



Heathcote River Vision  
Communication Team  
Christchurch City Council  
P O Box 237  
Christchurch

Attn: John de Zwart, Project Manager

## The Heathcote River Vision

### Submission of the Avon Heathcote Estuary Ihutai Trust

The Avon Heathcote Estuary Ihutai Trust thanks the City Council for the opportunity to comment on the proposals set out in the pamphlet titled “The Heathcote River Vision”

The Trust congratulates the Council for its recognition of the iconic status for the City of this waterway and for committing funds to develop this vision. Further, for embarking on a new staged programme of improving the amenity of river margin areas - beginning with the section of river between Colombo St and Hansen Park in Opawa.

#### The Trust's interests in the Heathcote River

The Trust's Constitution (2002) includes in its objects the achievement of “...healthy working ecosystems for the Estuary and its catchments...” Further the Trust in its Management Plan (2004) states that references to the Estuary in the Plan should be read as encompassing the Estuary **and its catchments**. Clearly, land use activities in the Heathcote catchment impact greatly the water quality and quantity in the Heathcote and its ecological health. Small headwater and side streams are particularly easily damaged. Most of the contaminants that enter the river at various points along its course end up in the Estuary. These include silt from inadequately controlled earthworks and organic compounds and heavy metals from untreated runoff from roads.

The Trust considers that the Heathcote River is under considerably greater degradation pressures than the Avon. It is therefore focusing its efforts on arresting the decline of the Heathcote.

The Trust's main focus in making this submission is on advocating for a vision statement and accompanying implementation plan to restore and sustain the whole Heathcote waterway. (How we would like to see this undertaken is set out later in this submission.)

The Trust has few comments to make on the local amenity enhancement works which the pamphlet also seeks feedback on. While those works will bring desirable improvements to the amenity of local neighbourhoods the Trust does not consider them fundamental to achieving the restoration of the aquatic values of the river. That is dependant on obtaining changes to land and drainage management practices over the whole length of the river system. The Trust is supportive of the local amenity works provided the wider issue of protecting the aquatic values of the whole waterway is urgently addressed by the Council.

### The Trust's special relationship with Christchurch City Council

The Trust has a special relationship with the Christchurch City Council. The elements of this relationship are set out in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which was signed in 2003 by the Chief Executive of the Council and the Chairman of the Estuary Trust. The City Council also appoints a member to the Trust's Board. The full MOU can be read on the Trust's website at [www.estuary.org.nz](http://www.estuary.org.nz)

Provisions of the MOU relevant to this submission include the following:

#### *GOALS*

*(c) implement the Ihutai Management Plan to achieve Integrated Environmental Management of the Estuary and its catchments.*

#### *CODE OF CONDUCT*

*The parties agree that in working together under the MOU they will:*

*-Work together in good faith to identify options and initiate and achieve outcomes.*

*-Inform each other and share information, resources and expertise....*

#### *STAFF IMPUT*

*While the Ihutai Management Plan is being developed and implemented there will be ongoing involvement of CCC... staff.*

The Trust finds it surprising in the light of the existence of this MOU that that it has never been approached about this project by council officers. This is despite the project having an engagement strategy and an engagement team. The Trust learnt of the project and the opportunity to comment on the brochure from an article in a suburban newspaper.

The MOU reflects the new mode of councils working in partnerships with community groups that is envisaged by the new Local Government Act with its focus on Community outcomes.

The Trust asks that it be involved in all further discussions that take place regarding the development of the vision for the waterway and in any other policies, plans and

engineering works that are proposed for the River including its tributaries. The Trust is keen to develop project partnerships with the Council.

### The form of the current project as described in the pamphlet

The Trust is having difficulty relating the Council's formulation of this project with normal approaches to integrated catchment management. The project set out in the pamphlet appears to comprise two largely unrelated sub-projects with completely different characteristics and requirements.

The development of a vision statement for the Heathcote River would require two years and would require extensive consultation over the whole catchment and beyond. It would develop goals and policies, and methods to achieve those. On the other hand a project involving budgeted works for amenity purposes for a specific section of the river is a project of an entirely different nature: one of much lesser significance and potential benefit from a City-wide perspective. Consultation is mainly focused on proposed works rather than on goals and policies and implementation methods. A faster timetable would be possible and a different mix of skills would be needed on the project team.

### Towards a Vision Statement and Implementation Plan for the Heathcote River and its catchment

The Trust believes that a vision statement and implementation plan are urgently required if degradation of the Heathcote River system is to be arrested.

Previous attempts at visions and catchment wide plans for the river have been well intentioned and have achieved some environmental improvements. But they have not been successful in halting the flow of the most serious contaminants to the river. Also the springs and shallow groundwater seeps which provide much of the water for this river continue to be lost to land developments. This limited effectiveness probably stems from the projects being based in individual units of the Council and not being binding on all units.

To protect the aquatic qualities of the Heathcote River will require an integrated approach to land use controls and storm water management that would guide the activities and practices of all units of the Council.

The Trust believes the development of such a vision should be a priority for the Greenspace Unit. The Trust asks that the Manager of the Greenspace Unit take a proposal to the Council's chief executive for a Community Outcome and work programme focused on the restoration of the Heathcote River to be included in the Long Term Community Plan. The proposal would include establishing a cross council project

team led by a manager who would report directly to the senior management team. In line with the philosophy of the local Government Act the vision and implementation plan would be developed in partnership with the community. Project plans would be developed that included fairly tight timeframes for achieving changes to land use management practices and controls and consequent improvements to the River.

