

Natural Heritage Partnership Programme Funding Policy

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Waikato Regional Council places a high priority on supporting individual and community initiatives that enhance the environment and protect our natural heritage including our native plants and animals, special landscapes and ecosystems.

Council supports these initiatives through the Natural Heritage Partnership Programme (NHPP). This programme comprises three separate contestable funds for small, medium and large projects respectively:

- the Small Scale Community Initiatives Fund or SSCIF (for project grants under \$5000);
- the Environmental Initiatives Fund or EIF (for project grants \$5000 to \$40,000);
- the Natural Heritage Fund or NHF (for project grants over \$40,000).

1.2 Structure of this document

This funding policy is designed to support the management and operation of the NHPP.

Sections 2 and 3 describe the aim of the NHPP and how rate revenue is allocated across the three funds respectively.

Sections 4 to 6 outline the eligibility requirements for applicants and projects across all three funds. For projects to be considered for funding, they must meet these initial eligibility requirements. If a project meets these requirements, then it will be further evaluated against the assessment criteria for the relevant fund.

Section 7 lists general requirements for the uptake of funds by successful applicants, and proposes an approach to demonstrate the value of funded projects both individually and collectively.

Sections 8, 9 and 10 describes specific conditions relating to how each of the three funds – NHF, EIF and SSCIF respectively – will operate.

2 Aim of the Natural Heritage Partnership Programme

The overall aim of the NHPP is to provide seed and/or collaborative funding for community-based projects that:

- improve the environment
- raise environmental awareness;
- use the enthusiasm and skills of the community; and
- are consistent with Council's statutory role and community outcomes.

Note: Well-established organisations seeking funding for projects of a regional economic development nature (e.g. tourism, recreation projects) should apply to Council's Regional Development Fund.

3 Funding Source & Allocation

The revenue for the NHF and EIF is sourced from the natural heritage targeted rate of \$5.80 per property in the region, generating total revenue in the range of \$1.1 million to \$1.2 million per annum (as of 1 July 2015). The natural heritage rate was designed to allow unspent funds to be put into a reserve and made available once suitable projects are approved. Therefore, the total budget each year for the NHF and EIF will comprise the year's rate revenue plus the previous year's closing reserve balance.

Each year, as part of Council's Annual Plan process, the allocation from this budget to the NHF and EIF respectively will be determined by Council. As a guideline, the NHF allocation is projected to be approximately \$850,000 per annum, and the EIF approximately \$250,000 for the 2015-2015 Long Term Plan - not including the reserve. An allocation of up to \$25,000 per year from the EIF is set aside for school projects through the EnviroSchools Grant Fund.

There is provision for large, significant NHF projects to be funded in part through internal borrowing if required. This allows Council to leverage a small, per property rate into larger sums that can be repaid over time.

Staff time spent in administering the EIF and NHF is drawn from the total natural heritage rate revenue, which reduces the amount available for grants accordingly.

The SSCIF is sourced from the uniform annual general charge (also a targeted, per property rate) with a fixed allocation of \$150,000 per annum. This is the total amount available for grant allocation - staff time for administering these grants is additional to this and is also drawn from the UAGC.

4 Applicant Eligibility

A wide range of organisations are eligible to apply for funding through one or more of the NHPP's three contestable funds. They include:

- community groups
- iwi/hapu
- kaitiaki groups
- incorporated societies
- community trusts
- resident and ratepayer groups
- territorial authorities
- landowner groups (e.g. Landcare or Streamcare groups)
- educational institutions
- businesses and industries.

Organisations must be a legal entity with a track record that satisfies the Waikato Regional Council.

Those ineligible include:

- Central Government departments and agencies. (Applications from community groups with these agencies as partners or co-funders are encouraged. However, the lead must clearly be the community group);
- Crown Research Institutes;
- Groups that are funded through other Waikato Regional Council programmes or Central Government programmes;
- Organisations that are based outside of New Zealand.
- Individuals – except for applications to SSCIF where private landowners may apply for funding to undertake pest control or other similar ecological restoration initiatives on covenanted land.

