

Natural Heritage Partnership Programme Funding Policy

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1 Introduction

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 \$5,000);
- the Environmental Initiatives Fund or EIF (for project grants \$1,000 to \$40,000);
- the Natural Heritage Fund or NHF (for project grants over \$40,000).

2 Objectives of the Natural Heritage Partnership Programme

The objectives of the Natural Heritage Partnership Programme are:

- Increasing positive biodiversity outcomes across the region.
- Supporting the community to develop and lead their own biodiversity projects.
- Inspiring and educating people in the region to either be involved or supportive of biodiversity work and to understand and place value on it.

The NHPP objectives align with Waikato Regional Council's Strategic Priorities as follows:

Biodiversity and Biosecurity. People working together to protect and restore our unique local native plants and animals, and the indigenous ecosystems they live in:

- Support and empower people to protect and restore the natural environment and taonga species by integrating their efforts with councils and other agencies.
- Work with others to protect ecosystems, human health and economic activities through effective pest management.

Community Connections. Contributing to creating vibrant communities that are well connected with each other.

Beneficial social outcomes are a well-documented positive outcome of community led biodiversity and conservation projects are known to enhance wellbeing among communities and foster social cohesion and connectedness.

The **Natural Heritage Fund** is designed to support community led, collaborative projects that have long term, landscape scale, intergenerational ecological benefits, including assisting in securing public assets and public access.

The **Environmental Initiative Fund** supports community groups undertaking projects which enhance ecological outcomes, or those that provide environmental education and/or raise community awareness of the benefits of preserving and restoring our regions unique native biodiversity.

The **Small Scale Community Initiatives Fund** provides funding to small community groups or individuals undertaking predator control and / or pest plant control. This is primarily aimed at

the purchase of materials to support these activities and includes the ability to allocate a percentage of the funds to one or more sub regional community hubs for distribution to smaller groups or individuals.

For the period 2024-2027, priority will be given to projects that achieve landscape scale outcomes or link to multiple smaller biodiversity projects to achieve landscape scale biodiversity outcomes, and noting that during this period land purchase is not a priority while an analysis is undertaken of how to implement a programme that looks at securing public assets.

3 Funding source and allocation

The revenue for the NHF and EIF is sourced from the natural heritage targeted rate which is set through the Long Term Plan.

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, as any unallocated funds are carried forward to the next financial year.

The NHF allocation will be approximately 80% of the natural heritage targeted rate and the EIF approximately 20%, not including the reserve.

The full project costs (including any multi-year commitments) must be allocated from the year in which the funding was applied for, to ensure surety of funding each year and so that future funding decisions are not constrained. Successful applicants will receive funding in the year in which they need it. External borrowing can be considered for land purchases.

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 allocation is sourced from the uniform annual general charge (also a targeted, per property rate) with a fixed allocation of \$195,000 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
- landowner groups
- educational institutions
- businesses and industries
- individuals (SSCIF only).

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

Those ineligible include:

- Central government departments and agencies and territorial authorities. (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.

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 four years for NHF, and up to two years for EIF); however, a different project can only be funded once any prior project has been successfully completed. Applicants to SSCIF may only be awarded funding for a maximum of three consecutive years and will then be required to take a minimum of one years break before applying to the SCCIF again.

5 Eligible projects and costs

Projects must:

- be located within the Waikato region, noting that funding is available for lands of all tenure;
- have clear objectives that are consistent with Council’s statutory functions, Regional Policy Statement and overall environmental objectives and priorities;
- 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 granted, and the recipient must meet any conditions decided upon by Council;
- 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.

The NHF and EIF will generally contribute to materials, labour costs, contractor costs and costs associated with supporting volunteers. The NHF can also support land purchase and other mechanisms to protect land. The SSCIF will fund materials related to pest plant and pest animal control and up to \$1,000 of contractor labour where this is essential to achieving the outcomes of the project in an efficient and safe manner.

EIF and SSCIF funds will be allocated with the aim of supporting projects that collectively encompass a wide range of ecological and biodiversity outcomes and an even disbursement across the region.

6 Ineligible projects and 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 Council programmes (however; aspects of a project not covered under another programme may be eligible to apply for funding).
- Projects more appropriately funded through other Council 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, other than those funds awarded to sub regional community hubs via the SSCIF.
- 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.

7 Application and assessment process

Only those applications that rank highly against the criteria and have good supporting justification will be funded. Funding will depend on the project's merits and the available budget for that financial year.

7.1 Natural Heritage Fund

There is no formal application process for the NHF. An expression of interest process may be held and interested parties are encouraged to contact Council directly at any time to discuss their projects.

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

Council also reserves the right to use the NHF to progress significant natural heritage projects arising from its core business.

7.2 Environmental Initiatives Fund

A formal application process will be held annually. All eligible projects will be assessed against the assessment criteria by multiple assessors. Assessment scores will be moderated by a moderation panel and external advice may be sought where required.

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

7.3 Small Scale Community Initiatives Fund

A formal application process will be held annually. All eligible projects will be assessed against the assessment criteria.

Multi-year applications will not be considered.

Thirty percent of the available SSCIF funding will be allocated to one or more sub regional community hubs to enable these umbrella organisations to distribute materials for smaller groups to undertake pest animal and pest plant control. This will be reviewed annually, and the percentage allocated to hubs scaled up or down depending on the success of this approach. The intent is to empower hubs to support smaller community groups, enable collective, landscape scale community action, and provide operational efficiencies for both Council and community groups.

7.4 Assessment criteria

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 Māori, groups and other partners and support the building of capacity and capability over time. Groups will need to demonstrate comprehensive monitoring and reporting of their impacts and outcomes.

Only those applications that score highly against these criteria and have good supporting justification will be recommended for funding.

- 1. Fit with Council's regional outcomes, strategic priorities, and policies**

- 2. Environmental enhancement**

How the project will directly promote, enhance or protect the Waikato region's environment, with a focus on improved ecological and biodiversity outcomes.

- 3. Community participation and awareness**

How the project involves iwi Māori, the wider community and increases public awareness of environmental issues. What is the level of mana whenua and community support for the project.

- 4. Collaboration and partnership**

Whether the applicants have explored and developed any opportunities for collaboration and partnership with others, including any co-funding and support from other parties.

- 5. Viability**

The likelihood of the project's success and the applicant's capability to deliver the outcomes of the project.

- 6. Value to mana whenua**

Relative to the scale of the project, how the project involves iwi Māori including their cultural values, interests and associations, the effect on Māori historic heritage or the relationship of Māori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral lands, water, sites, waahi tapu and other taonga including fauna and flora.

7.5 Funding deed

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

7.6 Decisions

Decisions on the NHF will be made as per the Integrated Catchment Management Committee's Terms of Reference.

Decisions on the EIF and the SSCIF will be determined by staff.

Community hubs, responsible for distributing SSCIF funds, will follow guidelines, as a condition of their agreement with Council, to ensure equitable access to materials.

Council decisions on NHPP 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.

8 Reporting on the Natural Heritage Partnership Programme

Quantitative information and qualitative commentary on the NHPP will be reported to Council each year. The aim of this reporting is to attempt to demonstrate the value and benefits of the funds to the region.

9 Review of the Natural Heritage Partnership Programme

It is anticipated that the Natural Heritage Partnership Programme and associated Funding Policy will be reviewed at least every three years in line with the Long Term Plan.

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.