

**Christchurch City Council
Annual Plan Submission
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Introduction

The Ōpāwaho Heathcote River Network

Our Vision is; *'An ecologically healthy river that people take pride in, care for and enjoy.'*

Our Purpose is; *'To facilitate a collaborative network which advocates for the regeneration of the whole of the Opawaho Heathcote River.'*

The Ōpāwaho Heathcote River Network (OHRN) is a catchment group that facilitates and supports the values, efforts, and needs of our local river-care organizations and communities along the river. The OHRN is made up of representatives from thirteen community groups in the Ōpāwaho Heathcote catchment.

The OHRN's establishment was borne out of a frustration at the lack of integrated management of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River. It has become a recognised player in the community led delivery of collaborative actions to support the work carried out by both Christchurch City Council (CCC) and Environment Canterbury (ECan) to improve the health of the river and strengthen the community connection with the river.

The Ōpāwaho Heathcote River

The Ōpāwaho Heathcote River, including many of its tributaries, has some of the poorest water quality in the City of Christchurch. The River has a complex catchment which includes part of the Port Hills, industrial areas, and concentrated urban and residential zones.

Like many lowland rivers, the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River suffers from 'urban stream syndrome.' This is a result of the cumulative effects of activities and water management within its catchment over the last 150 years. There is an overall low baseline of ecological, water quality, and cultural health.

The River's ecological health is under pressure from discharges contaminated by copper, zinc and a very large amount of suspended sediments from the Port Hills. Other sources of contamination include sewage overflows from the City's wastewater system.

The River is a part of a larger aquatic ecological system including the Ōtākaro Avon River. Both of these rivers flow into and the Avon-Heathcote Estuary Ihutai. The toxic contaminants from these rivers can bioaccumulate in filter feeders of the Estuary and hence adversely affect the animal and plant life that depend on them.

The Estuary is significant nationally as a coastal wetland and is now internationally significant as the only urban wetland in Australasia to be part of East Asian-Australasian Flyway Network for migratory birds.

The health of the Estuary depends on the cultural and ecological health of its tributary rivers and the catchments that surround them. Due to the interdependence of these systems, the OHRN would like to emphasise the following areas of work that the CCC needs to focus on to improve water quality and waterway ecology in the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River. These include;

1. Water Quality Improvement
 - 1.1 Stormwater
 - 1.2 Sediment into the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River
 - 1.3 Wastewater Overflows
2. Biodiversity, Riparian Planting and Weed Control
3. Collaboration

The OHRN acknowledges that these are extraordinary times and the pressures on governing bodies and the communities within Christchurch are huge.

In this context, it is fundamental that the environment that supports our daily lives is protected and able to continue to function to support the quality of our lives into the uncertain future. The health of our urban waterways is vital to the health of our communities. We all have a role to play in improving the health of our urban rivers and the CCC must provide a foundation for a community programme to instigate behaviour change.

The OHRN acknowledges the support of the CCC over the last year in the use of facilities at the South library for meeting rooms. It also acknowledges the support and expertise of staff.

1.0 Water Quality Improvement

1.1 Stormwater

The OHRN acknowledges and supports the overall increase of capital expenditure for stormwater drainage. It supports the extensive work that has been and is proposed to be carried out in the upper catchment to improve both water quality and water quantity, (flooding) in the catchment. These include unique projects such as the Sutherlands Road Waterways and Enhancement project and the Cashmere Stream Enhancement.

Despite these extensive upper catchment works, stormwater is a major source of contaminants into the OHRN. The CCC Global Stormwater Consent (CCCGSC), which was granted in December 2019, is the legislative framework by which the effects will be managed.

Under the CCC Global Stormwater Consent, the CCC has until 20th June 2021 to develop a Stormwater Management Plan (SWMP) for the Ōpāwaho Heathcote catchment. As a condition of the consent the OHRN is identified as a statutory consultee. The OHRN is concerned that it has not yet been approached

by council staff. The Christchurch West Melton Zone Committee (CWMZC) and the Community Boards are to lead the community consultation process for this. To date no engagement or consultation has been initiated by CCC.

