

**Christchurch City Council Draft
Annual Plan Submission
April 2019**



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Introduction

The Ōpāwaho Heathcote River Network

The Ōpāwaho Heathcote River Network (OHRN) is an umbrella organization that facilitates and supports the values, efforts, and needs of our communities along the River. The OHRN is made up of representatives from eleven community groups in the Ōpāwaho Heathcote catchment and the Avon-Heathcote Estuary.

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 OHRN provides a voice for local river-care organizations and the communities. It collaborates and advocates with decision making organizations including Christchurch City Council (CCC) and Environment Canterbury (ECan).

Just as the CCC wish to focus on a collaborative approach the OHRN seeks to work with the CCC, ECan, Ngai Tahu, community groups and other agencies to develop an integrated approach to the management of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote 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.

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

Like many lowland rivers, the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River suffers from ‘urban stream syndrome.’ This is an indicator of the cumulative effects of activities and water management within its catchment over the last 150 years. This has resulted in an overall low baseline of ecological, water and sediment quality, and cultural health. Erosional of loess from the Port Hills, has been exacerbated by the recent fires. The landscape changes from the earthquakes have compounded these impacts.

It is important to stress that the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River is part of a larger landscape system that connects the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River and the Avon Ōtākaro River to the Avon Heathcote Estuary. Here the rivers toxic contaminants can bio-accumulate in filter feeders and 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 emphasis the following areas of work that the CCC need 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 and Riparian Planting
3. Catchment Baseline Information and Communication Project
4. Collaboration

1.0 Water Quality Improvement

1.1 Stormwater

Stormwater is a major source of contaminants into the OHRN. The proposed CCC Global Stormwater Consent (CCCGSC) is the legislative framework for which the effects will be managed. For this reason the OHRN has been involved in and followed the CCCGSC process keenly. The OHRN provided a submission and presented evidence at the Hearing. We also attended the majority of the 3 week hearing and since then have been involved, along with the Avon Ōtākaro, in consultation with CCC staff in the subsequent refinement of relevant conditions for the Stormwater and Wastewater Liaison Group and the proposed annual meetings of this group.

Under the CCC Global Stormwater Consent the CCC will develop a Stormwater Management Plan (SMP) for the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River catchment. This will be submitted to ECan within 18 months of the commencement of the CCC Stormwater Consent. Under the proposed conditions of the consent, the Christchurch West Melton Zone Committee (CWMZC) and Community Boards have been identified as the means for community consultation regarding the SMP.

The OHRN has a good grasp of the complexity of issues within the catchment and an important connection with the communities of interest for the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River SMP. Following the consent hearing we initiated an informal meeting with staff regarding the SMP and asked to be identified as an informal party in the consultation process.

The OHRN acknowledges the CCC increase in Global Stormwater consent costs relating to additional environmental monitoring and stormwater drainage planning but it is also dismayed at the huge maintenance costs associated with the mowing of the stormwater management basins in residential areas.

The OHRN recognises the huge investment by CCC in the Bells Creek Stormwater Treatment Facility and look forward to the seeing the improvements in the lower river water quality as a result of this.

Members of the OHRN were part of a very informative Stormwater Action Team (SWAT) field trip at the end of 2018. This looked at the extensive retention basin and bank remediation projects throughout the catchment in the bid to improve water quality and flooding.

1.1.1 Action Sought

-The OHRN is seeking assurance from the CCC that we will be involved and updated on the progress with the development of the SMP at the beginning of the process and regularly throughout its development. This will ensure adequate opportunity for community input and understanding.

-The OHRN would like the CCC 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 OHRN would like to be involved in initiatives that inform OHRN members and the public on initiatives for improving water quality and flooding in the catchment. A tour of the Bells Creek Stormwater Treatment Facility would be a good starting point for 2019.

