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Waikato's velvetleaf blitz project a finalist in LGNZ EXCELLENCE Awards

An intensive blitz on invasive weed velvetleaf by Waikato Regional Council is a finalist in the Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) EXCELLENCE Awards.

Now in their fourth year, the Awards recognise and celebrate the key leadership role that local government plays in communities around the country.

The velvetleaf biosecurity response is a finalist for the Air New Zealand EXCELLENCE Award for Environmental Impact.

Velvetleaf is one of the world's worst cropping weeds, a very invasive pest plant that can cause extensive damage to crops.

In 2016, it was discovered in imported fodder beet seed. Through a national awareness campaign, it was subsequently found in a number of Waikato properties linked to maize crops. The council set up its own incursion response team with 50 staff working fulltime on the project over four weeks, visiting 101 farms, completing 29 biosecurity plans for infected properties.

These straightforward plans are now used as a model nationwide.

Judges said the Waikato Regional Council's Velvetleaf response set the bar for communication and inspection following a biosecurity threat to the primary sector.

"The council has set up an excellent biosecurity response that can be lifted and shifted to other authorities. The Ministry for Primary Industries has adopted the methods used by the Council, a sign of its value."

Judges said the Environmental Impact category was the strongest in 2017, dealing with real issues around rivers, water, biodiversity and biosecurity. A number of the entries were in the very early stages but with excellent strategy and processes in place the judging panel looks forward to seeing the results of these projects in coming years.

LGNZ President Lawrence Yule said the finalists in the EXCELLENCE Awards showcased outstanding leadership being provided by local government throughout the country.

"Local government is at the centre of every community in New Zealand, helping shape the environment in which we work and play," Mr Yule says.

"Being named as a finalist is a great achievement and reflects the vision shown by councils and the innovative work being done by staff. The finalists include some truly exceptional projects that are having a profound impact on communities."

Local authorities were invited to submit award applications in five categories:

- Fulton Hogan EXCELLENCE Award for Community Engagement
- Creative New Zealand EXCELLENCE Award for Best Creative Place

- Air New Zealand EXCELLENCE Award for Environmental Impact
- Chorus EXCELLENCE Award for Best Practice in Infrastructure
- Crown Fibre Holdings EXCELLENCE Award for Best Practice Contribution to Local Economic Development

Judges for the awards are former Wellington Mayor Kerry Prendergast, Chair of EQC Sir Maarten Wevers and The New Zealand Initiative's Executive Director, Dr Oliver Hartwich.

The 17 finalists in the LGNZ EXCELLENCE Awards 2017 are:

Fulton Hogan EXCELLENCE Award for Community Engagement

- Hutt City Council – Transformation Taita - Aiming to create a brighter future for all young people while building a stronger community, Transformation Taita offers access to facilities, resources and activities to those who need it most.
- Queenstown Lakes District Council – QLDC Winter Morning Road Reports - Throughout winter, seven days a week, QLDC provides early morning reports on road conditions throughout the district to thousands of people across multiple communications channels.
- Tasman District Council – Moturoa/Rabbit Island Reserve Management Plan (RMP) - An innovative approach when developing a new RMP for one of the region's best-loved recreational spaces resulted in meaningful community consultation and genuine buy-in from stakeholder groups.
- Thames-Coromandel District Council – Our Coromandel Summer Magazine - With inserts into rates bills largely discarded, this high-end magazine targets the 60 percent of ratepayers who live outside the district, encouraging them to visit more often and stay longer, while keeping them informed about what's happening in the region.
- Waikato Regional Council – Healthy Rivers: Plan for Change/Wai Ora: He Rautaki Whakapaipai - Healthy Rivers Wai Ora is a courageous collaborative approach to improving water quality, empowering communities to own the problems - and solutions - in arguably New Zealand's most important catchment area.

