

# SOUTH WAIRARAPA DISTRICT COUNCIL

15 JULY 2015

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## AGENDA ITEM C1

### RAMSAR CONVENTION

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#### **Purpose of Report**

To present to Council a report from Department of Conservation on wetlands of international significance.

#### **Recommendations**

The Chief Executive Officer recommends that Council:

1. *Receive the information.*
2. *Support the application in principal recognising the improvements to the environment that can be gained from this status.*
3. *Request a further report from officers on the wider implications that may arise out of this designation.*

#### **1. Executive Summary**

The attached report from Department of Conservation is self-explanatory.

Council has an obligation to its ratepayers to understand the implications of fully supporting this application.

For example, if the designation was changed there could be implications for adjacent landowners and the costs of applying for resource consents could rise, or the process become more complicated.

The change of status could also have implications on the Featherston wastewater treatment and disposal regime that is planned.

There is insufficient detail at this time to make a fully informed decision.

#### **2. Appendix 1**

Appendix 1 – Proposal for Wairarapa Moana Wetlands to be Recognised as an Internationally Significant Wetland under the Ramsar Convention

Contact Officer: Paul Crimp, Chief Executive Officer

**Appendix 1 – Proposal for  
Wairarapa Moana Wetlands  
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Internationally Significant  
Wetland under the Ramsar  
Convention**

## **Proposal for Wairarapa Moana Wetlands to be Recognised as an Internationally Significant Wetland under the Ramsar Convention**

### **Recommendations**

- a) Note that work on the community initiated proposal for Wairarapa Moana Wetlands to be recognised as a internationally significant wetland under the Ramsar Convention is continuing.
- b) Note Wellington Regional Council have lead the proposal and undertaken a substantial amount of work to prepare the application.
- c) Note the proposal has no statutory implications.
- d) Note the Department of Conservation is still on the process of assessment of whether to put forward Wairarapa Moana as a nomination to Ramsar. The local office intends to brief Senior Management soon and needs to indicate whether or not SWDC supports the community initiated proposal for Wairarapa Moana to be considered as a Ramsar site.
- e) Agree to advise DOC on whether SWDC supports the proposal community initiated proposal for Wairarapa Moana to be considered as a Ramsar site.

### **Report**

Wairarapa Moana Wetlands is a 10,000ha area made up of the beds of Lake Wairarapa and Lake Onoke and the publicly owned reserves around them and one Fish and Game reserve.

The Wetlands have been managed under a joint initiative since 2008. The groups involved at the Governance and Management level include GWRC, DOC, SWDC, Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, Rangitane o Wairarapa Inc and a representative from two local hapu's. There is also a co-ordinating committee which includes landowners, the Lower Valley Development Scheme, Fish and Game, Forest and Bird, Ducks Unlimited, Wellington Conservation Board, local hapu, community restoration volunteers and staff from the partner organisations, including SWDC.

A Ramsar listing for the Wairarapa Wetlands was initially mooted by Forest and Bird in 2001 and has been driven since 2008 by the Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Group. An FAQ sheet on Ramsar and the map of the proposed area is attached.

A substantive amount of the technical work has been undertaken by staff from Greater Wellington's Science department and DOC in Masterton.

DOC has assessed the technical information as proving that the wetland is internationally significant against seven of the nine Ramsar criteria. Only one criteria needs to be met in order for an application to be submitted.

Greater Wellington Regional Council are identified as the site 'nominators'.

The DOC District Office now needs to submit a briefing to DOC Senior Management for them to determine whether or not to put the proposal to the Minister of Conservation. The Minister of Conservation would then decide whether or not to instigate national level consultation. National level consultation would include local MPs, and relevant Government Departments (MPI, MBIE and MfE).

It is important that the briefing accurately capture support of partners and the community.