Only one application from any group (or individual in the case of SSCIF) will be accepted per financial year. Groups applying to the NHF or EIF may be funded for

more than one year for a particular project (up to five years for NHF, and up to three years for EIF); however, funding for a different project can only be sought once any prior project has been successfully completed.

5 Eligible Projects/Costs

Projects must:

- be located within the Waikato region;
- have clear objectives that are consistent with Council's statutory functions, Regional Policy Statement and overall environmental objectives;
- have clearly assigned responsibility for the ongoing promotion or viability of the initiative;
- demonstrate the necessary capacity to undertake the project, including responsibility for prudent financial management and ensuring all occupational health and safety requirements are met by volunteers or contractors;
- ensure that funding may only be used for the purpose and amounts for which it was granted¹, and the recipient must meet any conditions decided upon by the WRC;
- demonstrate the administration of fund money in accordance with standard accounting procedures; and
- have no potential conflict of interest for Council as a consent authority.

In submitting a funding request, an organisation (the applicant) must acknowledge and agree that WRC may disclose to, or obtain from, any government department or agency, private person or organisation, any information about the applicant for the purposes of gaining or providing information related to the funding or the applicant.

Council will generally give priority to projects which:

- have clear links to Council's priority areas and community outcomes as described in the 2015-2025 LTP;
- are cost-effective;
- focus on environmental deliverables;
- have a high degree of community support or involvement and promote community awareness in environmental issues;
- are not fully funded by the Council (i.e. have contributions from other sources, including in-kind labour or volunteer assistance);
- are a new initiative, new to the particular area or an extension of an existing project;
- include a well-developed project plan including measurable outcomes and a detailed budget and map of the project location/area;
- demonstrate co-support, involvement, co-operation and engagement with mana whenua (iwi Maaori) of the area;
- supports projects that are based on or give regard to maatauranga Maaori environmental work programmes and iwi environmental management plans;
- supports mana whenua (iwi Maaori) in their aspirations to the restoration of the environment.

¹ Prior written approval must be obtained from WRC to use the grant for a different purpose. The recipient must repay any grant monies spent on anything other than the purposes approved by WRC. Funds left over from the grant must be returned to WRC.

6 Ineligible Projects/Costs

The following projects/costs will not be funded:

- Projects located outside the Waikato Regional Council administrative boundaries.
- Debt repayment, refinancing of existing loans, deposits, or underwriting projects.
- Projects receiving funding from other Waikato Regional Council programmes (however; aspects of a project not covered under another programme may be eligible to apply to the EIF).
- Projects more appropriately funded through other WRC programmes.
- Projects which the Council considers are core business of other agencies.
- Overseas travel or conference expenses, legal expenses, expenses incurred through participation in statutory processes.
- Landscaping, beautification, food gardening and wildlife pond projects that do not have appropriate environmental outcomes.
- Proposals designed to generate personal or commercial benefit, political or religious objectives, or for private pecuniary profit or gain.
- Projects which seek to redistribute, at their own discretion, funds to recipients.
- Consultants' fees or salaries that are not directly linked to an activity or programme with proven benefit to the community and/or environment.
- Purchase of large capital items of equipment or infrastructure (e.g. vehicles, solar panels, buildings, building renovations, roads and bridges etc.).
- Any works/activities that are required as conditions of a resource consent or as mitigation as part of a resource consent.
- Projects that require resource consent, but have not received one at the date of the close of the funding round.
- Retrospective funding for projects or items completed or acquired before the application closing date.
- Any project that would have significant adverse impacts on the environment, regardless of the positive impacts.

Average or current costs for materials such as bait, bait stations, traps and herbicide will be made available to applicants on the Council website prior to the fund closing dates. These costs should be used as guidance in compiling project budgets.

Labour costs may be funded – refer to the details under each fund below. Volunteer labour should be included in all NHF and EIF applications as an in-kind contribution (i.e. as part of the total project cost) and costed at a level equivalent to the current minimum wage.

Quotes (less than six months old) for materials and contractor labour should be included in all applications.

