

Kai Iwi Lakes Dune Lakes Galaxias Working Group update

Meeting: Taharoa Domain Governance Committee
Date of meeting: 11 August 2020
Reporting officer: Mark Schreurs, Policy Analyst

Purpose/Ngā whāinga

To update the Taharoa Domain Governance Committee (the Committee) on the work of the Kai Iwi Lakes Dune Lakes Galaxias Working Group (the Working Group).

To seek agreement to provide a written request to the Department of Conservation (DOC) to establish a Threatened Species Recovery Group for the Dune Lakes Galaxias (DLG); and to invite them to increase their participation in protecting the DLG and restoring the Taharoa Domain.

Executive summary/Whakarāpopototanga

The Working Group last met on 07 July 2020; notes are in **Attachment A** to this report. At this meeting the Working Group discussed the progress they had made to date with their research projects, which are nearing completion. The Working Group discussed how best to present the findings of their research and concluded that collating the findings of the different research streams into a comprehensive report, was not necessary. Instead, each research project is to be reported on individually and to a high standard.

The Working Group considered the future of their work and the struggle they have had to resource their research projects. It was agreed that the best approach would be to ask DOC to establish a Threatened Species Recovery Group for the DLG.

This would consist of a panel of leading scientists in the areas of freshwater ecology and non-migratory galaxiids. The Recovery Group would prepare a Recovery Plan for the DLG and advise on management actions. To this end, the Committee could task the Recovery Group to report back within a specified time frame with an advised direction on if trout releases should be continued or discontinued in order to protect DLG.

The Working Group also agreed that the Committee should write to DOC inviting them to participate further in efforts to protect the DLG and to restore the Taharoa Domain. It was considered that this might help to leverage additional funding and resourcing from DOC.

Recommendation/Ngā tūtohunga

That the Taharoa Domain Governance Committee:

- a) Notes the report 'Kai Iwi Lakes Dune Lakes Galaxias Working Group update, and its Attachment A.
- b) Requests that staff write to Department of Conservation (DOC) to set up a Dune Lakes Galaxias Recovery Group, based on the DOC Threatened Species Recovery Group model, to advise on the Dune Lakes Galaxias recovery and to seek advice from DOC on the steps needed to undertake this; and
- c) Requests staff write to the Department of Conservation inviting them to further assist with the recovery of Dune Lakes Galaxias and the wider restoration of the Taharoa Domain.

Context/Horopaki

The Kai Iwi Lakes (Taharoa Domain) Reserve Management Plan (the RMP) was adopted in 2016 and included the direction that trout releases will cease in all lakes by 2018 with monitoring of effects on native species. *NB Trout cannot breed in the lakes so regular releases are needed to maintain the population.*

The Northland Fish and Game Council (Fish and Game) had submitted to the Draft RMP opposing this direction. When the RMP was adopted with the above direction, Fish and Game threatened a judicial review to the High Court but asked to meet first to resolve the matter out of court.

Before the meeting was held, a literature review, Gee and Franklin (2017) was completed by NIWA at the request of the Northland Regional Council. It found past studies had failed to identify conclusively if the exclusion of trout from the lakes would result in an increase or decrease in the Galaxias population. The report recommended that the balance that existed between the species in the lakes should not be altered (i.e. it recommended trout releases should continue) until more was known.

A meeting was held on 2 May 2017 between Fish and Game, the Taharoa Domain Governance Committee (the Committee) and their respective legal advisors. The parties agreed to:

- a) do more research into the interactions between fish species in the lakes;
- b) defer ceasing trout releases due to the new information received in the Gee and Franklin (2017) report and provided the Committee was satisfied with the progress of further research; and
- c) to defer taking legal action.

The Kai Iwi Lakes Dune Lakes Galaxias Working Group was subsequently established to oversee this research.

The Working Group includes representation from the Kaipara District Council, Northland Fish and Game Council, Te Roroa, Te Kuihi, Department of Conservation and Northland Regional Council. NorthTec also attend the meetings and have been the primary research provider.