Stormwater is a key priority for improving the quality of our urban rivers. Stormwater from both residential properties, industrial areas and roads contribute to the poor quality of the water in the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River. As a community group, we recognise the need and potential gains to be made from communities taking ownership of the behaviour change required by residents and businesses to improve the quality of our stormwater that flows into the river.

The proposed Community Water Partnership is a key mechanism to ensure all agencies and community groups benefit from the collective messaging and develop and support the implementation of an effective programme for behaviour change.

1.1.1 Action Sought

- The Council to involve the OHRN in the development of the SMP.

- The Council to outline to CWMZC and Community Boards their obligations under the CCC Global Stormwater consent conditions to facilitate a consultation process for the Ōpāwaho Heathcote SMP.

- The Council to support and sign the Community Water Partnership as a mechanism for the implementation of a effective programme for behaviour change amongst our residents to improve the quality of the stormwater that flows into all our urban waterways.

1.2 Sediment into the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River

There is an urgent need to reduce the large amount of sediment entering the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River. Sediment has severe effects on water quality and aquatic life forms. The biggest source of sediment is overland flows into the Port Hills waterways that then flow into Cashmere Stream. These direct flows of sediment (loess) into the waterways are not within the scope of the CCC recently issued Global Stormwater Consent (GSWC), as they bypass the stormwater infrastructure (the stormwater consent has a condition limiting total suspended solids).

The reduction of direct overland flows of sediment into the waterways requires a land management programme which is best instigated jointly by ECan and the City Council.

A recent EOS Ecology Report (2019), *Water Clarity of the Cashmere Stream* (See Annex 1), indicated that the ongoing decline of water quality in the Cashmere Stream, which feeds into the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River, is the result of current land management in the catchment. It cannot be attributed only to the 2017 Port Hills fires. The report also states that the Cashmere Stream has ‘poor’ water clarity when

it is not raining, and this drops to ‘extremely poor’ after a moderate rainfall. The report concludes that it is vital to focus on the hill catchments to improve water quality in Cashmere Stream. This in turn will improve the water clarity in the middle and lower sections of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River.

“To improve water clarity in Cashmere Stream it will be necessary to focus on the hill catchment, which are the source of the poorest water clarity. This is more difficult due to the nature of loess soil, which does not settle out of the water column easily, meaning that traditional water detention basins and surface water wetlands will not serve to improve clarity from tributaries draining the Port Hills hilly catchments. Thus approaches specific to hillside catchments should be developed.”

We ask that CCC ensure that monitoring and compliance of erosion and sediment loss in the Ōpāwaho Heathcote catchment is given priority and adequately funded. The Erosion and Sediment Control Toolbox, developed by ECan, is one tool that provides best practice guidelines for the management of erosion and sediment. But there is also a need to ensure, through monitoring and compliance, that these practices are carried out to the appropriate standards.

The OHRN is pleased to participate in the Christchurch West Melton Zone Committees (CWMZC), Cashmere Stream Port Hills Working Group along with representatives from the CCC, including Community Boards, Ngai Tahu and the Cashmere Stream Care Group . This group is finding ways to reduce the amount of sediment flowing into Cashmere Stream. These measures will also need to be applied to the wider Port Hills areas as other hillside tributaries release sediment to the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River.

1.2.1 Action Sought for Reducing Sediment Flow into the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River

-The CCC, in collaboration with ECan, to set up a specific programme to reduce the overland sediment flow, from the Port Hills into the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River. All agencies need to work together to enable the continued native revegetation of the Port Hills, the reduction of sediment loss and the subsequent improvement in the ecological health of the river.

-The CCC to accept the recommendations from the CWMZC that the Cashmere Stream, and Port Hills catchments that flow into it, be considered a priority catchment.

-The CCC to communicate to staff that the Cashmere Stream, and the Port Hills catchments that drain into the Cashmere Stream be considered a priority catchment when:

- Carrying out building inspections
- Processing consents
- Deciding on consents to be prioritised for monitoring

-The CCC to lead by example when carrying out Council roading, earthworks and management of Council properties that have an effect on the Cashmere Stream, and the Port Hills catchments that drain into the Cashmere Stream.