Creative New Zealand EXCELLENCE Award Best Creative Place

- Napier City Council – City Vision: Small City, Big Ideas - This overarching strategy for projects in the City Centre, Ahuriri and the Waterfront areas is guiding Napier to an integrated future where opportunities are seized and the city is both beautiful and memorable.
- Waikato District Council – Placemaking Programme - This programme is reclaiming public spaces by encouraging groups and individuals to develop artistic and cultural ideas for projects as diverse as delivery of library services through Little Libraries, and knitting poppies for trees to mark Anzac Day.

Air New Zealand EXCELLENCE Award for Environmental Impact

- Environment Southland – Southland Dairy Effluent Advisory Group project - A partnership between Environment Southland and milk producers, and the dairy industry body, sees dairy farmers who need assistance to comply with discharge consents given the help they need before they become seriously non-compliant.
- Palmerston North City Council – Green Corridors Palmerston North - More than 150,000 native trees have so far been planted as part of this project to connect the Tararua Ranges to the Manawatu River through a corridor of native plants alongside streams and tributaries, improving water quality and bringing birdlife back to the city.
- Waikato Regional Council – Velvetleaf biosecurity response - Velvetleaf, one of the most damaging invasive pest plants, was the target of an intensive incursion response in 2016 leading to management plans for infestations and biosecurity plans that are now used nationwide.

Chorus EXCELLENCE Award for Best Practice in Infrastructure Management

- Waikato District Council – Waikato District Alliance - The Alliance is the largest purely roading group in the country, with an integrated team of council staff, contractors and suppliers working together to improve asset management, and renewal and maintenance services to the community – dramatically improving response times.
- Hamilton City Council – Rototuna Reservoir – supporting growth and building resilience in Hamilton - More than just a water storage solution, Rototuna Reservoir and its pumping equipment and bulk mains are integrated in planned land use, and designed to ensure resilience for Hamilton in case of emergency.

Crown Fibre Holdings EXCELLENCE Award for Best Practice Contribution to Local Economic Development

- Hastings District Council – Papakainga Development Policy & Implementation Project 2007-17 - Leadership by the council has seen strategic issues that were preventing development of Māori land investigated and resolved, enabling well-supported developments to get up and running.
- Hauraki District Council – Economic Development Strategy “Toward 2025” - “Toward 2025” builds on the highly successful strategy adopted in 2013, using a range of proactive and practical intervention projects to focus the community on achieving development goals that have already seen more than \$100 million in investment coming to the region, including major international investment.
- Rotorua Lakes Council – Rotorua Mountain Biking Strategy - The strategy to establish Rotorua as a globally recognised mountain bike destination has seen visits to the Whakarewarewa Mountain Bike Park increased from 55,000 in 2005 to 250,000 in 2016, with resulting job growth coming from increased investment in retail and support businesses.
- Selwyn District Council – Izone Business Park Development - The Izone Business Park is New Zealand’s largest fully consented and development-ready industrial park with 68 new businesses employing 1,200 people. Another 800 jobs are forecast as development work is completed by land purchasers.
- West Coast Regional Council – Untamed Natural Wilderness - The West Coast’s exciting new brand has dramatically boosted tourism in the region, and is an ideal antidote to the decline in other major economic sectors that was damaging the social fabric of local communities.

Ends

For more information contact LGNZ’s Communications Advisor, Joe Dawson on 022 524 1217 or joe.dawson@lgnz.co.nz

About LGNZ and local government in New Zealand

Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) is the peak body representing New Zealand's 78 local, regional and unitary authorities. LGNZ advocates for local democracy, develops local government policy, and promotes best practice and excellence in leadership, governance and service delivery. Through its work strengthening sector capability, LGNZ contributes to the economic success and vibrancy of communities and the nation.

The local government sector plays an important role. In addition to giving citizens a say in how their communities are run, councils own a broad range of community assets worth more than \$120 billion. These include 90 per cent of New Zealand's road network, the bulk of the country's water and waste water networks, and libraries, recreation and community facilities. Council expenditure is approximately \$8.5 billion dollars, representing approximately 4 per cent of Gross Domestic Product and 11 per cent of all public expenditure.

For more information visit www.lgnz.co.nz

