing these areas (as resources permit). This includes:

- advice on management plans (no charge)
- advice on the methods of controlling pest plants and animals (no charge)
- loan of predator traps (no charge)
- a small tube of Vigilant for plant pests (no charge)
- provision of fencing materials or a contribution towards labour costs for fences for stock exclusion
- advice on funding agencies who fund biodiversity enhancement on private land
- letters of support for applications to funding agencies
- refund of up to 50% of the costs of pest plant control
- refund of up to 50% of the costs of native plants purchased for restoration planting
- a contribution towards surveying costs for covenanting
- natural areas that have been covenanted are eligible for rates relief