Such an approach would spearhead an integrated catchment approach to environmental management and would be a vanguard project towards a sustainable City and for partnership projects with the community.

The Trust would be pleased to work with the Council in scoping and developing such a vision and action programme.

Some more specific issues for consideration in the preparation of a vision and implementation plan

Some issues that would need to be addressed include the following

- The Urban Development Strategy as it affects the Heathcote catchment. The draft document appears to contain very little appreciation or analysis of the affects of land development on the health of waterways
- The prevention of sediment from earthworks from reaching the contributory drains and streams that flow into the river.
- The pretreatment of stormwater from roads to prevent toxic organic and inorganic chemicals reaching the waterway.
- Effective means of trapping toxic spills and other pollutants before they reach the river, and regular maintenance of these.
- The protection of the springs and seeps in the headwaters that feed the river from being disrupted by developments.
- The development of retention basins.
- The limiting of impervious surfaces and the development of retention basins so that flows are maintained and peak flood flows attenuated.
- The removal of silt from waterways and the reestablishment of gravel bottoms needed for fish spawning
- The enhancement of the river ecology including the native fishery and the re-establishment of mahinga kai.

## Protecting the biodiversity of the Heathcote River

In September 2004 the Trust made a comprehensive submission to the Greenspace Unit, on its draft biodiversity strategy for the City. Comments the Trust made that have a bearing on the Heathcote River, and the preparation of a vision and implementation plan are reproduced below in italics.

*-Ki Uta Ki Tai (From the Mountains to the Sea) The Trust strongly supports this whole-river approach. The Trust has defined its area of membership and activities to include the catchment areas of the Avon and Heathcote rivers including their headwater streams and springs. The Trust is working closely with Ngai Tahu in the delivering its programmes. Specific funding needs to be set aside to allow environmental values of importance to Ngai Tahu to be identified and for co-management to be developed and sustained. For example with respect to mahinga kai species.*

*-Fish ( pages 40-41) The Trust endorses the identification of pollutants as a major factor in the ability of fish to survive in the City's waters. The reduction of pollutants is a priority area of activity for the Trust..... Also the need for monitoring fish species in the rivers.*

*-Freshwater Invertebrates ( pages 42-42) The decline of invertebrates in recent years as a result of pollution from land uses will require a sustained commitment across Council working groups if it is to be halted and reversed. The Trust intends to advocate strongly for this to be a major area of Council activity. This plan should give greater emphasis to the problem and to how it will be addressed across Council.*

### ***-The Ihutai management plan 2004 contains the following relevant goal and targets***

**GOAL 2:** *Healthy ecosystems are sustained in the Estuary and its surroundings*

*Targets for this goal include*

*Target 7: Water quality in the Estuary and its rivers supports healthy aquatic ecosystems.*

*Target 8: The incidence of macro-algae as a nuisance in the Estuary is continuously reduced.*

*Target 9: The Estuary provides a healthy and safe ecosystem for birds.*

*Target 10: Estuarine fish populations are monitored and restored.*

*Target 11: Healthy estuarine invertebrate populations are restored and enhanced.*

*Target 12: Waste and contaminants entering the Estuary are continuously reduced.*

*Target 13: Protect, enhance and increase the natural areas of the Estuary and its catchments.*

*- In keeping with the Whole of Council approach encouraged by the Local Government Act and advocated by this Trust we would like to see the Council Senior Management Team take the opportunity to consider whether some more strategic City-wide programmes - which will deliver no less benefits to biodiversity and hopefully considerably more - can be developed and funded.*

*-As part of this more strategic approach the Trust would like to see a Whole of Council approach taken to protecting and enhancing the City's waterways including the Estuary.*

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## Summarizing the key points in our submission

- The project set out in the pamphlet to which the Trust is responding appears to consist of two largely unrelated sub-projects with completely different characteristics and requirements.
- The Trust is supportive of the local amenity works being proposed provided the more fundamental issue of protecting the aquatic values of the whole waterway is urgently addressed by the Council.
- The Trust believes that a Vision Statement and Implementation Plan are urgently required if degradation of the Heathcote River system is to be arrested.
- To protect the aquatic qualities of the Heathcote River will require an integrated approach to land use controls and storm water management that would guide the activities and practices of all units of the Council.
  
- The Trust asks that the Manager of the Greenspace Unit take a proposal to the Council's chief executive for a Community Outcome and work programme focused on the restoration of the Heathcote River to be included in the Long Term Community Plan. The proposal would include establishing a cross-council project team led by an appropriately skilled manager who would report directly to the senior management team. In line with the philosophy of the local Government Act the vision and implementation plan would be developed in partnership with the community. Project plans would be developed that included tight timeframes for achieving changes to land use management practices and controls and consequent improvements to the river.
  
- Such a bold approach would be a vanguard project for:
  1. Integrated environmental catchment management
  2. The pursuit of a sustainable City
  3. Partnership projects as envisaged in the new Local Government Act

- The Trust would be pleased to work with the Council in scoping and developing such a vision and action programme.
  
- The Trust asks that it be involved in all further discussions that take place regarding the development of the vision for the waterway and in any other policies, plans and activities affecting the Heathcote River system

The Trust would welcome the opportunity to discuss its submission with council staff, councillors, and community groups with an interest in restoring the Heathcote waterway.

Yours faithfully

Alex Drysdale  
CHAIRMAN

*Further details about the Trust, its Constitution, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and the Trust, the Trust's Management Plan, and its activities can be found on our website at [www.estuary.org.nz](http://www.estuary.org.nz)*

Address for service  
P O Box 2657  
CHRISTCHURCH  
Telephone 379-2257