

Attachment G: Natural Environment Protection

Context

The Natural Environment Targeted Rate (NETR) was introduced in 2018/2019 as part of the Long-term Plan 2018-2028. The NETR provided increased investment to support protection of the natural environment. The NETR almost trebled in investment in Auckland's natural environment. The NETR is currently set to expire in 2028.

Under the current settings for the NETR, we will be able to double the number of threatened species we're actively managing to 86 species by 2028, up from 43 species in 2018. The targeted rate will also enable active management of pest pressures across 72 per cent of prioritised ecosystems within the region by 2028. However, this represents only a portion of the total ecosystem in the region.

Expiry of the rate in 2028 would result in a rapid reversal of the biodiversity gains enabled by the NETR investment to date and would end up costing ratepayers more in the long-term, as early intervention in pest management is more cost effective.

Climate change will also cause a range of new pressures to indigenous biodiversity. Of these additional climate induced stresses, only some are directly manageable. The key action that can be taken is to effectively manage pests so that indigenous species and ecosystems can be as resilient as possible to unmanageable climate stressors.

Consultation Options

The draft Recovery Budget proposed to extend the Natural Environment Target Rate for three years from 2028 to 2031. This proposal provides an additional \$106.6 million to maintain investments in measures such as addressing the spread of kauri dieback, and predator and weed control.

The alternative was to maintain the status quo with the rate expiring at the end of the 2027/2028 year.

Public Feedback

Public feedback generally supported extending the Natural Environment Targeted Rate until 2030/2031. Of the 12,114 pieces of feedback regarding the proposal, 60 per cent supported the extension.

- most respondents supported the proposal to extend the Natural Environment Targeted Rate to enable Auckland Council to continue pest management and restoration efforts across the region and address kauri dieback.
- key themes from the comments included asking for increased pest management, for tracks currently closed due to kauri dieback to be re-opened in the near future and for greater tree protection.
- seven iwi¹ supported extending the Natural Environment Targeted Rate until 2031, to invest further in measures such as addressing the spread of kauri dieback and predator and weed control. 11 iwi did not state a position.²

¹ Ngāti Paoa Iwi Trust; Ngā Maunga Whakahii o Kaipara Development Trust; Ngati Tamatera; Ngaati Whanaunga Incorporated Society; Te Whakakitenga o Waikato Incorporated; Te Akitai Waiohau; Ngāti Tamaoho Trust

² Ngāti Whātua o Ōrākei Trust Board; Te Runanga o Ngāti Whātua (Regional Body); Te Uri o Hau; Te Uri o Hau – Environs; Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki Tribal Trust; Te Motu a Hiaroa Charitable Trust; Ngāti Manuhiri Settlement Trust; Te Kawerau Iwi Settlement Trust; Ngātiwai Trust Board; Te Ahiwaru; Mana Whenua Forum

- There were over 300 specific comments on the extension of the Natural Environment Targeted Rate covering a wide variety of topics.
- Submissions on the extension of the Natural Environmental Targeted Rate were received from 8 stakeholders. Seven were in support of the extension noting the importance of protecting native biodiversity. One stakeholder supported the extension but believed these initiatives should be funded by central government.
 - Waikato Regional Council supported the proposal noting that the objectives aligned with national biosecurity strategies and expressed a desire to continue the strong working relationship to deliver high profile biosecurity programmes, including marine biosecurity and kauri dieback.
 - Forest and Bird supported the extension of the Natural Environment Targeted Rate to increase ecological corridors, protecting private land with high value biodiversity, improved management of priority native habitats and increased pest management. They asked for higher priority to be given to biodiversity recovery programmes, education campaigns and marine protection and suggested that the Water Quality Targeted Rate should be incorporated into the Natural Environmental Targeted Rate as the outcomes are intrinsically linked.
- Thirteen specific feedback comments were against further investment in pest management in general, nine believed natural environment initiatives should be funded by Crown agencies and a further six submitters believed these activities should be covered by general rates. A small proportion of submitters did not support the closure of tracks due to kauri dieback.
- A wide variety of topics were raised amongst the 79 'Other' feedback points including a wish for greater marine protection, condonement of herbicide use for pest plant management and concerns regarding local pest infestation issues.

Summary

Indigenous biodiversity in the region is under substantial stress due to a range of factors, particularly habitat loss and invasive species (pests). These stresses are already being exacerbated by climate change. The Natural Environment Targeted Rate (NETR) introduced in 2018 funded additional investment in protecting the natural environment. The rate is currently due to expire in 2028 and many of the gains made will be lost if investment falls in subsequent years.

The council consulted on extending the NETR for an additional three years, through to 2030/2031, adding a further \$106.6 million to investment in protecting the natural environment. This would ensure that sunk costs from investment made up to 2027/2028 are not lost and ensure on-going protection for indigenous biodiversity within the region, through biosecurity activities and biodiversity protection. The majority of submissions supported the extension of the NETR for a further three years.

Attachment G1: Options assessment

	Rationale	Impact on Rates	Impact on Debt	Impact on level of service
Status Quo:	Status quo – Natural Environment targeted rate and programme ends 2027/2028.	None	None	None
Option One: Extend the Natural Environment Targeted Rate to 2031	Enables the current Natural Environment programme to continue for three additional years to 2030/2031, ensuring that the gains of pest management funded by the rate are not lost. This will ensure that sunk costs from investment prior to that are not lost and ensure on-going protection for indigenous biodiversity within the region, through biosecurity activities and biodiversity protection.	\$106.6m in additional rates. The average residential ratepayer will continue to pay \$46.90 over the three years from 2028/2029 to 2030/2031, while the average business ratepayer will continue to \$217.	This proposal will have no impact on our debt as any additional revenue is offset by additional expenditure	Maintains existing service levels for the protection of the natural environment for an additional three years until 30 June 2031. Likely to see increasing declines in natural heritage due to effects of climate change.