Consultation has occurred since the application was first proposed. Support has recently been re-iterated by a range of community groups including Friends of Onoke Spit, South Wairarapa Biodiversity Group, Forest and Bird, Fish and Game, Wellington Conservation Board, and Ducks Unlimited. Both iwi who have connections to the Wetlands support the proposal. DOC has recently reached out via letters and phone calls to neighbouring landowners to ensure their views are understood and captured accurately in the briefing. There are varying levels of support amongst farmers – some fully support and others strongly oppose. Many of those opposing it are confusing the regulatory Wellington Regional Council plans and the non-statutory Ramsar recognition being sought.

### Consequences of a Listing

Ramsar status requires the site to be maintained or enhanced. A Ramsar listing would have no statutory effect in and of itself i.e. there would be no changes that agencies or entities would need to make to their management.

The listing would likely attract increased awareness and funding for the Wairarapa Moana Wetlands. This in turn would give the Wetlands and local economy a boost by increasing funding to improve the physical environment and infrastructure and providing a reason for more people to visit the Wairarapa, stay longer and/or spend more.

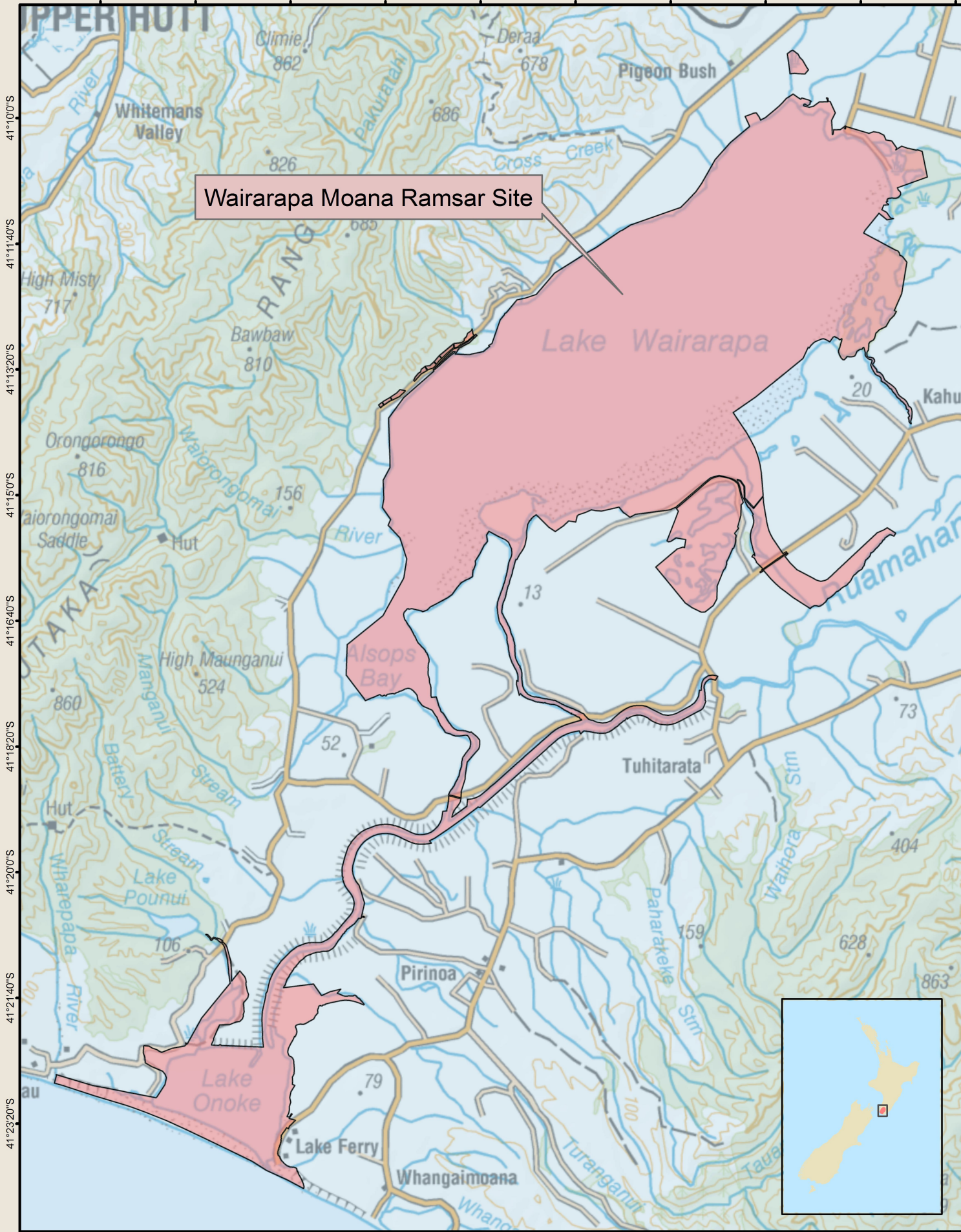
DOC at the District and National Office level is well aware of Wairarapa Moana Wetlands high biodiversity values. Therefore, a Ramsar listing would not result in an increase in the level of attention the Wetlands and the catchment receive from the Department in its advocacy capacity.

