

Submission to Manawatū District Council Long Term Plan 2024-34

Contact Details

Organisation: Environment Network Manawatū (ENM)
Contact Person: Helen King
Address for service: 145 Cuba St, Palmerston North 4410
Phone: (06) 355 0126
Email: comms@enm.org.nz

Overview

A submission on behalf of Environment Network Manawatū with particular input from its Manawatū District focused member groups regarding all aspects of the given proposal.

ENM would like the opportunity to speak to this submission.

Background

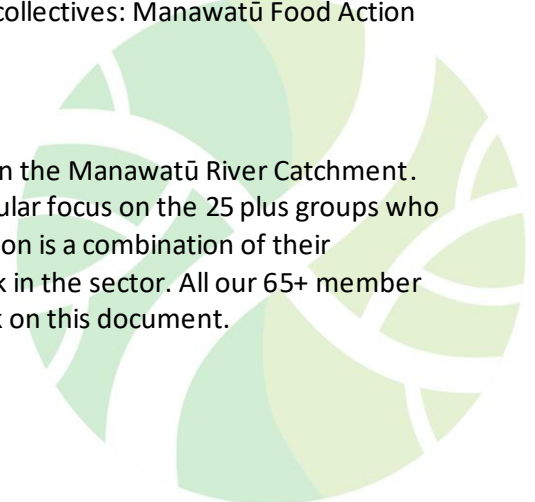
ENM exists to connect and inspire communities for environmental action. We are the environment hub for the Manawatū region providing sector leadership, building capacity and capability, and creating community.

Understanding that all life is part of a thriving, self-sustaining ecosystem, our vision is that the ecological and human communities in the Manawatū River catchment, are living in harmony.

We work strategically to demonstrate best-practice as a member-led environmental organisation. We promote environmental activities and advocate for positive environmental outcomes. We connect volunteers, support organisational sustainability, provide educational opportunities and seek to increase the stream of funding to the sector. We support and enable our membership through meeting needs, holding space and creating opportunities for increased connections. We celebrate the diverse passions of our 65+ member groups, that include biodiversity protection, freshwater quality, food resilience, waste reduction, sustainable living, alternative energies, climate action and active transport. The network is organised into two collectives: Manawatū Food Action Network and Manawatū River Source to Sea

Submission Context

Our network is composed of groups and organisations who span the Manawatū River Catchment. We consulted with them as part of this submission with a particular focus on the 25 plus groups who base their primary work in the Manawatū District. This submission is a combination of their thoughts, and our organisational knowledge of 23 years of work in the sector. All our 65+ member groups have had the opportunity to view and provide feedback on this document.



Submission

Issue 1. Roding rates differentials.

Option C (council's preferred option): Remove current differential gradually over 3 years.

Road maintenance would be less of an expense all round if there were less cars on the road and Manawatū District Council (MDC) worked in strong conjunction with Horizons Regional Council (HRC) to promote and advocate for both public and active transport.

- We encourage MDC to work with HRC to incentivise the use of public transport, by de-incentivising parking by the possible raising of costs around this. Feilding's free parking heavily incentivises car use. This money could be used to create better, more frequent public transport systems.
- We encourage the intensification of bus and possibly train services between Feilding and Palmerston North. There is a vast amount of commuter travel between the two townships, and traffic has become increasingly heavy.
- We encourage strong collaboration with HRC to ensure that active transport has a strong commuter focus, not just primarily a health and wellbeing one. A key focus here which goes hand in hand with increased public transport, making commuter cycling a viable, safe option.

Issue 2: Kowhai Park Aviaries.

Option A (council's preferred option): Close the existing aviaries.

We suggest that savings from this could be used towards projects that preserve, celebrate, and promote endemic avian biodiversity and plant biodiversity.

We would like to suggest funding is diverted to Ruahine Kiwi. Ruahine Kiwi is a partnership between ENM's Manawatū River Source to Sea Collective and Te Kāuru Eastern Manawatū River Hapū Collective with the vision of returning North Island eastern brown kiwi to the southern Ruahine by 2026. We do this through intensive control of mustelids on a landscape scale, with our trap network covering 23,000ha. We work in strong collaboration with tangata whenua, local farmers and volunteers. We actively seek to educate and inform individuals and diverse groups of our work and how they can make a positive impact on our rohe.

This project is based in the Manawatū yet receives no direct funding from council despite outcomes that hugely benefit the district.

Issue 3: Feilding town centre parking limit enforcement.