7 Successful Applications

7.1 Uptake of allocated funding

Successful applicants to the NHPP grants will be required to accept, in writing, specific grant conditions before funding may be accessed. These conditions will include, but are not limited to:

- that the recipient is committed to completing and maintaining the project;

- that the recipient report on the project each year and at the completion of the project;
- that Waikato Regional Council's contribution be publicly recognised;
- that Waikato Regional Council can use the project in promotional material such as event programmes, annual reports etc.
- that should the project not proceed within six months of funding approval, such approval will become null and void unless other provisions are arranged between the applicant and the Council.

Successful NHF and EIF applicants will be required to sign a Funding Deed describing the obligations of both parties.

It is preferable that applicants take those funds up during the financial year in which they are approved (this may differ for multi-year projects approved under NHF and EIF).

Applicants are asked to advise Council staff of any changes to project timeframes. Project overspends will not be covered by the NHPP.

7.2 Staff support for projects

Where deemed necessary (e.g. for all NHF projects), and in collaboration with managers, a nominated liaison person will be assigned to support each applicant group or organisation. The choice of liaison person will be based on their area of professional expertise and geographic focus if relevant. In some instances, an appropriate delegate may be given the task of liaising with a group, such as a Waikato Biodiversity Forum representative. One person may be the contact for several groups or projects.

The role of the staff contact person will be to maintain dialogue with the group, deal with issues that may arise in regards to the grant and to provide technical advice.

7.3 Demonstrating the value of projects

Council wishes to better demonstrate the value of contestable funds for our communities and Council. This requires applicants to provide a broader picture of a project's successes both environmentally, culturally and socially.

For EIF and NHF projects, the contract between a successful applicant and the Council (funding agreement) will include identification of project milestones, results achieved and outcome indicators that will be used to demonstrate qualitative and quantitative outcomes of the project. Applicants will be asked to state the milestones and indicators of their projects in their application. These will then be confirmed in agreement with the applicant when the funding agreement is drawn up. The number and spread of indicators will be determined for each project – appropriate to the value of the project/grant amount.

Examples of project milestones include:

- establishment of a trap/bait station grid;
- convening a project steering group;
- completion of threatened species population assessment;
- workshops and planting days held etc.

Examples of result indicators may include:

- number of trees planted, over what area and maintenance programme undertaken;
- before and after photos and GPS points;
- volunteer hours input;
- predator control effort/number of pests controlled; reporting on monitoring results post a pest control operation;

- numbers of attendees at community events;
- waste volumes reduced;
- energy savings etc.

Examples of outcome indicators include:

- hectares of land vegetated;
- visual changes to habitat condition (eg. through photopoints & GPS points if possible);
- change in community behaviour;
- increase in population numbers for species at risk;
- increased funding support.
- ability for the community to swim in river due to better water quality.

It is expected that Natural Heritage Fund grants will require a memorandum of understanding between Council and the applicant, with detailed requirements for monitoring, evaluation and reporting appropriate to the size of the grant.

7.4 Project reporting

Progress reports (at the end of each year or more frequently negotiated) should, as a minimum, include the following (referring to the period that the report covers):

- a description of the work completed, with specific reference to the project objectives and milestones;
- comment on whether the project is running to budget, within the timeline and explanations given if required;
- costs incurred;
- issues or problems experienced;
- staff and volunteer hours contributed.

Final project reports will also describe how well the project has achieved its objectives and measurement (i.e. totals) against project indicators (results and outcomes). Final reports are also expected to include commentary on the long term future management of the project.

Smaller SSCIF projects will be required to provide only a brief summary report focusing on costs incurred and achievement of project objectives.

Templates are available for project reports from Council.

8 Natural Heritage Fund

8.1 Purpose of the NHF

The purpose of the NHF is to help implement Council's commitment to preserving the natural heritage of the region – native plants and animals, threatened ecosystems, outstanding landscapes and the natural character of waterways and the coast. Natural heritage projects are designed to secure permanent assets for the people of the region and have very long term, inter-generational benefits. The fund may be used to:

- facilitate partnerships (e.g. with district councils, central Govt, NGOs, private landowners, iwi, businesses and the public) to help protect special significant natural heritage places in perpetuity;
- support “umbrella” community groups with an excellent track record of managing significant natural areas and who have the capacity to increase their conservation impact;
- assist iwi Maaori who are mana whenua to exercise kaitiakitanga at place. This may be through (but is not limited to) the development of their own environmental plans, policies, interpretation, and methods to preserve natural heritage;
- assist in securing permanent public assets through leases, covenants, management agreements and purchase; and
- enhance the ecological value of existing public lands where there is demonstrable regional benefit through advocacy, planning, technical support and direct enhancement.

