

**Submission on the Environment Canterbury
Annual Plan
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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 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 Environment Canterbury (ECan) and Christchurch City Council (CCC).

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 the wastewater system. The River flows into the Avon-Heathcote Estuary where its toxic contaminants can bio-accumulate in filter feeders and hence adversely affect the animal and plant life that depend on them.

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.

The OHRN supports of the ECan Annual Plan but there are 3 areas that we would especially like to see more action for the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River;

1. Prioritising Freshwater Management
2. Biodiversity and Biosecurity
3. Regional Leadership

1. Prioritising Freshwater Management

“Implementing innovative solutions to manage our freshwater resource to support community use (mahinga kai, drinking water and recreation), achieve ecosystem health and sustainable economic development”.

1.1 The OHRN supports the continued work of ECan in freshwater management through its Environmental Monitoring and Progress Reporting, Canterbury Water Management Strategy (CWMS) Facilitation, Resource Management Act Framework and Zone and Regional Implementation.

1.2 The OHRN submitted a submission and presented evidence at the Hearing for the CCC Global Stormwater Consent. We also attended the majority of the 3 week hearing and have been in consultation with CCC staff in the subsequent refinement of relevant conditions. 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.

1.2.1 Action Sought

-The OHRN is seeking assurance that ECan will establish a process for community consultation, through the CWMZC, for the proposed Ōpāwaho Heathcote SMP. We emphasize that this should be initiated in the early stages of the SMP development and involve multiple engagements within the process to ensure adequate opportunity for community input.

2. Biodiversity and Biosecurity

“Creating a step-change in effort in the regeneration of freshwater, marine and terrestrial biodiversity.”

2.1 The OHRN supports the proposed increased efforts in the regeneration of biodiversity within the freshwater marine and terrestrial environment. The OHRN acknowledges the considerable restoration projects that have been supported by ECan to date in the bid to protect and restore Canterbury’s indigenous biodiversity.

It is important here to highlight the connection between the water quality and 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. 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.

It is also important to note that the CCC Global Stormwater Consent Hearing has identified that the overland 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, is not within any formal process.

Toxic contaminants from the City's stormwater and the City's sewage overflows enter the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River. This affects the ecological health of the river and the Avon-Heathcote Estuary.

2.1.1 Actions Sought

-The OHRN would also like to stress the need for ECan, in collaboration with CCC, 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 to have the opportunity to object to the variation to the resource consent on the wastewater overflows into the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River.

2.2 OHRN acknowledges the importance of protecting and restoring native vegetation in the identified priority areas of braided rivers and wetlands. It is vital that we recognise the importance of our unique native species, biodiversity and biogeography in both the rural and urban environment.

2.2.1 Actions sought

-The OHRN would like ECan to provide an analysis of wetlands within the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River catchment and their protection status.

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

-The OHRN would like ECan to develop the concept of an ecological corridor along the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River, from the Avon-Heathcote Estuary to the Port Hills.

2.3 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.

The Port Hills are a major component of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River catchment. We recognise their significance as a biodiversity hotspot and note the proposal in the Annual Plan for a Pest-Free Banks Peninsula rate. This rate will be applied to all rateable properties in the Port Hills, Banks Peninsula and Kaitorete Spit and is \$5 per \$100,000 land value (not capital value) per year and \$0.65 per ha. A large proportion of the Port Hills rateable community will fall within the Ōpāwaho Heathcote catchment.

The control of pests in this area will ensure the success of revegetation projects and the continued survival of existing native vegetation. It will also support the regeneration of freshwater and terrestrial biodiversity within the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River catchment. All these factors will contribute to the ongoing health of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River. For these reasons the OHRN supports the Pest-Free Banks Peninsula rate.

2.3.1 Action Sought

- The OHRN would like to be asked to be consulted on what is proposed under this programme, within the Ōpāwaho Heathcote catchment, and to be involved in the implementation.

3. Regional Leadership

“Maintaining effective relationships; providing evidence-based policy; supporting well-informed decision makers and community; and providing a robust, adaptive, and cost-effective regulatory process that underpins the sustainable management of Canterbury’s natural resources.”

3.1 The OHRN supports the reporting of Mātauranga Māori alongside the State of Environment reporting.

3.2 The OHRN acknowledges the continual support of community groups, such as the OHRN, by ECan. It supports the endeavours of making ‘*available information and ways for the stakeholders and the wider community to engage in decision making.*’ 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 Catchment Baseline Information Project which looks at the catchment, the ecological zones within it, the overarching issues, communities of interest and the actions communities can take to improve the health of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River.

3.2.1 Actions Sought

- The OHRN asks ECan to ensure communities of interest are provided with relevant and digestible information so they can effectively engage in the planning process.
- OHRN seeks funding from ECan for the ongoing development of the OHRN Baseline Information Project for the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River and its catchment.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

We wish to be heard and we look forward to elaborating on our submission at the hearing in April.



Annabelle Hasselman
Chairperson
Ōpāwaho Heathcote River Network