A Ramsar status does not change the legislative power that any other management entity has, for example Regional Council.

### Ramsar Criteria

<b>Criteria and Description</b>		<b>Wairarapa Moana</b>
1	A wetland should be considered internationally important if it contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region.	Yes
Criteria based on biodiversity		
2	A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities	Yes

3	A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.	Yes
4	A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.	Yes
Specific criteria based on waterbirds		
5	A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.	No (excluding mallards)
6	A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.	Yes
Specific criteria based on fish		
7	A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity.	Yes
8	A wetland should be considered internationally important if it is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.	Yes
Criteria other		
9	A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species.	No

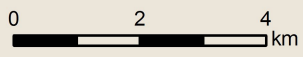


Wairarapa Moana Ramsar Site

 Site Boundary

# Wairarapa Moana Ramsar Site

Not for navigation  
 Crown Copyright Reserved  
 Scale at A4 = 1:120,000  
 Date Produced: 4/03/2015  
 Paul Hughes, Geospatial Services  
 Basemap: LINZ Topo 250  
 NZGD 2000 New Zealand Transverse Mercator



Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*  
[newzealand.govt.nz](http://newzealand.govt.nz)



## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the Ramsar Convention?

The Ramsar Convention provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. It covers lakes and rivers, swamps and marshes, wet grasslands and peatlands, oases, estuaries, deltas and tidal flats, near-shore marine areas, mangroves and coral reefs, and human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs, and salt pans.

So far 168 countries have signed up to it, and 2186 wetlands have been included on its list of *Wetlands of International Importance*.

When a country is a Party to the Ramsar convention, its main commitments (“pillars” of the Convention) are to:

- designate one or more suitable wetlands for the list of *Wetlands of International Importance* (the “Ramsar List”) and ensure their effective management; this includes the requirement to monitor and report on the state of the Ramsar Site(s).
- work towards wise use of all wetlands (in other words – it is not just about Ramsar Sites).
- cooperate internationally on transboundary wetlands, shared wetland systems, and shared species.

More information can be found at: <http://www.ramsar.org>

### What is the New Zealand interest in wetlands?

New Zealand, as a natural resource-based economy, relies on its biodiversity and related ecosystem services. Wetlands provide a broad range of ecosystem services (such as water regulation and provisioning, flood control, water purification and fisheries spawning grounds) that support human wellbeing and many of our primary industries. Careful management and use of these systems is often more cost effective than the development of infrastructure to achieve the same purpose.

### What role does DOC have?

The Department of Conservation (DOC) is the lead New Zealand agency for Ramsar including management, with others, of New Zealand’s six designated Ramsar Sites which cover 55,512 hectares. The six Sites are:

- ✓ Whangamarino
- ✓ Kopuatai Peat Dome
- ✓ Firth of Thames
- ✓ Manawatu River Mouth and Estuary
- ✓ Farewell Spit
- ✓ Awarua Wetlands

### What powers does DOC have at a Ramsar site?

DOC’s legislative powers do not change as a result of a wetland becoming a ‘Ramsar’ Site. Further, a Ramsar status does not change the legislative power that any other management entity has, for example Regional Council.