Option A (council's preferred option): 100% of the cost through the general rates.

Everyone who accesses Feilding by car and who parks centrally benefits from the current free parking situation, whether locals or people visiting the region. All ratepayers should fund this. We support the time limits being proposed on parking. We would like to think this, in part, may incentivise public transport use. However, we strongly encourage MDC to work with HRC to incentivise the use of public transport, by further de-incentivising parking by a user pays system. This takes the onus off the rate payer and puts it directly on the user.

Issue 4: Revenue and financing funding mixes.

CBD redevelopment. Option B. Increases to user payments.

Everyone in the district benefits from a vibrant, safe CBD, and these costs should be evenly distributed. We understand there is increasing financial pressure on local businesses, and distributing these costs may alleviate this.

Animal Control. Option B. Increases to user payments.

There should be increased onus on animal owners to pay for costs associated with animal control. Increased costs may also deter less responsible owners, in the understanding that there are environmental implications for wandering animals.

We know that dogs must be microchipped and licensed. However, cats do not and yet they potentially pose a far greater danger to the environment. We suggest MDC introduce a cat licensing and microchipping scheme (which could be done over time to minimise the burden on current owners).

Building Control. Option B. Increases to user payments.

We support this option.

Consent Management. Option B. Increases to user payments.

It's noted that Consent Planning is 'the resource consent guidance and consenting we do to protect our natural environment'. It is also noted that 'currently Manawatū District Council's consenting fees are low compared to other local authorities in New Zealand.' Though we support the movement to a more user over ratepayer-based system we question why these fees are low and what that means for the environment. If increased fees could be diverted to better environmental outcomes, then we suggest this should also be discussed.

Solid waste. Option B. Increases to user payments.

Though individuals do benefit from solid waste disposal systems not all the solid waste produced is their responsibility and lies with the manufacturer. We understand that increased costs can be a deterrent to producing waste or there is a chance that they can increase illegal dumping.

We understand that to mitigate increased costs and to protect the environment that waste reduction and reuse is optimal, and that **community education** goes hand in hand with this. We also strongly advocate for the responsible management of waste so that it has minimal impact on the environment. We champion the work of **Feilding Repair Café** as a strong waste minimisation initiative in the region, which serves to reduce the number of items sent to landfill, educates the public in how to mend, and creates an important sense of community connection and cohesion.

We highly encourage the promotion of product stewardship and the re-use of packaging such as glass bottles, where possible. Having a refund scheme that encourages people to collect and return to manufacturers is an important lever to reduce waste to landfill. We encourage MDC to consider

supporting local initiatives toward reuse as well as using its voice to advocate for improved national policy on packaging and implementation of product stewardship schemes.

We assume that like other councils around the country (e.g. PNCC and HDC as examples) that roughly 50% of solid waste is green waste (a combination of food and garden waste). Our understanding is that the logistics and infrastructure for a regional food waste collection service will not be feasible until 2030 when government mandates require this to commence. To reduce food waste in the interim we recommend the introduction of community composting trials. ENM recently completed a successful 10-week community composting trial in Palmerston North, with the aim of encouraging and enabling people to compost their food waste locally. As well as turning a waste product into a valuable resource, the pilot increased social cohesion, as participants taking their waste to the composting sites made new connections. To reduce food waste to landfill, we encourage MDC to support local food recycling/composting and surplus food redistribution initiatives, for example those associated with Manchester House, Salvation Army and Community Fruit Harvest Manawatū.

We are also aware from recent LTP community conversations with PNCC that there is conversation beginning around more centralised soft plastics and demolition waste recycling facilities. We wonder if MDC is involved in this conversation and what this could mean for local waste diversion.

Additional commentary

Biodiversity:

A major goal of ENM is the preservation and restoration of biodiversity, both in its own interest, and because it is becoming increasingly clear, even to the thoroughly urbanised, that nature is an important partner in and provider of the needs of humans.

Our region has less than 1% of its lowland forest left, only 15% of its coastal vegetation, and 10% of its wetlands. The ecosystem services these areas provide are now lost and are difficult to restore.

Rivers, soils, habitats, communities, and consequences have no boundaries. There are many issues that can only be addressed at a catchment scale. An example is the invasion of *Phragmites karka*. This relatively new pest weed is establishing itself in waterways, on farmland and along the coast. The extensive root system has the capacity to undermine stop banks if allowed to establish in their proximity, invade estuaries and rapidly fill wetlands reducing their water retention abilities, grow up through road surfaces, and overrun native vegetation and destroy biodiversity. This weed cannot be tackled in a piecemeal way as disposing of removed rhizomes needs to be done in a way that is highly controlled to stop further spread. We fully support the submission linked to Awahuri Forest Kitchener Park Trust linked to this issue.

