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Report To: Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes Strategy Group
Meeting Date: 02 December 2011
Report From: Greg Corbett, Manager Land Resources (Rotorua)

Review of Aquatic Weed Control for Amenity Purposes on Rotorua Lakes

Executive Summary

Aquatic weeds infestations within the Rotorua Lakes area have resulted in major impacts on lake ecology, biodiversity, water quality and recreational use.

Over the past two years the Regional Council has received an increasing number of requests for aquatic weed control for safety and recreational use. Management of aquatic pest within the Rotorua Lakes area involves a number of agencies and is complicated by different policies which have proved frustrating for the public.

The Bay of Plenty Regional Council has responsibilities under both the Ten Year Plan and the Regional Pest Management Plan for the BOP 2011-2016 (RPMP) to address biosecurity issues. The impacts of aquatic pest plants on recreational and amenity values are currently not well addressed. Both the Regional Council and the Rotorua District Council have a mandate under the Local Government Act to take action where they consider this is of benefit to the region and district. Given this APR Consultants Ltd were commissioned by the Regional Council to investigate the scale and nature of the issue. To date they have completed two stages of their report.

APR have identified a number of issues and have also canvassed stakeholder views and found a noted level of support for Regional Council involvement in the control of Aquatic pest plants for Amenity purposes.

The Regional Council have recognised stakeholder views and has provisionally budgeted \$50,000 within the Draft Ten Year Plan and for Lakeweed control to be targeted to amenity areas. Prioritisation of sites and establishing an appropriate process for carrying out work and allocating costs will be required.

Copies of both stage one and stage two of APR Consultants report are available to members of the Group.

1 Recommendations

That the Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes Strategy Group under its delegated authority:

- 1 Receives the report, Review of Aquatic Weed Control for Amenity Purposes on Rotorua Lakes.**

2 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to inform the Group of APR Consultants Report “Review of Aquatic Weed Control for Amenity Purposes on Rotorua Lakes” and of the Bay of Plenty Regional Councils provision for aquatic weed control for amenity purposes in the draft TYP.

3 Background

Since the late 1950's aquatic weeds infestations within the Rotorua Lakes have resulted in major impacts on lake ecology, biodiversity, water quality and recreational/amenity values. Impacts have varied from lake to lake depending on the species of aquatic weed introduced and other factors including lake bathymetry, lake nutrient levels, existing lake vegetation and lake use. Chemical control using Diquat herbicide was first undertaken in the 1960's and with some refinements in application mixes and techniques is still used today as the primary method of aquatic pest plant.

Management of aquatic weed issues combines responsibilities from a number of agencies and organisations. Underpinning control are the Crown's obligation to Te Arawa Lakes Trust under the Te Arawa Lakes Deed Settlement signed in 2004. The settlement specifies that management of aquatic pests attached to the lakebed is the responsibility of the Crown. This responsibility is administered through Land Information New Zealand who contracts the delivery of the responsibility to Boffa Miskell Consultants. Organisations that have a role include:

- Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes Strategy Group, which has a governance role over lake management and are responsible for the Lakes Protection and Restoration Programme
- Rotorua District Council whose park department are responsible for amenity cleanups on councils reserves, mainly at the Rotorua Lakefront
- Department of Conservation who support advocacy and education
- The Bay of Plenty Regional Council, who have responsibilities through both the 2009-2019 Ten Year Plan and the Regional Pest Management Plan.

4 Councils Role and Responsibilities

4.1 Ten Year Plan

References to aquatic pest plant control in the ten year plan include;

- Ensuring there is a place where people can experience, enjoy and appreciate nature because of the initiatives like the Rotorua Lakes Recreation Strategy- page 115.
- Taking a lead role in addressing regional issues such as the Rotorua Lakes in partnership with Central Government and Iwi – page 116.
- Build aquatic weed cordons at six Rotorua lakes – page 122
- Weed Harvesting at Lake Rotoehu – page 133

4.2 Regional Pest Management Plan

The implications of aquatic weeds to biosecurity are largely managed under the 2011-2016 Regional Pest Management Plan for the Bay of Plenty (RPMP). The RPMP targets three aquatic pest species. In the event that any of these species are found as

new incursions in presently uninfested Lakes the three species *Egeria densa*, *Lagarosiphon* and *Hornwort* are designated as “containment species” and control will be implemented via an incursion response programme. The plan also targets the transport of weed between waterways and makes it an offence to transport weed.

The Regional Council currently contribute financial to incursion response plans and carry out monitoring and Surveillance of aquatic weeds and advise LINZ and Boffa Miskel of appropriate areas to carry out control, this advice is largely target at the prevention of aquatic weed spread. NIWA have reviewed this advice (NIWA Client Report HAM 2009 – 164 November 2009 Review of Aquatic Pest Surveillance and Monitoring Programme for the Rotorua Lakes) and found it to be sound.

