

Chairperson and Committee Members

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

9 JUNE 2011

Meeting Status : Public

Purpose of Report: For Decision

RATES REMISSION FOR CONSERVATION PURPOSES

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To report on the rates remission applications for the 2010/2011 year and seek approval for recommended allocations.

SIGNIFICANCE OF DECISION

- 2 The recommendations in this report do not trigger the Council's significance policy.

BACKGROUND

- 3 As part of the Annual Plan for 2003/04, Council approved a policy for rates remission for land protected for natural and cultural conservation purposes (Attachment 1 to this report CS-11-148). This is included in the 2009 Community Plan as part of the Rates Remission Policy.
- 4 The rates remission policy supports the provisions of the Kāpiti Coast District Plan regarding incentives for heritage feature management and protection. It recognises that most heritage features are already protected by rules in the District Plan and encourages landowners to maintain, enhance and protect heritage features by offering a financial incentive.
- 5 The granting of a rates remission as an incentive for encouraging the protection and management of heritage features is consistent with Council's responsibilities under the Resource Management Act 1991 and the Historic Places Act 1993. It is also consistent with Community Outcome 1: 'There are healthy natural systems which people can enjoy'.
- 6 Historically the fund has been consistently oversubscribed, leading to an increase of funding for rates remission for natural or cultural conservation purposes from \$15,000 in 2007/08 to \$25,550 in 2010/2011.
- 7 A total of 89 ratepayers benefited from the policy in 2009/2010, and the land area to which remission applied totalled 464.2 ha. Having applied successfully for rates remission, ratepayers continue receiving it provided they follow approved management plans designed to protect the natural and cultural values of their sites.

- 8 The Rates Remission for Conservation Purposes programme was advertised in local media in April, 2011. Two new applications were received and are recommended for approval. They have been added (marked with an asterisk) to the list of recommendations included as Attachment 2 to this report CS-11-148.
- 9 The first application is for a 2.9ha wetland at 231 Te Hapua Road, Ōtaki, listed in the Heritage Register of the District Plan as Ecological Site KO57. The wetland is part of the regionally significant Te Hapua wetland complex, and provides habitat for *Eleocharis sphacelata* ('bamboo spike sedge', 'kuta') a tall sedge valued by Māori for weaving. The wetland also contains open water-reedland-sedgeland-scrub wetland associations that are under-represented in the district. The owners have fenced off the wetland and planted extensive buffers to restore its values. They have participated in a collaborative wetland restoration programme for Te Hapua Road landowners run by Greater Wellington Regional Council and Kāpiti Coast District Council and are committed to wetland conservation.
- 10 The second application is for a 1.5ha wetland at 233 Te Hapua Road, Ōtaki, which is also listed in the Heritage Register of the District Plan as Ecological Site KO57, because its hydrology and ecology are linked to the nearby wetland at 231 Te Hapua Road. The two properties are owned by the same landowner.

CONSIDERATIONS

Principles of Rate Remission for Conservation Purposes

- 11 The following sections will discuss the principles of rates remission, a range of funding scenarios will be presented in a table, and a recommendation made on the levels of rates remission for 2010/2011.
- 12 The main principle behind the rates remission programme is to recognise the conservation efforts of ratepayers and the positive contribution their actions make to the district's cultural and biodiversity values.
- 13 The owners of these properties are often motivated solely by the desire to protect and manage their environment, and their actions are voluntary. Many are keen conservationists while others may fence off a bush remnant as the pasture gain is negligible or to better manage stock movement. Whatever their motivation, addressing significant pressures such as stock grazing or noxious pests has a positive impact on the Kāpiti Coast environment.
- 14 Landowners could use the rates rebate for the upkeep of stock-proof fencing or pest animal and weed control, but in most instances the amount of remission is far less than the true cost of these activities.

- 15 Rates remission is an added incentive for landowners to respect the conservation values in the situation where that property has a legal protection mechanism in place. The provision of rates remission also provides a good basis for an ongoing partnership between Council and the land owner.

Calculation of Rates Remission

- 16 Rates remission amounts are calculated according to the size of the heritage feature as shown in Table 1. This method is coarsely related to the level of contribution towards the environment as larger areas of forest or wetland are generally more significant. This does not take into account, however, the presence of rare and endangered species or the amount of time and effort put into management.
- 17 This method allows an adjustment to the level of remission using minimum, medium and maximum remission bands as shown in Table 1. The selected band applies to all recipients. This year's budget allowed for a 2.2% increase in remission levels to compensate for inflation, and this increase is applied to all remission bands.

Table 1: 2010/11 Level of Remission vs Feature Size (Including 2.2% Inflation Adjustment from 2009/2010).

Size of total protected area/feature (ha)	Minimum rates remission possible (\$)	Medium rates remission possible (\$)	Maximum rates remission possible (\$)
Up to 1.0 ha	\$59	\$89	\$119
1.001 – 5.0 ha	\$116	\$177	\$237
5.001 – 10.0 ha	\$174	\$266	\$356
10.001 – 20.0 ha	\$232	\$355	\$474
20.001 – 30.0 ha	\$290	\$443	\$593
30.001 – 40.0 ha	\$348	\$532	\$711
40.001 – 50.0 ha	\$406	\$621	\$830
50.001 – 70.0 ha	\$464	\$709	\$948
70.001 – 100.0 ha	\$522	\$798	\$1,026
More than 100 ha	\$580	\$887	\$1,186

- 18 The Rates Remission Policy will be subject to review as the Long Term Plan is developed in 2011/12. This will include reviewing the mechanism by which the level of remission is determined, i.e. the minimum, medium, and maximum remission levels shown in Table 1.
- 19 Council approved the application of the maximum band of rates remission for the 2009/2010 year.
- 20 Given that applying the maximum band results in modest levels of remission (\$237 for areas between 1.001ha and 5ha, and most areas are smaller than 5ha), applying bands that reduce current levels could undermine the programme.
- 21 The amount of rates remission allocated if the maximum band is applied is within the budget of \$25,550. Therefore it is recommended that the maximum band of remission is applied, resulting in allocation of \$23,436 for Rates Remission for Conservation Purposes in 2010/11.

Financial Considerations

- 22 There are no other financial considerations.

Legal Considerations

- 23 There are no legal considerations.

Delegation

- 24 The authority to make a decision on whether to grant rates remission for conservation purpose is described in the Rates Remission Policy Part 8: Rates Remissions for Land Protected for Natural or Cultural Conservation Purposes, included in Part Two of the 2009 Community Plan, pp 121-123:

Any decision on whether to grant remission on rates will be at the discretion of the Council Committee responsible for the Council's environmental and natural heritage portfolio (at the time of adopting this Policy this is the Environment and Community Development Committee).

Consultation

- 25 There are no consultation considerations.

Policy Implications

- 26 There are no policy implications.

Publicity Considerations

- 27 A media release will be prepared to publicise the Council's decision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 28 That the Committee approves a 2.2% inflation adjustment to the bands of rates remission as shown in Table 1 of report CS-11-148.
- 29 That the Committee approves the maximum band of rates remission to the properties set out in Attachment 2 to report CS-11-148 in accordance with Council’s Policy for Rates Remission for Land Protected for Natural or Cultural Conservation Purposes.

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ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix 1 – Policy on Rates Remission for Conservation Purposes

Appendix 2 – Properties recommended to receive Rates Remission for Conservation Purposes in 2010/2011, and recommended amounts.