8.2 Funding source & allocation

Funding is derived from the natural heritage targeted rate. The total amount allocated per year to natural heritage projects varies but is usually around \$850,000. Council has a current commitment to fund the Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust at \$300,000 per year for 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18.

Any unallocated funds are carried forward to the next financial year.

8.3 Project funding limit

Natural heritage projects are expected to be in the range of \$40,000 - \$300,000. However this is a guideline only.

Multi-year projects will be considered (to a maximum of five years).

8.4 Application timeframes

Funding will be available from 1 July each year.

There is no formal application process for natural heritage projects. Applicants with ideas for possible projects should contact Council directly.

8.5 Who can apply?

Eligible groups may apply to the NHF – see Section 4 Applicant Eligibility. Individuals are not eligible to apply.

8.6 What types of projects/costs can be funded?

Refer to Section 5 Eligible Projects/Costs and Section 6 Ineligible Projects/Costs.

The NHF is designed to fund ecosystem restoration projects that aim to achieve “landscape scale” outcomes via well-integrated and connected areas of ecological

significance. Projects should be multi-stakeholder and collaborative in nature, and should also demonstrate potential for growth in both area under management and capacity.

Examples of specific projects for natural heritage funding include:

- preserving natural landscapes, particularly along our coasts;
- maintaining and/or restoring natural habitat;
- protecting, restoring or enhancing significant natural features such as wetlands, geothermal areas or caves;
- land retirement, acquisition/purchase for permanent protection;
- promoting public access to natural areas.

To date the NHF has been used for a wide range of projects including contributions to support the Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust, purchase of land for Waipa peat lake reserves and the purchase of the Ed Hillary Hope Reserve.

Priority will be given to projects that complement Council's work and those of other organisations or existing community efforts. Projects should maximise collaboration between iwi Maaori, groups and other partners and address the issue of building capacity within and outside of the group over time in order to reduce reliance on ongoing Council funding. Groups will need to demonstrate comprehensive monitoring and reporting of their impacts and outcomes.

In any given year, Council may also give priority to projects in specified target areas or geographic locations, or addressing specific natural heritage outcomes. Council also reserves the right to use the NHF to progress significant natural heritage projects arising from its core business.

A NHF grant may contribute to the following costs (quotes will be required):

- material costs for projects;
- labour costs for project coordination may be funded to a maximum of 50% of the approved grant;
- contractor costs - at the discretion of Council;
- transport costs up to 10% of the total grant;
- accommodation/food costs associated with supporting volunteers – at the discretion of Council;
- plants, fencing and some other capital items (see Section 4 for ineligible costs);
- land purchase; and
- covenants and other similar legal mechanisms to protect land.

Volunteer labour should be shown and costed as an in-kind contribution at a level equivalent to the current minimum wage.

8.7 Assessment criteria

Once a project proposal has been developed and is deemed to have met the NHPP screening criteria as set out in sections 4, 5 and 6 of this policy, the project will be assessed against specific NHF criteria. The criteria for the Natural Heritage Fund below are based on the existing criteria developed through the consultative process carried out when the fund was established in 2005 and include but are not limited to the following:

