

**SUBMISSION to HORIZONS REGIONAL COUNCIL'S  
LONG-TERM PLAN 2018-28  
From W.E.C.A. (The Water and Environmental Care Association)**

Tena koutou katoa and thank you for giving WECA the opportunity to talk to you today.

We appreciate the fact that Horizons has spent time and money over recent years in the pursuit of cleaner water. However, we feel that money spent in the Horowhenua catchment has been inadequate and has led to no improvement in the quality of our lakes and streams – as shown by your own trend data.

We assume HRC is not proud of or happy with this situation and we are keen to work together to change this. Subcontracting of Lake Horowhenua to the Lake Horowhenua Accord does not, in WECA's view, shift the primary responsibility for water quality from HRC.

Situated on the Horowhenua floodplain, special care is required to preserve the high water table nature of this small but precious ecosystem – especially it's fertile topsoil, it's traditionally pure water sources and it's mana whenua values and tikanga.

**Background.**

The Horowhenua Catchment (Catchment) is a relatively small area, but the most polluted district in New Zealand. From talking with many different locals we think the general population in the catchment are saddened and even embarrassed by this level of pollution (highlighted by Lake Horowhenua being unsafe for swimming or taking kaimoana for food) and they want to see rapid improvements in water quality for their children and grandchildren's sake, as much as for their own sense of dignity and identity.

**WECA's goals for working with HRC**

WECA would like to support:

- HRC to challenge land use businesses in the Horowhenua district to develop and maintain high expectations around environmental sustainability.
- HRC to set agreed input, effluent and runoff targets for an initial 3 year period, and subsequently,
- HRC to effectively monitor land use businesses for compliance against these water quality targets, and report publicly on how businesses are meeting agreed input and effluent targets.
- HRC to support businesses with improved change practices by encouraging Rural Professionals to support businesses with fit for purpose production practices.

WECA understands that Government agencies (MPI and MfE) are currently working with a collective of Regional Councils to better equip Rural Professionals and increase their numbers to provide “environmentally sustainable advice” to farmer and growers. WECA fully supports this direction and wishes to publicly acknowledge its willingness to work with HRC staff to assist with this type of knowledge building and behaviour change.

WECA members are willing to provide to the HRC Environmental Committee meeting on June 13<sup>th</sup> a package of support materials to assist HRC staff with behaviour change for land based businesses. These will include evidence of international good practice around regenerative farming and horticulture practices and a range of examples (using links and video) of how things could be done differently. While our ideas will not be perfect they may encourage new ways of thinking and acting. We would be willing to meet regional farmers and growers alongside HRC staff to discuss these practices. We believe education and professional support are the keys to unlocking behavioural change.

**Areas of Concern.**

The following areas of concern WECA will now focus on in this submission are all businesses that our region needs. We acknowledge these businesses currently provide many jobs and key activities that generate an economy and income for the Horowhenua population.

WECA wants these businesses to thrive for the sake of the people – “he tangata, he tangata, he tangata”.....

### **Agricultural farming.**

The ten dairy farms in the Catchment represent one source of pollution. WECA considers overstocking close to streams and lakes to be the major problem here. Thought needs to be given by HRC to consenting and stock numbers close to lakes and streams. Studies show that reducing stock numbers alongside a reduction in fertiliser application can result in greater productivity and profit.

WECA recommends that HRC along with HDC and business interest groups also think rigorously about how to appropriately retire some farm land close to the coast and lakes, and return these to wetland or help find alternative economic land uses with lower environmental impact.

We understand from HRC in 2017 that some dairy farms are still operating on effluent management agreements which are no longer fit for purpose from a good or best practice perspective. While technically compliant under old specifications these arrangements are unhelpful. Can HRC find a way to speed up introduction of replacement systems?

While we understand the fencing of major waterways has been largely done, this is a red herring in terms of water quality management, as there is now clear scientific evidence to support our visual records that most farms have drains or minor water courses that direct the majority of inputs and effluent (especially water borne nitrogen) just below the pasture level across paddocks and into the major fenced and planted waterways. From our observations, every farm seems to have these water courses in abundance.

While beef and sheep units do contribute to our pollution problems, they do so less than dairying, particularly if stock numbers are well managed.

### **Residential Building and waste water systems.**

The significant increase in residential building (three new subdivisions at last count, alongside the recent removal of development contributions by HDC) is a recent cause for real concern as there is evidence the township's support systems are already struggling, even without more houses in the district. Waste water from the township's industrial areas, businesses and main roads still flow down the Queen St, Domain and Hokio Beach Rd. drains directly into Lake Horowhenua. On a H.E.K.A. catchment road trip last year some of us shared with seven HRC councillors evidence of residential stormwater being discharged directly or indirectly into spring fed streams. Has any effort been made to address this?

