



Waihora Ellesmere Trust - translating plans into action

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Words are all well and good, but actions really can speak louder when it comes to protecting and restoring biodiversity.

Waihora Ellesmere Trust (WET), established in 2003, is an organisation which has a strong tradition of both words and actions. Founded to drive the implementation of a comprehensive *Community Strategy* (which was developed over two years of deliberation and consultation in the early 2000s), WET has sought to achieve the community's vision for Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere in a variety of ways.

WET has recently reviewed the *Community Strategy* and developed a new *Action Plan* – a way to articulate WET's role and guide their activities. As part of this process WET also reaffirmed a commitment to promoting consultation, involvement and action and to working collaboratively to achieve the Vision for the Lake.

While there has been plenty of emphasis on education and facilitating discussion, WET has also looked for opportunities to demonstrate best practice, particularly with respect to riparian restoration on the rivers, streams and drains which discharge to the lake.

These waterways drain the surrounding land and focusing on their management is recognition of the interconnectedness of the catchment and the lake – to improve the health and biodiversity of the lake will require a significant shift in the way land is managed. It is expected that restoration of indigenous riparian vegetation will, over time, improve the water quality, particularly through the provision of shade. However, a more

immediate gain is the opportunity to bring back some indigenous biodiversity to the Canterbury Plains.

1. WET AND TAK – WORKING TOGETHER

Te Ara Kākāriki (TAK): Greenway Canterbury Trust is a not-for-profit community group that was established in 2006 to promote native plants and plant communities on the Canterbury Plains. Kākāriki is the Māori word for green and also for the native parakeet. Te Ara translates as the pathway. They aim to address the historical loss of indigenous vegetation (less than 1% now remains on the Canterbury Plains), while demonstrating the economic and ecological benefits of native plants. TAK's activities are focused on the Selwyn District, where less than 0.5% of the indigenous vegetation remains.

WET and TAK are ideal partners, sharing common objectives around biodiversity and identifying the importance of supporting landowners who want to make a difference. This includes local and central government agencies, as leading by example on public land is recognised as an important factor in encouraging private landowner action.

2. THE CANTERBURY PLANTOUT

Initiated and led by TAK, the Canterbury Plantout brings together a number of organisations, funders and individuals to plant out a series of sites over two days in September each year. WET has been involved since the start of the project in 2011, supporting TAK's funding applications and helping out with the planning and organisation of the Plantout days. Other partners include Selwyn District Council, Environment Canterbury, Ngāi Tahu and the Department of Conservation.



Figure 1: Saturday 8th September 2012 – Planting at Cemetery Pit

The event brings together a large number of volunteers (over 300 in 2012) to plant at a series of sites. The volunteers are extremely well looked after – transport is provided, they are well fed, and a band to accompany the dinner at the end of the day makes it an enjoyable social event. Another vital aspect is ensuring that the planting is well planned, with a number of restoration ecologists involved. Landowners of each site pledge to maintain the sites as they get established.

The captive audience of volunteers (on the buses and at mealtimes) allows important messages to be delivered using handouts, static displays and speakers on the buses travelling between sites. At the 2012 Plantout volunteers learned about the history of the lake and surrounding lands, the



importance of the drainage network, birdlife, invertebrates and the work of the Canterbury Water Management Strategy Zone Committee¹.

Figure 2: Saturday 8th September 2012

Volunteers are all ages and come from a wide range of backgrounds – in 2011 60% were urban and 40% rural, and included several family groups and a large number of students. Student participation increased in 2012 as the Plantout

registered with ‘The Concert’, an initiative of the Student Volunteer Army aimed at increasing volunteering by rewarding volunteers with a ticket to a concert.

3. HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO WET’S ACTION PLAN?

The WET *Action Plan* is structured around the community’s Vision for the lake:

Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere

- A place where healthy and productive water provides for the many users of the lake while supporting the diversity of plants and wildlife that make this place unique.
- A place of cultural and historical significance that connects us with our past and our future.
- A place where environmental, customary, commercial, and recreational values are balanced while respecting the health of the resource.
- A special wide open place for the enjoyment and wonderment of present and future generations.
- A place of contemplation and tranquillity as well as activity, a place just to be.

Translating a vision into meaningful actions can be quite a challenge. The *Action Plan* has taken each theme of the Vision and identified the issues and opportunities that WET sees as important. Outcomes relating to the key issues are articulated along with possible actions, or outputs, which could contribute to achieving the outcomes. Performance measures are indicated – generally relating to the output, as measuring outcomes is much harder. However, the relevance of the performance measure comes from establishing a link between the output and outcome sought.

Clearly, action is required by a whole raft of organisations and individuals, but the *Action Plan* also indicates what WET’s role can be – structured around the headings of Educate, Facilitate, Activate.

Taking the first part of the Vision: *A place where healthy and productive water provides for the many users of the lake while supporting the diversity of plants and wildlife that make this place unique*, the first issue identified is declining

ecosystem health – a very broad issue indeed. The outcome WET is seeking is a healthy state of the lake and environs and a list of possible actions are stated. One of those actions, 1.13, is *Implement best management practices in the catchment (through ZIP and regional planning processes)* and another is 1.14 *Protect existing indigenous riparian biodiversity/ restore indigenous biodiversity.*

Primarily this will be achieved by landowners changing current practice and one measure will be the establishment and enforcement of rules encouraging best practice; another will be to survey and monitor the extent of biodiversity and restoration projects in the catchment.



Figure 3: Coes Ford 2011

For WET, this means advising landowners about where to get information and support, working with partner organisations to ensure messages are consistent, promoting key messages and practical advice, and celebrating success. There are a number of ways WET can do this – and participation in events such as the Canterbury Plantout is one.

4. CONCLUSION

For WET, having an *Action Plan* means there a clear link between activities and outcomes. Events such as the Canterbury Plantout can contribute to the outcomes sought by WET and others by adding to the number of restoration projects and educating and supporting landowners. However, the real value may be less in the number of plants and the area planted on the day and more in the increase in community buy-in and understanding. This greater appreciation of the issues and the scale of biodiversity loss will hopefully lead to wider acceptance of the need to change current land

use practices and to invest both private and public funding in larger scale restoration projects.

For groups like WET and TAK collaboration is vital to the success of events. Councils, DoC, Ngāi Tahu and other non-government organisations (NGOs) are the usual partners, but increasingly NGOs are looking for ways to form alliances with business and industry.

TAK has established the Canterbury Plantout with a lot of in-kind help from partners and support from some key funders. However, ongoing funding is always very hard to secure. Larger scale events such as this can provide a platform for potential sponsors to reach a large number of people from a diverse background, and the publicity material has even greater reach. TAK, and also WET, are now looking for potential steps to obtain permission for using any material that might be protected by copyright. Please note that on delivery of your manuscript you will be asked to transfer your copyright to the publisher.

Anyone who would like to get involved in these sorts of events and help to make a real difference – as a volunteer or, even better, as a sponsor should contact:

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WET's *Action Plan* and *Community Strategy* are available at www.wet.org.nz and information about TAK is at <http://www.kakariki.org.nz/>.

ⁱ The Canterbury Water Management Strategy has seen the establishment of 10 Zone Committees made up of community and *rūnanga* representatives, plus local and regional council appointees. The Selwyn-Waihora Zone Committee has identified priority outcomes for the catchment, and their Zone Implementation Programme includes recommendations on riparian restoration and protecting and restoring biodiversity.