- What is the ecological significance of the proposal and does it involve the protection or restoration of habitats that are regionally under-represented (with reference to the Regional Policy Statement criteria for ecological significance)?
- To what degree is the purpose of the project consistent with the RPS, Regional Plan, RCP, LTP and other planning and policy documents?
- Is the project area part of a collection of features that is cumulatively valuable (such as natural and cultural landscapes)?
- The location of the project (e.g. is it in a priority catchment or does it connect several significant natural areas or is it convenient to population centres?)
- To what degree will the regional community potentially benefit from access to and protection of the values on the site?
- What type of proposed partnership is associated with the project and what is the level of funding and support provided by other agencies?
- Does the proposal involve protection of significant landscapes, waahi tapu, places of cultural significance to Maaori, or other physical features?
- Does the project facilitate meaningful and effective participation of Maaori and recognise their cultural values, interests and associations, the effect on Maaori historic heritage or the relationship of Maaori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral lands, water, sites, waahi tapu and other taonga including fauna and flora.
- What is the level of mana whenua support and public support expressed for the project?
- Will the project complement previous or existing initiatives and if so, how?
- Has the applicant demonstrated that they have the required capacity to deliver the ecological outcomes of their proposed project?
- Does the applicant have the ongoing resources necessary to maintain the project?
- Will the project and/or area be adequately protected by way of covenant, management agreements and/or legislation, policies and rules?
- Is there any conflict of interest associated with the proposal?
- For land purchase proposals:
 - How urgent is the threat faced by the area?
 - Will the opportunity to protect the area recur in the future and at what cost?
 - Will the proposal provide permanent protection for the area?

8.8 Assessment process

People wishing to submit project proposals for consideration for natural heritage funding should contact Council staff to discuss their proposal.

Proposals must meet the eligibility criteria in sections 4, 5 and 6 of this policy before being considered for funding.

As a minimum, a comprehensive project plan will be required including, but not limited to:

- a description of the ecological values of the project area;
- a restoration plan;
- comprehensive project budget including details of other funding inputs;
- a cultural impact assessment (includes the potential impact of not supporting the project);

- details of consultation undertaken, particularly with local iwi;
- details of how the project will contribute to opportunities for social, recreational or cultural participation;
- a reporting and accountability framework;
- details of how the project will be managed in perpetuity.

Proposals will be assessed against the specific NHF criteria above, by Council staff. Only those applications that score highly against these criteria and have good supporting justification will be recommended for funding to the Waikato Regional Council's Integrated Catchment Management Committee.

There may be a further process involving - for example - negotiations with other funding partners, a site visit and/or the supply of further information before confirmation of the grant amount to be allocated to the project. Funding will depend on the project's merits and the merits of other proposals being considered by the committee at the time, and the available budget for that financial year.

Successful NHF applicants will be required to sign a Funding Deed describing the obligations of both parties, and to follow a reporting framework approved by Council.

Council decisions on NHF grants are final and there is no process for unsuccessful applicants to appeal the decision. At times a funding decision to not approve an application may solely be based on the fund being oversubscribed. Occasionally Council may defer a proposal to the following financial year pending the supply of further information about the project.

9 Environmental Initiatives Fund

9.1 Purpose of the EIF

The purpose of the EIF is to provide one-off grants to projects, which directly enhance and/or benefit the environment or provide environmental education.

9.2 Funding source & allocation

Funding is derived from the natural heritage targeted rate. The total amount allocated per year to EIF projects varies but is usually around \$250,000, with \$25,000 of this amount available for Enviroschools projects through the Enviroschools Grant Fund.

Any unallocated funds are carried forward to the next financial year.

9.3 Project funding limit

Up to \$40,000 is available to any one project. Projects may be funded for up to three years; however, the total project grant may not exceed \$40,000.

EIF grant amounts range from \$5,000 to \$40,000. For smaller projects under \$5,000, funding requests should be directed to the Small Scale Community Initiatives Fund.

9.4 Application timeframes

Applications will be processed twice per year and funding rounds will vary depending on the budget for the year.

9.5 Who can apply?

Eligible groups and individuals – see Section 4 Applicant Eligibility.

Schools do not usually qualify for general Environmental Initiatives Funding but may be supported through the Enviroschools Grant Fund.

9.6 What type of projects/costs can be funded?

Refer to Section 5 Eligible Projects/Costs and Section 6 Ineligible Projects/Costs.

Funding is available for one-off projects. A one-off project may include:

- a single, stand alone project; or
- a discrete stage of a larger, ongoing project.