Presently there is minimal direct targeting of aquatic pest plant control for amenity purposes, on BOPRC advice LINZ do treat some areas of the Kawaha Point Weedbed as strandings from this weedbed can result in major impacts to the Rotorua Lakefront, this control is limited by LINZ budget constraints.

5 **APRs Report**

Public concern has frequently been expressed regarding the impact of aquatic weed, particularly strandings on amenity values, the commissioning of APRs report is largely in response to these concerns. The report aims to inform council and help councils decision making process as to the level of intervention warranted from the Regional Council.

5.1 **Project Objectives**

APRs project has been divided into three stages. The first stage of APRs project sets out to review the background behind current control programmes, to assess the pattern of aquatic weed establishment and distribution, to outline the legislative framework behind management, and to identify the key aquatic pest plant beds that are impacting on areas of high amenity value.

The proposed outcomes from the report were to:

- to assess the rationale behind BOPRC management of aquatic pest plants for enhancement of amenity values,
- to assess criteria for setting priorities for control,
- to weight recreational use with spatial patterns of aquatic pest distribution
- to assess any key pressure points for aquatic weed management.

The second stage involved consultation with key stakeholders to collect feedback from a range of recreational bodies, Commercial Operators and businesses, Hapū, Iwi and Lakeside communities.

The third stage is yet to be completed but involves assessment and confirmation of criteria used in aquatic weed prioritisation, identification of key organisations roles, assessment of control options and analysis of risks involved.

6 **Project Outcomes and Recommendations**

6.1 **Stage One**

Stage one of the project assessed key recreational areas within the Rotorua Lakes area. And also gave a range of recommendations.

The report presented a rationale for controlling aquatic pest plants:

“That they impede recreational activity such as swimming, boating and fishing that they diminish water quality and compromise aesthetic values. In the event of strandings, pest plants rot onshore in substantial quantities and create a strong stench.

Aquatic pest plant activity in the Rotorua Lakes has implications for lower real estate values around the lakes, lessened economic activity, lower recreational use, increased public nuisance, diminished cultural value associated with the Mauri (special nature) of the lakes.”

The Report presented criteria for the control/prioritisation of sites that combined the following;

- Visitor use data from the 2009 Rotorua Lakes Infrastructure Pressure Study report that includes boat counts, vehicle counts and person counts.
- Population centre sizes.
- Aquatic pest plants spread on each lake.
- Whether control had been previously carried out on the site.

The above factors were factored into a spreadsheet which ranks a number of sites as a low medium or High priority for control.

Recommendations for enhanced control and monitoring from the first stage of the project are to;

1. Continue to undertake biosecurity related aquatic pest plant control and prioritise funding toward preventing further spread.
2. Undertake Aquatic pest plant control in areas identified as being of ‘Moderate-High’ or High amenity value when weeds have been identified as preventing full and maximum enjoyment of the site.
3. Create a Mechanism for hybrid funded (public/private) control on aquatic pest plant areas of low bio-security but high private amenity value.
4. Consider scaling back spray operations on Lake Rotoehu based on amenity values.
5. Investigate use of the protection and restoration programme weed harvesting programme to also undertake control for amenity values and biosecurity on Otautu and Kennedy Bay.
6. Establish a phone number for residents to ring about aquatic pest plant control for amenity values.
7. Include a survey component about visitor attitudes to the lakes and aquatic pest plant to any monitoring activity.
8. Include amenity value data collection into the current surveillance and monitoring programme carried out by the Bay of Plenty Regional Council.

6.2 **Stage Two**

Stage two of the project surveyed lake users and found that aquatic pest plants had negative impacts on most respondents’ activities to some degree.

Key findings were

- Aquatic pest plants impacted most (82.7%) of stakeholders to some degree, there was strong support (93.1%) for control of lakeweed for amenity values
- Stakeholder feedback indicated a strong level of support for BOPRC involvement in controlling aquatic pest plant for amenity values although it should be noted that the majority of those surveyed were involved with the lakes in a more direct way than the average BOPRC ratepayer and were therefore more likely to support BOPRC involvement.
- key pressure points for amenity values that had not been identified in stage one of the project were highlighted these was a strong recommendation for control around the Rotorua Lakefront this came from across a number of stakeholder groups and for further control adjacent to Hannah's Bay (Lake Rotorua) and Boyes Beach (Lake Ōkāreka).
- Stakeholders generally supported action on areas of high amenity value that would have a diffuse benefit to Rotorua's tourism features and clean green profile.
- No new methods of aquatic pest management were identified.
- Roughly three-fifths (58.5%) of stakeholders supported a public private model for funding depending on the details of its implementation.

7 **Discussion - implications for future aquatic pest management.**

Based on the work completed to date there is a clear rationale for aquatic weed control and an expectation that Council should act. By including budget provision for aquatic pest management for amenity purposes in the Draft Ten Year Plan the Regional council have indicated a commitment to meet the expectations of affected communities.

Richard Mallinson
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24 November 2011