### **WECA wishes to raise other long term water related system concerns.**

These include the Treatment station with it's associated waste water disposal system the 'Pot', poorly sited near the coast, The 'Pot' drains into the Waiwiri stream and leaches underground towards the shellfish beds on the coast. Recent coastal studies show these beds may be dying. Is the 'Pot' contributing to this? The 'Pot' is currently up for long term Resource Consent renewal and WECA cannot support this. The Hokio Landfill is again poorly sited near the coast and very likely to be leaching heavy metals into the Hokio stream and the sea. WECA recommends immediate stopping of waste from KDC coming to the Hokio landfill and rigorous exploration of alternative sites.

### **Horticulture.**

The major source of pollution in our Catchment is currently from intensive horticulture.

The horticulture fields seem to entirely lack substantial onsite silt traps and have insignificant and often unplanted narrow berms. The road facing edges of paddocks have been recontoured on CD Farm Rd to flow directly into the road drains. Current planting practice is on raised rows that direct the water, nutrient and topsoil flows towards the drains and therefore quickly into the streams.

With no barriers, the fields flow good soil/sediment and fertiliser inputs directly into the Patiki stream (4<sup>th</sup> dirtiest by nitrogen reading in NZ) on the north side of Lake Horowhenua (eg. Kawiu Rd) and into the Arawhata stream (2<sup>nd</sup> dirtiest by nitrogen reading in NZ) on the south side of the Lake (eg. Bruce Rd and CD Farm Rd).

Along with major applications of fertiliser to force feed crops for short term production, these are poor practices for keeping topsoil in the paddocks and for managing fertiliser runoff in ways that protect our waterways.

WECA recommends significant action from HRC to work with growers in line with our earlier stated goals, starting with a clear 3 year plan with agreed targets for water quality improvement and behavioural practice change.

### **Lake Horowhenua.**

Lake Horowhenua, according to the Horizons' *Report Card*, had an LTI of 6.7 in 2016 and has been above 6.0 in every year since 2006. Pollution of the Lake has been a long-term problem and Horizons has been aware of it for long enough to get it moving in the right direction. It is clear that the Lake is

contaminated by what flows into it and more effort is required in the short-term to control the sources of pollution before trying to clean up the Lake. 'Beautification projects' do not clean up the Lake. Lake Horowhenua and Lake Papaitonga are key taonga for tangata whenua and the degrading treatment of them for 150 years by local businesses and communities is embarrassing. These taonga must be restored by working alongside mana whenua and with the community to reduce and eliminate as far as possible what goes into these lakes.

**Other issues on the horizon – Forestry logging, Wetland regeneration and Monitoring.**

What will happen when the substantial radiata pine forests on the Tararua ranges are logged? We understand some logging has already begun. What plans does HRC have in place to control significant sediment loss from flowing downstream during and after logging and further affecting native fish life and Catchment water quality?

What could be done to invest significantly in the re-establishment of wetlands and planting of native trees including taonga species by retiring some areas of currently farmed and horticultural land in partnership with land owners, government agencies and environmental benefactors.

While time and money has been spent by HRC on monitoring over recent years, it is still very difficult for the public to access and navigate your monitored trend data. Could HRC please advise us on improvements in this area?

**In conclusion**

WECA recommends that with a significant shift in perspective on the environment brought about by a new government, now is a very good time for HRC to spend more money and resource on prevention of pollution into the waterways of the Horowhenua catchment through an educative approach with farmers, growers, land developers and the wider community.

WECA understands that Government agencies (MPI and MfE) are currently working with the collective of Regional Councils to better equip Rural Professionals and increase their numbers to provide "environmentally sustainable advice" to farmer and growers. WECA fully supports this direction and wishes to publicly acknowledge its willingness to work with HRC staff to assist with this type of knowledge building and behaviour change.

WECA realises that Horizons has limited resources so we recommend a significant diversion of resources to this Catchment in an effort to have an immediate impact on this dire situation.

As stated previously, WECA is willing to provide a range of educative resources by June 13 and volunteer personnel to work with Horizons staff.

We want to shed the title of "Horowhenua – the Dirty District" and enable the people of the Horowhenua catchment to regain pride in their local environment.

Again, many thanks to HRC for giving WECA time and opportunity to share our ideas with you.  
Ka kite ano.

Geoff Keith  
Chairperson W.E.C.A