

Biodiversity Advisory Group

1 December 2025



Biodiversity Advisory Group Minutes – 1/12/25

Minutes of a meeting of the Biodiversity Advisory Group held on Monday 1 December 2025, in the Wakanui Room, 2 Baring Square East, Ashburton, commencing at 1.00pm.

Present

Councillors Richard Wilson (Chair) and Deb Gilkison.

Edith Smith, Val Clemens, Mary Ralston, Simon Waugh, Donna Field, Robb Stevens, Barry Austin, Joe Butler, Sally Stevens, Gen de Spa and Kim Wall.

Also present: Cr Julie Moffett

In attendance

Toni Durham (GM Community & Open Spaces), Ian Soper (Open Spaces Manager), Dr Christian Chukwuka (Ecologist/Biodiversity Advisor), Linda Clarke (Communications Advisor) and Phillipa Clark (Governance Team Leader).

Christian introduced Bill Martin – the Canterbury Regional Coordinator for the NZ Landcare Trust. Based in Christchurch, Bill works with catchment and community groups across the region to support projects that protect and enhance biodiversity, soil and water quality. He is attending today's meeting to learn more about the Ashburton Biodiversity Group, local initiatives and to explore opportunities for collaboration.

Presentations

- 1) Lake Heron Conservation Society – Kai Tegels and John Evans
- 2) Biodiversity Credit System – Duncan Ensor

1 Apologies

Mayor Liz McMillan, Cr Phill Everest, Sarah Mason, Mike Salveson, Ian Fraser and Angela Cushnie.

2 Extraordinary Business

Nil

3 Declarations of Interest

Nil

Presentations

5 Pest Trapping at Lake Heron

Kai Tegels and John Evans presented information on the Lake Heron Conservation Society's trapping programme.

The Society has approximately 120 traps, concentrated mainly on the water shore. The presentation showed the types of animals being caught, notably the increased number of weasels, cats and possums since 2018.

The Society continues to rely on volunteers to run the trap lines.

5 Verity NZ – Biodiversity Credit System

[Verity NZ](#) is a subsidiary of Verity Nature led by Duncan and Fee Ensor, high country farmers from the Rakaia Gorge.

Duncan outlined the company’s role in supporting landowners and partnering with communities to develop and manage long-term carbon projects with the aim of achieving environmental, social and economic benefits. They also partner with local communities and landowners to restore nature and combat climate change.

The current focus is on green carbon – using the carbon credits system. Part of marketing Verity’s project involves putting information in front of people showing the quality of NZ product (projects must comply with all 10 of the core carbon principles to qualify).

A current case study (South Island Black Hill Station) has 19 field trial plots being monitored. Data is being collected on different regeneration methods under different conditions with the aim of identifying the optimal regeneration project design.

Another case study (Chatham Islands natural regeneration project) aims to remove barriers to native plant growth. This project has an independent A Rating that attracts attention and a premium.

The presentations concluded at 1.57pm.

6 Biodiversity Advisory Group Terms of Reference review

Minor changes have been made, including reference to the annual biodiversity grant being removed. It is no longer a requirement for grant applications to be referred to the Group before going to Council.

Recommendation to Council

That Council adopts the Biodiversity Advisory Group Terms of Reference for the 2025-28 term.

Gilkison/Austin

Carried

7 Ecologist / Biodiversity Advisor’s Report

• Biodiversity Strategy Actions Implementation update

The proposal to establish an Environmental Champions Award was supported. The intention is to recognise people, especially landowners, in the district who have demonstrated outstanding commitment to biodiversity conservation and restoration, and environmental initiatives.

The proposed criteria will be referred to Council for consideration.

Recommendation to Council

That the Biodiversity Advisory Group supports the establishment of an Environmental Champions award and recommends that this award category be included in Council’s Community Honours Awards.

Gilkison/Wilson

Carried

• Biodiversity Grant applications 2026

Group members were reminded that the next round of applications will open in February. The biodiversity grant limit is \$7500 with the applicant contributing 50% of the project cost.

That the Ecologist/Biodiversity Advisor's report be received.

Gilkison/Smith

Carried

- **Ashburton Water Zone Committee disestablishment**

Toni Durham reported that disestablishment of the Ashburton Water Zone Committee means that funding for environmental and biodiversity projects is no longer available. The Water Zone Committee had been responsible for administering funding from the CWMS Action Plan budget.

The Biodiversity Advisory Group may want to consider lobbying ECan or making a submission on Council managing the defunct Water Zone Committee community funding.

8 Group updates

Brief verbal updates were provided from each of the organisations present.

Forest & Bird representatives thanked Christian for assistance that Council has provided at the Harris Scientific Reserve, including provision of labels and signs being used to identify special plants display at the Harris Scientific Reserve, including *Aciphylla subflabellata* with conservation status "At Risk – Declining".

Next Meeting

Tuesday 17 February 2026, 1pm.

An invitation will be extended to Nicky Snoynk and Professor David Norton to speak about the impact of wild pigs and ungulates on the district's biodiversity. Forest & Bird have observed the detrimental effect of animals grazing on native biodiversity in the foothills.

The meeting concluded at 2.50pm.