### Can any wetland become a Ramsar Site?

No. Selection is based on the wetland’s significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology, or hydrology, which is reflected in the Ramsar criteria. The Ramsar Convention has nine such ecological criteria – at least one of those needs to be fulfilled before a site can be considered to be “*of International Importance*”.

Once “International Importance” has been established, other factors come into play to decide whether to develop a formal Ramsar Site nomination: such as the potential for awareness raising, ability to effectively manage, community support, etc. There is a general recognition that management of a Ramsar Site will be most effective if multiple stakeholders are involved and are supportive.

### What is the significance of designation as a Ramsar site in New Zealand?

Some of the main ramifications of designation, in the New Zealand context, are:

- The site needs to be managed effectively. In the New Zealand context this will usually need some form of cooperation between national authority (DOC) and regional and/or district council. It is important to note that a site may already be managed effectively.

## Frequently Asked Questions

- There is an expectation that non-government stakeholders, including iwi and the local community, are involved in governance (ie. decision making processes) and at least some of the management; how this is best done will depend from site to site. Such arrangements may be in place already.
- New Zealand needs to report on the state of the site at regular intervals to the Ramsar Secretariat. This reporting is undertaken by DOC.
- Ecological character of the site needs to be maintained, and if it deteriorates, the deterioration needs to be notified to the Ramsar Secretariat.
- Specifically in New Zealand: a Ramsar Site is added to schedule 4 of the Crown Minerals Act (1991).<sup>1</sup>
- Resourcing management activities at the site (eg. plant pest control) can become easier due to the recognition of the site as internationally significant and the approach to inclusive management and governance.
- The sense of pride of local communities may be boosted by the international recognition.
- Visitor numbers in the region may increase due to the sites International Ramsar status (with potential economic spinoffs).

### **What about wetlands that are not Ramsar Sites?**

The international Ramsar Convention spells out the requirement for sustainable management of all wetlands, regardless of whether they are Ramsar Sites or not. In New Zealand, the main implementation is through the RMA. Moreover, the National Freshwater Statement for Freshwater Management sets out the objectives and policies for managing New Zealand's freshwater resources under the RMA. It requires regional councils (and other relevant local authorities) to manage water in an integrated and sustainable way, while providing for economic growth within set water quality and quality limits.

### **Does designation of a Ramsar Site mean that existing use for fishing, hunting, recreational or sporting activities etc. would have to stop?**

No. Ramsar encourages sustainable use of all wetlands, including those that are Ramsar Sites. Existing activities will be managed and be included in management plans. A Ramsar designation to a site does not give or empower any entity to stop an activity. However, existing or new activities should not lead to deterioration of the values or ecological characteristics of the Site.

### **Does designation of a Ramsar Site mean that it can no longer be used for e.g. flood control or other uses that benefit primary production?**

No, not at all, given that Ramsar encourages sustainable use of wetlands. However, sustainable use implies that the ecological characteristics or values of the Site don't deteriorate and ecosystem integrity is maintained. This in turn means that the Site's benefits will also be available for future generations.

### **What does designation of a Ramsar Site mean for the surrounding area?**

Activities and land use practice in the surrounding area can have a great influence on the state of any wetland, including those designated as a Ramsar Site. Importantly under the RMA, there already is an integrated framework that incorporates the principles of sustainable management. Moreover, the National Freshwater Statement for Freshwater Management sets out the objectives and policies for managing New Zealand's freshwater resources under the RMA.

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<sup>1</sup> Schedule 4 of the Crown Minerals Act 1991 lists public conservation lands (including Ramsar sites) where an access arrangement for petroleum and minerals activity can only be entered into for specific purposes. Specifically, for the purpose of: constructing an emergency exit for an underground mining operation; activities that do not result in stripping of vegetation over an area exceeding 16 square metres or create any permanent impact on the profile of the land; minimum impact activities; gold fossicking; or a special-purpose mining activity. Permission must be sought from the Minister of Conservation before any activity can proceed.