Climate Focus:

The current trajectory of plausible climate change scenarios shows that over 60cm of sea-level rise can be expected along our coast over the next century, or even sooner, along with an average annual temperature warming of 4°C. This will result in salt-water inundation of low-lying areas, erosion of the coastal dunes several hundred metres inland, and increased surface flooding (freshwater) over much of the coastal plains. Simultaneously there will be increases in heat, storm frequency and severity, flooding and drought. This will affect most agricultural and horticultural

activities, and much of the amenity plantings in the region, while climate change impacts on the remaining native vegetation and fauna is unknown.

We are pleased to see that MDC has identified preparing for a warmer climate as a challenge it faces as part of its larger consultation document. However, we question if the LTP reflects the extent of the urgency needed to avoid or reduce these changes. There needs to be a significantly stronger focus on what this means for our people in our rohe and our endemic flora and fauna. The language used in the consultation document (words like 'some' and 'may') is at best non-committal. People need to be prepared for what is not a possibility, but what is unanimously regarded in the scientific community as an absolute certainty. There needs to be overall guidance offered to the human inhabitants of the region as to how these climate changes and the requisite mitigations might or will affect their lives as currently lived. What is required here is a LTP which has a sense of human needs over a period of several to ten decades, which sets the general direction and level of urgency of councils' policies.

Funding local environmental work.

In 2023 ENM applied for funding from MDC to initiate a Manawatū based equivalent of our 'Environmental Initiatives Fund' (EIF) which is made financially possible by Palmerston North City Council. This demonstrates a strong commitment on their behalf to funding small-medium scale city based environmental projects. We were disappointed when our request to offer the same opportunities for Manawatū based groups, for the tune of \$10,000 was declined. We are frequently approached by groups within the Manawatū District who want to apply to the EIF, but who can't because of its Palmerston North City limitations. We strongly recommend that the council makes an addition to its LTP for a funding pool along the lines of our EIF to fund community led environmental and sustainability projects and that it works in collaboration with ENM to achieve this.

Considering active transport over car use.

We all know the environmental benefits of more people walking and cycling and subsequently, less car usage. However, less well known are the economic benefits to the region. These are as follows:

- Waka Kotahi has estimated the net benefits from cycling at 16 cents per kilometre primarily from reduced burden on the health system. With our ageing population, and Feilding being seen as a prime choice for retirees (particularly from the rural sector), it makes sense to encourage more people to cycle. A focus on cycling infrastructure (pathways, bike parking etc.) is encouraged.
- Retirees are amongst the largest group taking up e-bike cycling, and MDC could be well ahead of the wave in terms of supporting our senior residents. For example, Arvida's Waimea Plains village, near Nelson have assisted the active residents there to start a cycle group complete with a custom-built bike trailer provided by the village. With at least three retirement homes within Manawatū (that we know of), we'd encourage MDC to provide economic assistance and cycling coaching guidance to the residents, thus reducing car usage.
- Increased retail patronage: Direct economic benefits have been reported to retail and other businesses from investing in walkable communities with high amenity values and proximity to frequently used destinations such as shopping, eating places, schools, and parks. This is particularly important for 'main street' retailers, many of whom are suffering due to more online shopping and the propensity for people to 'jump in their car' to visit a mall or plaza. A greater emphasis on active transport is encouraged.

- Increased tourism: We've seen from the success of the Otago Rail Trail (the economic benefit of which is now second only to rural in the region), that cycling tourism can have a major economic benefit. The Greasy Chain Charitable Trust is one body currently stocktaking all trails in the region with the ultimate aim of having a major regional cycle trail. Feilding and Palmerston North could be hubs for visitor stays in addition to some of the smaller regional villages. We'd encourage MDC to investigate the potential and work with other interested parties to draw up plans for such a trail.

To conclude

MDC and the region glean tangible benefits from the incredible work of our member groups, particularly around biodiversity. It is the role of ENM to connect and inspire communities for environmental action, and to underpin and support their mahi. PNCC recognizes us as Sector Lead for the Environment and resources us for our role. We would welcome conversations with MDC about increased partnership so we can work together to provide and expand services to the region.