Funding through the EIF can be provided to specific projects designed to:

- enhance the environment;
- promote and/or contribute to sustainable management of the environment;
- raise community awareness of environmental issues;
- provide environmental education; and
- build the capacity and competency of iwi Maaori, haapu, Marae in environmental education and/or exercising kaitiakitanga.

Examples of past funded projects include native forest and wetland restoration, innovative sustainability action based projects which optimise the use of natural resources such as energy, water and waste, pest control, environmental events and publication of environmental guidelines.

An EIF grant may contribute to the following costs:

- material costs for projects;
- labour costs for project coordination to a maximum of 20% of the approved grant;
- contractor costs to a maximum of 20% of the approved grant;
- transport costs up to 10% of the total grant;
- accommodation/food costs associated with supporting volunteers; and
- plants and some other capital items (see Section 4 for ineligible costs).

EIF funds will be allocated with best intent, with the aim of supporting a wide range of project types (environmental education, sustainable management, direct environmental enhancement) and an even disbursement of funds across the region.

9.7 EIF assessment criteria

Once an application has been submitted and is deemed to have met the NHPP screening criteria as set out in sections 4, 5 and 6, the project will be assessed against the following EIF assessment criteria:

- **Fit with Council's regional outcomes and policies**
How the project contributes to Council's LTP outcomes and resource management policies.
- **Environmental enhancement**
How the project will directly promote, enhance or protect the Waikato region's environment, with environmental outcomes and project milestones clearly identified.
- **Community participation & awareness**
How the project involves iwi Maaori, the wider community and increases public awareness of environmental issues.
- **Innovation/uniqueness**
How unique or special is the project?
- **Collaboration and partnership**
Whether the applicants have explored and developed any opportunities for collaboration and partnership with others resulting in contributory funding from other parties.
- **Viability**
The likelihood of the project's success and the applicant's capability to deliver the outcomes of the project. Inclusion of a robust project plan and clear project budget providing visibility of all funding sources for the project.
- **Value to Mana Whenua**
How the project involves iwi Maaori including their cultural values, interests and associations, the effect on Maaori historic heritage or the relationship of Maaori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral lands, water, sites, waahi tapu and other taonga including fauna and flora.

9.8 Assessment process

To be considered for funding, groups will be required to complete a formal EIF application. Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact Waikato Regional Council staff and discuss their project before submitting an application.

Applicants will be provided with a provisional date of when the application is likely to be processed, and any subsequent changes will be communicated to applicants.

EIF applications that meet the eligibility criteria in sections 4, 5 and 6 will then be assessed against the specific EIF criteria above by Council staff. External advice may be sought where required. Only those applications that rank highly against these criteria and have good supporting justification will be funded. Staff will recommend the grant amount to be allocated to the project and Council will make the final decision. Funding will depend on the project's merits and the available budget for that financial year.

Decisions on EIF grants are final and there is no process for unsuccessful applicants to appeal the decision. At times a funding decision to not approve an application may solely be based on the EIF being oversubscribed. Occasionally an application may be deferred to the next round pending the supply of further information about the project.

10 Small Scale Community Initiatives Fund

10.1 Purpose of the SSCIF

The purpose of the SSCIF is to support volunteer community based groups or individuals undertaking small ecological restoration initiatives within the Waikato region.

10.2 Funding source & allocation

Funding is derived from the uniform annual general charge. The total amount allocated per year to SSCIF projects is \$150,000.

10.3 Project funding limit

Funds are capped at \$5000 maximum per application. Up to \$1000 of this amount may be used for contracted services where this is essential to achieve the outcomes of the project.

Repeat applications from groups for the same project are allowed; however, only one application per group per year is allowed.

10.4 Application timeframes

Applications will be processed once per year and must be received by **30 June**.

10.5 Who can apply?

Eligible groups and individuals – see section 4 Applicant Eligibility.

10.6 What type of projects/costs can be funded?

Refer to Section 5 Eligible Projects/Costs and Section 6 Ineligible Projects/Costs.

The primary aim of the SSCIF is to enable the purchase of materials such as bait stations, traps, toxins, herbicides and/or plants to undertake community-initiated ecological restoration work on private or public land.

For those initiatives on private land, preference will be given to areas with some form of legal protection such as a QEII covenant.