1.3 Wastewater Overflows

One of the key benefits to the community of wastewater services is to provide healthy waterways. A great deal of costly and effective work has been done by the Council to reduce dry weather overflows from equipment failure and wet weather overflows caused by flows exceeding pipe capacities. But wastewater overflows remain a contributing factor to the poor microbial rating of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River. Wastewater includes waste from kitchens, bathrooms and trade waste from industrial and commercial operations.

The variation to the Wastewater consent was granted in March 2020. We understand that this will provide additional monitoring locations throughout the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River catchment. This will ensure that the CCC can adequately respond to and mitigate any effects should these be detected in the receiving environment.

The OHRN supports the proposals for upgrades to reduce overflows. It notes the CCC commitment to reduce the number of spills from 14.2/year across all sites in the Ōpāwaho Heathcote to 4.7. These include Tilford Street, Sandwich Road /Eastern Terrace in 2020 and Ōpāwa Road, Fisher Ave and Somerfield in 2021 and 2022.

Continual funding is needed for ongoing renewals of the sewage system. These capital programmes are important to upgrade and renew wastewater infrastructure and reduce wet weather and dry weather overflows. Dry weather overflows can have a greater impact as they occur without the dilution factor of a wet weather event.

The OHRN welcomes our inclusion in the Compliance and Monitoring Liaison Group which covers both wastewater overflows and stormwater. Our ongoing communication with staff is appreciated and valued by the OHRN.

1.3.1 Actions Sought

-The Council commits to ongoing funding of pipe renewals for the wastewater system.

2. **Biodiversity, Riparian Planting and Weed Control**

The Ōpāwaho Heathcote River has been identified as a Site of Ecological Significance (SES) in the District Plan. This means the CCC has a statutory responsibility to manage, maintain and enhance the ecological values of the river. Under the Land and Water Regional Plan Biodiversity Guidelines all indigenous species in the Low Plains Ecological District are significant under the Resource Management Act and are not to be removed or made to fail.

OHRN stresses the importance of protecting and restoring native vegetation remnants within the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River catchment. Our unique native species, biodiversity and biogeography creates our distinctive place and community attachment to the River.

The CCC acknowledges a lack of baseline data in relation to the implementation of their biodiversity goals. A key aim of the OHRN is to tell the story of the River encompassing its different tributary catchments and habitats. The OHRN stresses the importance of a catchment-wide approach as opposed to a site specific approach.

The major threats to biodiversity in the region are from introduced plants and animals. There is also the potential for an increased proliferation of weed species resulting from the warmer temperatures being produced with climate change.

At present the weeds along the banks and in the river are managed across two departments of the Council. Drainage, within the Three Waters Department, manage weeds in the River and along the banks, whilst the Parks Department manage weeds one metre back from the banks. This leads to insufficient consistency and a lack of integration of weed control. There are also unclear lines of responsibility between CCC and ECan and the Department of Conservation (DOC).

A recent report by Nicolas Head, senior Ecologist for CCC, *Lower Heathcote River Weed Survey*, identifies the key weed species on the banks and in the River (See Annex 2). These weeds include yellow flag iris, hanging sedge, sweet canary grass, reed canary grass and spartina. Of these, spartina is the only species listed in the Canterbury Regional Pest Management Plan (CRPMP).

Weeds that are a threat to biodiversity values along the river are not regulated and not identified in the CRPMP. These weeds need to be managed now to limit future costs and the loss of biodiversity with their increased spread. Long term management also needs to be governed by the principle that the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River is a connected ecological system from its sources to the sea.

Along the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River there is a need for a precautionary approach rather than reactive management. Agencies need to work together and have a clear understanding of where the responsibilities lie.

The river care community groups, that are part of our Network, all contribute to the management of weeds along the river. There is potential for CCC to support these groups and help the wider community in the identification and management of weeds through the development of weed information brochures.

The OHRN acknowledges the collaborative project by CCC, ECan, and Department of Conservation (DOC) to manage the spread of spartina in the lower catchment.

The OHRN welcomes the implementation of the Linear Plan and would like to be updated on this proposal.

The OHRN is keen to be involved in the ongoing riparian planting to help improve water quality.

The OHRN supports the Waterway Ecology and Water Quality Improvement capital programme as it supports projects for enhancing the ecological value of waterways within the Opawaho Heathcote Catchment.