1.2 Sediment into the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River

It is important to highlight the connection between water quality and the ecological health of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River, and the land-use activities within its catchment. Significant effects on terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity have resulted from the Port Hills fires of 2016. Large areas of exotic forestry and native bush were lost and there has been a subsequent increased sediment load into the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River. The overland flow of stormwater picks up and carries sediment into our waterways. This increase has contributed to the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River having the poorest water quality of Christchurch's lowland streams, as shown in the CCC Water Quality Report Card of 2018. With climate change, the frequency of these storm events are likely to increase and be more intense. This increase in overland flow of sediment to the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River is causing a loss of habitat and detrimentally affecting the ecosystem within it.

The CCC Global Stormwater Consent Hearing has identified that the over land flow of sediment, from the Port Hills, is outside the scope of the proposed consent and also outside the scope of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote SMP. This means the issue of sediment from the Port Hills into the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River, does not sit within any formal legislative process.

The OHRN understands there are concrete culverts and debris catches in the upper catches that act as sediment traps.

1.2.1 Action sought

-The OHRN would also like to stress the need for 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 OHRN wants the regular maintenance of the concrete culverts and debris catches as a possible means of reducing overland sediment flow.

1.3 Wastewater Overflows

One of the key benefits to the community of wastewater services is to provide healthy waterways. Wastewater overflows are a contributing factor to the poor microbial rating of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River. This wastewater includes waste from kitchens, bathrooms and trade waste from industrial and commercial operations.

The public is wanting to see an improvement in the water quality and cultural health of our urban waterways. The CCC needs to focus its spending to upgrade and renew wastewater infrastructure and reduce wet weather and dry weather overflows. Under the existing consent no dry weather overflows are permitted but they are as frequent as wet weather overflows. Dry weather overflows can have a greater impact as they occur without the dilution factor of a wet weather event. At present dry weather overflows are not included in the CCC Wastewater Consent. Waste water can only be discharged into the environment in compliance with the ECan resource consent. Adequate and reliable treatment processes must be maintained to comply with the conditions of this Resource Consent.

The Service Delivery Plan for Wastewater Collection, Treatment and Disposal, under the Annual Plan identified that the waste water pipes are in very poor condition which allows groundwater and stormwater to leak into the waste water system. When these flows are above the capacity of the pumping stations an overflow into waterways occurs. This same report identifies that the proposed spending for waste water infrastructure would; *'be insufficient to maintain the current network condition and so the network would deteriorate.'* This would result in increased wet and dry weather overflows in the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River.

This decline in wastewater overflow performance targets overtime will negatively affect the ecological, cultural and social health of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River.

The variation to the CCC Wastewater consent regarding wet weather overflows is already lodged with ECan but has not been notified. This consent application is as environmentally important as the stormwater consent so should follow the same process of notification, submissions and evidence presented to a hearing.

Following our submission to the Annual Plan we have been included in the Compliance and Monitoring Liaison Group regarding wastewater overflows in the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River. Thank you for this inclusion.

1.3.1 Actions Sought

-The OHRN does not support the WW Heathcote Wet Weather Overflow Reduction Project being deferred until beyond 2021.

-The OHRN supports upgrading the capacity of the Wastewater Network in the area at the corner of Sandwich Road and Eastern Terrace at P Station 20 to help reduce overflows.

-The OHRN supports the proposals for upgrades to improve the system to reduce overflows but does not support the reduction in funding for renewals which will mean the overall decline in the system and lead to problems down the track. It will result in a decline of the infrastructure to a level that may not be serviceable.

-The OHRN wants CCC to ask ECan to notify the variation to the CCC Wastewater Consent so the OHRN and other key river care groups can formally make submissions to the commissioners' panel and give evidence at the hearing.

-The OHRN would like the minutes from the first Compliance and Monitoring Liaison Group Meeting in 2018.

2. Biodiversity and Riparian Planting

The OHRN is keen to be involved in the continual 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.

The OHRN acknowledges that 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.

