

Hon David Parker

Minister for the Environment

Embargoed to 4.00 pm, Thu 27 May 2021



27 May 2021

PĀNUI PĀPĀHO
MEDIA STATEMENT

Major step in restoration of Lake Horowhenua

A major milestone in restoring the health of Lake Horowhenua has been reached, with agreement to buy land to construct a nationally significant wetland.

“The land, currently used as a dairy farm, will be converted into a large wetland and indigenous vegetation area, with huge benefits for the water quality of Lake Horowhenua,” Environment Minister David Parker said.

“Over the years we have lost 90 per cent of our wetlands and many other precious ecosystems from across Aotearoa. Lake Horowhenua is one of the most degraded lakes in the country. This is our chance to turn it around.

“Lake Horowhenua has been badly degraded by pollution and poor management. This is an important step for all those who have been fighting to improve the health of the lake,” David Parker said.

“The wetland project itself will improve water quality and the habitat for native fish, birds and plant species, while also providing jobs and recreational opportunities for the community.”

It is expected to create up to 45 full time equivalent jobs over four years.

The Lake Horowhenua Water Quality Interventions Project received \$11.2 million from the Government’s Jobs for Nature programme, towards a total project cost of \$12.5 million.

The 142 hectare farm land was purchased for \$6.7 million with Horizons Regional Council contributing \$1 million and the rest coming from Jobs for Nature funding.

The project is a collaboration between Muaūpoko, Lake Horowhenua Trust (representing the owners of the lake), Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga, Horizons Regional Council, Horowhenua District Council, dairy farmers, horticulturalists and the wider Lake Horowhenua community.

“This project allows iwi/hapū, local government, land users and the community to realise their shared aspiration to restore the lake and its ecosystem, and ensure it can be enjoyed by future generations.

The additional land could also allow other aspects to be incorporated into the design including a walkway between Lake Horowhenua and Lake Waiwiri (Papaitonga), forest and ecosystem restoration and recreational areas.

“As part of broader efforts to protect the lake and its surrounding waterways, the Government is working with iwi/hapū, Horizons Regional Council, Horowhenua District Council and the wider community to develop an integrated plan across the lake catchment and beyond.

“That plan is in the early stages of development, but it will almost certainly lead to significant changes in practice for land users,”

“The Government is making a major investment in the restoration of the lake through the Jobs for Nature funded project, but growers, the Council and rural and urban land users also need to play their part in improving water quality once and for all,” David Parker said.

Horizons Regional Council will own the land and wetland once the project is completed.

The farm purchase comes on top of other Jobs for Nature initiatives to improve environmental outcomes around the region.

They include a \$11.3 million riparian planting and stream fencing project to which central government contributed \$4.6m. A \$3.2 million project to enhance native fish populations through fish passage remediation has received \$2.6m from the Government.

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Editor’s note:

Once completed, the wetland is expected to significantly reduce nitrogen levels in the lake. It will also improve other water quality parameters including sediment and phosphorus. Decisions are yet to be made on the final design of the wetland complex.

Wetlands provide essential ecosystem services, acting as buffers for flooding, nutrient cyclers, water purifiers and carbon sinks.

New Zealand wetlands also provide essential habitat for a diverse range of endemic flora and fauna, including critically endangered birds like matuku and kōtuku, as well as 67 per cent of freshwater and estuarine fish species, and 13 per cent of nationally threatened plant species.