

A regional scale approach to biodiversity restoration

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Enhancing biodiversity and restoring ecosystem processes in agricultural and urban landscapes is at the “cutting-edge” of biodiversity management. This is particularly relevant in the Waikato Region where agricultural development has led to extensive habitat loss and modification. Biodiversity management is a multi-faceted undertaking and is the responsibility of many public agencies, private landowners and business/sector groups. While co-operative approaches involving key stakeholders offer important opportunities, facilitating and co-ordinating collaborative efforts also present major challenges. This need and associated opportunities have been recognised by the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (via RPS Method 11.1.11 Local Indigenous Biodiversity Strategies (LIBS)). Undertaking LIBS is the key method for responding to the issue of ongoing biodiversity decline.

The spatial representation of local (district/catchment/regional) ecological networks is a key component of LIBS. It can provide the strategic element currently missing from our biodiversity management approach and move us from trying to hang onto what we have (through mapping of remaining biodiversity sites, including significant natural areas (SNA)) to large-scale habitat restoration and re-creation, underpinned by the re-establishment of ecological processes and ecosystem services. Modelling a future-focussed ecological network is an important component of being able to achieve the Waikato RPS Objective for indigenous biodiversity which seeks that “The full range of ecosystem types, their extent and the indigenous biodiversity that those ecosystems can support, exist in a healthy and functional state.”

A LIBS pilot project in the upper Waihou catchment called Source to the Sea:Te Puna o Waihou ki Tikapa te Moana has confirmed the ability to model and map ecological networks at catchment scale and apply this work to enable more proactive and strategic approaches to working with others and to prioritise resources. It can provide the ecological protection and restoration framework within which a broader suite of tools can be applied and co-ordinated by multiple parties.