Suitable projects include:

- restoration of identified Significant Natural Areas (including wetlands, native bush etc.);
- trapping of predators to protect threatened species such as kiwi;
- removal of plant pests from natural areas;
- small planting projects with an ecological restoration focus.

SSCIF funds will be allocated with best intent, with the aim of supporting projects that collectively protect a wide range of indigenous species and habitat types, across the region.

Project coordination or administration costs are not covered under the SSCIF; however, up to \$1000 of contractor labour may be covered in a single grant where this is essential to achieving the outcomes of the project in an efficient and safe manner. Quotes are required.

10.7 SSCIF assessment criteria

Once an application has been submitted and is deemed to have met the NHPP screening criteria as set out in sections 4, 5 and 6, the project will be assessed against the following EIF assessment criteria:

- **Fit with Council's regional outcomes and policies**
How the project contributes to Council's LTP outcomes and policies, with specific reference to the Regional Pest Management Plan.
- **Environmental enhancement**
How the project will directly promote, enhance or protect the Waikato region's environment, with specific reference to ecological and/or biodiversity outcomes.
- **Viability**
The likelihood of the project's success, measured through the project plan and budget.
- **Community participation & awareness**
How the project involves iwi Maaori and the wider community and increases public awareness of environmental issues.
- **Innovation/uniqueness**
How unique or special is the project?

10.8 Assessment process

To be considered for funding, groups will be required to complete a formal SSCIF application. Applicants are encouraged to contact Waikato Regional Council staff to discuss their project before submitting an application.

Applicants will be provided with a provisional date of when the application is likely to be processed, and any subsequent changes will be communicated to applicants.

SSCIF applications that meet the eligibility criteria in sections 4, 5 and 6 will then be assessed against the specific SSCIF criteria above by Council staff. Only those applications that rank highly against these criteria and have good supporting justification will be considered for funding. Staff will determine the grant amount to be allocated to the project. Funding will depend on the project's merits and the available budget for that financial year. SSCIF grants made will be reported to the Waikato Regional Council Integrated Catchment Management Committee after the completion of each round.

Decisions on SSCIF grants are final and there is no process for unsuccessful applicants to appeal the decision. At times a funding decision to not approve an application may solely be based on the SSCIF being oversubscribed. Occasionally an application may be deferred to the next round pending the supply of further information about the project.

11 Promotion of the Natural Heritage Partnership Programme

The funds available through the Natural Heritage Partnership Programme and benefits to the wider community will be promoted through a variety of means including:

- information and application forms/guidelines on the Council website;
- a promotional flyer;
- word of mouth by councillors and staff;
- the Waikato Biodiversity Forum;
- media releases on funded projects;
- the Your Waikato magazine;
- other opportunities such as community open days, funding expos as appropriate;
- Fundview; and
- WRC internal Maaori-focused contact databases.

12 Reporting on the Natural Heritage Partnership Programme

Quantitative information (statistics) and qualitative commentary on the NHPP including parameters such as applicant numbers, iwi/hapu/marae-based projects, types of applications, spread of project locations and project outcomes will also be reported to Council each year. This reporting will also include an analysis of staff time, the nature of support provided to applicants and other administrative costs for the NHPP. The aim of this reporting is to attempt to demonstrate the value and benefits of the funds to the region.

Selected information will be included in the NHPP promotional material (for example, a summary of grants made in the previous financial year), to ensure greater transparency for the community.

Staff will continue the tradition of inviting a selection of successful grant applicants each year to report in person to Council at the conclusion of their projects.

13 Review of the Natural Heritage Partnership Programme

It is anticipated that the Natural Heritage Partnership Programme and associated Funding Policy will be reviewed every three years in line with the Long Term Plan. Reviews will involve seeking feedback from staff, councillors, successful and unsuccessful applicants and other funders of NHPP projects and key organisations such as Department of Conservation and Trust Waikato. The focus will be on:

- determining the gains made to the environment through projects undertaken with NHPP assistance; and
- the processes and criteria for each of the three funds.

These reviews will help inform any recommendations to improve the NHPP to ensure that the funds are still relevant and useful for the community and Council.