Action Sought

-The OHRN seeks a consolidation of all relevant biodiversity baseline data (pests, wetlands, springs, vegetation, weeds, in-river species). There is potential to develop a citizen science recording programme with tools such as iNaturalist. It is an opportunity for collaboration between organisations to integrate information together

- The CCC in conjunction with ECan, DOC and the OHRN to develop a Biodiversity Plan for the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River.

-CCC needs to develop a Weed Management Plan for the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River with a clear indication of who is responsible for each part of its implementation. The Council needs to continue to work in collaboration with other agencies such as ECan and DOC to manage the weeds in and along the banks of the river.

-The OHRN would like to be updated on the Linear Plan and wants be involved in the consultation before it is implemented.

-The CCC, in collaboration with ECan and Ngai Tahu, to develop the concept of an ecological corridor along the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River, from the Avon-Heathcote Estuary to the Port Hills.

-The CCC to develop an Eco-Sourcing Policy in conjunction with DOC, ECan and environmental groups.

3. Collaboration

Ngai Tahu are mana whenua of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River and are a statutory partner with CCC and ECan. The CWMZC operates under the Canterbury Water Management Strategy which the Council is a partner and signatory to.

As a community group the OHRN works in collaboration with all these agencies as well as the communities of interests which are part of its Network. We have become the linker of the various parties. We all need to work collaboratively to ensure the ecological health of the river is significantly improved.

The OHRN recognises the collaborative efforts that are being made by the Council in support of community groups. These include the proposed Community Water Partnership, Networking for the Environment, Enviroschools, and the Community Collaborative Education Programme (CCEM) *Heathy Ōpāwaho*.

There is an increasing awareness by government agencies of the role and the need for catchment community groups, such as the OHRN, to be an integral part of the planning and delivery of projects.

The OHRN commends the Linwood Central Heathcote Community Board for initiating a Lower Heathcote Catchment Management Plan. There are three Community Boards that operate along the length of the river. These boards need to work together to establish a Catchment Management Plan for the whole of the River from its source to the sea. The efforts in the lower catchment need to be linked to the upper catchment to ensure effective management of the river.

The OHRN are grateful for the use of the community rooms at the South Library for our meetings.

3.1 Action Sought

-The CCC involve the OHRN in community projects relating to the River from the planning to implementation stages.

-The CCC explore ways of supporting the functioning of catchment community groups such as the OHRN.

-The CCC, in collaboration with ECan, Ngai Tahu, OHRN and other stakeholders, initiate scoping for a Catchment Management Plan for the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River .

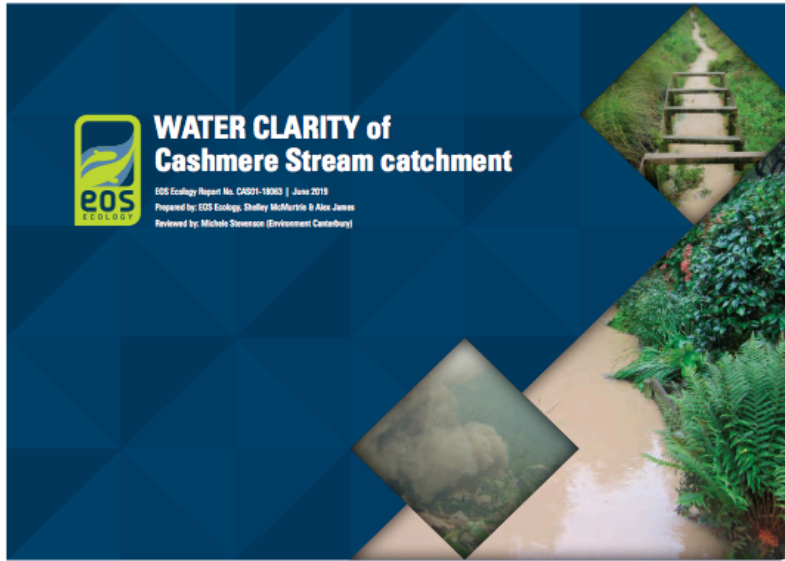
Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

We wish to be heard if that is possible in these uncertain times.



Annabelle Hasselman
Chairperson
Ōpāwaho Heathcote River Network

Annex 1



Annex 2