OHRN stresses the importance of protecting and restoring native vegetation within Ōtautahi and within the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River catchment. It is vital that we recognise the importance of our unique native

species, biodiversity and biogeography and its role in creating our unique 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 across its different tributary catchments and habitats. The OHRN stresses the importance of a catchment-wide databases as opposed to a site specific approach.

There is also potential to develop a platform for citizen science with such tools as inaturalist. It is an opportunity for collaboration between organisations to integrate information together. At present no weed monitoring is carried out within the catchment.

A continual frustration for community groups is the damage caused to community plantings by contractors carrying out maintenance contracts. This is something that is an all too regular occurrence and is demoralising for community groups who put a huge amount of volunteer time and effort into establishing native planting in areas along the river.

2.1. Actions sought

- The OHRN would like the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River to be identified as significant and worthy of action.

- The OHRN would like 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 OHRN would like the Opawaho-Heathcote Linear Masterplan to be implemented. Key aims of which are to pull the road back from the river, increase river channel capacity, and increase biodiversity with native planting.

- The OHRN seeks a consolidation of all relevant biodiversity baseline data (pests, wetlands, springs, vegetation, weeds, in-river species). Weed monitoring is not undertaken by the CCC council. There is potential to develop a citizen science recording programme in this area.

- The OHRN would like a program for baseline monitoring data to be collected in the holes identified.

- That relevant staff from CCC to meet with key community group representatives to develop an strategy to resolve the issue of contractor damage to volunteer community group plantings .

- The OHRN advocates for the development of an Eco-Sourcing Policy in conjunction with CCC, ECan and environmental groups.

3. Communication of Catchment Baseline Information Project

The Ōpāwaho Heathcote River has a complex catchment. There is also a huge amount of information in a large number of specialist reports that needs to be simplified and communicated to the public. This would help people to understand and engage with the complexity of the place they are living, the issues relating to it and initiate actions from the community to be a part of the solution. A key starting point is to distill, simplify and visually communicate the Ōpāwaho Heathcote Catchment, its issues and communities of interest.

It is vital for complex and scientific information to be simplified so community groups can effectively engage and inform their communities of interest. This also ensures communities can effectively engage in the decision making process.

The OHRN is in the initial stages of developing a Communication of Catchment Baseline Information Project which will look at the catchment, the ecological zones within it, the overarching issues, and baseline data to date, communities of interest and the actions communities can take to improve the health of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River.

3.1 Action Sought

-CCC to provide support for the OHRN Communication of Catchment Baseline Information Project.

4. Collaboration

Ngai Tahu are the mana whenua of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River and a statutory partner with ECan and CCC in the legislative framework which manage the River. The CWMZC operates under the Canterbury Water Management Strategy.

As a community group the OHRN has to work in collaboration with all these agencies and the community of interests which are part of its Network. We have become the integrator of the various parties and need to work in collaboration to ensure the ecological health of the river improves.

The OHRN recognises the collaborative efforts that are operating today which support community groups such as ourselves. These include the initial stages of the Community Water Partnership, SWAT, Networking for the Environment, Enviroschools, and the Community Collaborative Education Programme (CCEM) to name a few.

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. It is important for agencies to recognise that to enable volunteer community groups, such as the OHRN to grow and contribute, there needs to be a partnerships, collaboration and support provided.

We are also grateful for the use of the community rooms at the South Library for our meetings and the support of council staff.

4.1 Action Sought

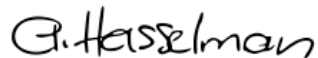
-Develop a Recovery Plan for the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River with the CCC, ECan, Ngai Tahu, OHRN and other stakeholders.

-OHRN advocates for the involvement in CCC community projects from the planning to implementation stages.

-The OHRN are wanting to work with CCC and other agencies to explore ways of supporting the functioning of groups such as ours.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

We wish to be heard and we look forward to elaborating on our submission.



Annabelle Hasselman

Chairperson

Ōpāwaho Heathcote River Network