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Committee Environment Committee
Author Geoff Skene Manager, Environmental Education

Billion tree initiative - Greater Wellington tree planting

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee about the “Billion Tree Campaign” and the potential for greater Wellington’s trees to contribute to the mitigation of climate change.

2. Background

The Billion Tree Campaign is an initiative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It came about through a suggestion by Professor Wangari Maathai, founder of Kenya’s Green Belt Movement that the world should commit to planting a billion trees in 2007. This was taken up by the UNEP and has been promoted worldwide. The reasons for the campaign are to contribute towards the mitigation of the effects of climate change, combat deforestation, stabilise soils, provide habitat, and so on.

Worldwide, deforestation occurs at the rate of around 13 million hectares per annum – an area about the size of Greece. However, forest planting and the natural expansion of forests reduces this to a net loss of some 7 million hectares. The forests of Europe are expanding and there is large scale forestation in China which has turned around the deforestation trend in Asia. Interestingly, the net loss worldwide in the 1990s was approximately 8.9 million hectares per year.

In New Zealand, the initiative was taken up by the Trees for Survival Trust in Auckland, which contacted Greater Wellington in February, asking for support. Organisations and individuals “pledge” trees to the initiative. These need not be trees that are new or additional to an organisation’s regular tree planting programmes. Hence there are no costs in planting trees for Greater Wellington as part of the initiative over and above those already budgeted for.

At the start of May, the goal was reached with 1,810,666,222 trees pledged and 1,010,613,063 trees planted worldwide, but the campaign is continuing.

3. Greater Wellington's contribution

Greater Wellington plants a significant number of plants and trees every year. This occurs through our forestry operations, in parks, alongside streams and in dunes and wetlands through our environmental restoration initiatives (*Take Care, Streams Alive*), on farms to combat soil erosion and implement farm plans, in school revegetation projects, and so on. However, whilst hundreds of thousands are planted, a significant proportion does not survive in the long term or cannot be counted as part of this campaign. Many are thinned or harvested (in forests), and many are not so much "trees", as grasses, flaxes, shrubs and related species for wetlands and dunes. There are also natural losses that occur through competition from weeds, pest animals, and environmental conditions (storms, drought etc).

After allowing for these factors, it is expected that Greater Wellington's tree planting in 2007 will be approximately 204,000. These have been pledged to the campaign. At the present time, the trees associated with the work in Transmission Gully have not been included in this figure. Transit NZ estimates that around 30,000 trees are planned to be planted there this year but this number has yet to be confirmed.

4. Memorial trees

At the last Environment Committee meeting, the question was raised as to whether Greater Wellington might establish a scheme to plant trees on Council land as a memorial for a person, to celebrate the birth of a child, or for a similar purpose. This question has also been raised as part of the Billion Tree Campaign by the New Zealand organisers. This idea was investigated by the Council some years ago but it was not proceeded with because of its cost. However, a scheme was set up whereby regional residents can purchase and plant a totara tree in a regional park to "celebrate life". The \$30 cost includes a totara sapling, certificate and maintenance of the tree. The scheme commenced in 2003.

5. Trees and climate change

The calculation of our overall annual planting volume raises questions about the contribution being made by the Council to the region's carbon footprint, as well as its own footprint. Does the number of trees planted balance or cancel out the carbon used by Greater Wellington to power its activities? What more could or should be done by way of revegetation to assist the region to reduce its footprint or attain a carbon-neutral status? Can the tree planting undertaken by schools be credited against the energy consumed in their day to day operations? How can we assist businesses in our sustainable business programmes which want to offset their emissions through planting? How much of our parks and forest land could qualify for carbon credits through the new Permanent Forest Sink Initiative, recently launched by the Government?

These are large questions, which don't yield immediate answers. Government policy is still being worked out on these topics and there are scientific questions around such issues as the rate at which carbon is sequestered by

native species and pine trees. Work is underway with some pilot schools to look at their energy use and the potential to be “carbon neutral, as part of the *Take Action for Air* programme. Officers have also been following developments as the policy and science of permanent forests sinks have been progressed and are considering the potential for this on Greater Wellington land.

6. **Communities for Climate Protection**

Greater Wellington has recently joined the Communities for Climate Protection programme. This programme will assist us to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the Council’s operations (and can also be applied in the community) through a strategic milestones framework. The milestones require us to assess the organization’s greenhouse gas emissions, set emissions reduction goals, and develop and implement a plan to achieve those goals. It is expected that this process will provide many of the answers to the questions above and will be integrated with the next Long Term Council Community Plan.

7. **Communication**

The Billion Tree Campaign was launched publicly on April 27th. A press release on Greater Wellington’s contribution is being prepared and the campaign will appear in Elements in June. We are also promoting it in schools and with care groups.

8. **Recommendations**

That the Committee:

1. ***Receives the report.***
2. ***Notes the content of the report.***

Report prepared by:

Report approved by:

Geoff Skene
Manager, Environment
Education

Nigel Corry
Divisional Manager,
Environment Management