According to the terms of reference, the prime purpose of the Working Group is to “*ensure the long term survival and abundance of the Dune Lake Galaxia (DLG) at Taharoa Domain*”.

The Working Group has been meeting since 2017, (typically around three meetings per year depending on requirement).

The Working Group has succeeded in initiating a number of research projects which are overseen collaboratively by the Working Group’s constituent members. These projects have largely been focused on understanding the food web and other interactions between fish species in the lakes.

The Working Group anticipate they will be able to report on the findings from most of their research programmes to the Committee by the end of 2020, and the others in early 2021.

Discussion/Ngā kōrerorero

At the 28 May 2020 meeting of the Taharoa Domain Governance Committee, members of the Committee signalled they were dissatisfied with the progress of the Working Group’s research. Consequently, the motion to grant approval to Fish and Game to proceed with the 2020 annual trout release was lost, with Fish and Game being instructed that they may not release trout in 2020.

In response to this decision, the Working Group at its 07 July 2020 meeting considered firstly, what monitoring can be put in place to ensure that, if this decision negatively impacts the wellbeing of the DLG, this can be identified in time for intervention. This additional monitoring will be undertaken by DOC, building on a review of their monitoring methods as well as previous research by NorthTec.

Secondly, the Working Group considered how they can better achieve a greater understanding of the DLG and its environment. The conclusion they came to is that the lack of resourcing they experience is preventing them from achieving the outcomes desired by the Committee. It was

determined that better outcomes could be achieved if DOC were to establish a Threatened Species Recovery Group (Recovery Group).

A Recovery Group is a working group established by DOC as a way for experts on the species to share knowledge and make informed decisions about the best way to save this precious taonga species. If formed, this group would comprise leading scientists in the fields of freshwater ecology and non-migratory Galaxias conservation.

The Recovery Group would work towards preparation of a Dune Lakes Galaxias Recovery Plan. This plan would include recommended actions to manage this species.

In addition, the Committee would be able to task the Recovery Group to provide a recommendation within a given timeframe, on whether trout releases should be continued or discontinued in order to best protect the DLG.

It should be noted that DOC previously set up a Threatened Species Recovery Group to look at non-migratory galaxiid fishes, including the DLG. This group completed a *New Zealand non-migratory galaxiids fishes recovery plan 2003-13*. This previous work would provide a good foundation for preparing a dedicated DLG recovery plan.

At the Working Group meeting, DOC staff signalled there may be a willingness to form such a Threatened Species Recovery Group if requested by the Committee. They also indicated that the Committee could consider inviting DOC to assist further with efforts to protect the DLG and to restore the wider Taharoa Domain ecosystem. It is therefore recommended that the Committee request staff write to DOC to this effect.

The Working Group finished their meeting after reviewing the full suite of research and monitoring programmes currently underway at the Taharoa Domain and considering if these are sufficient. The Working Group concluded that these programmes were broadly sufficient.

The Working Group also discussed how they will report their findings to the Committee. Previously the Committee considered engaging NIWA (the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research) to collate the findings of the various research streams into a single comprehensive report. The Working Group concluded that this was unnecessary. Instead, a full report will be prepared presenting the findings of each of the individual research programmes.

The meeting notes from the Working Group's 07 July 2020 meeting are included with this report as **Attachment A**.

Options

Option 1: Instruct staff to write to DOC requesting the Department establish a Threatened Species Recovery Group for the DLG.

Option 2: Status quo – continue to rely on the Kai Iwi Lakes Dune Lakes Galaxias Working Group to provide insights on the management of the DLG.

Option 3: Enhanced status quo – increase resourcing of the Kai Iwi Lakes Dune Lakes Galaxias Working Group to provide insights on the management of the DLG.

Option 4: Instruct staff to write to DOC inviting them to increase their participation in protecting the DLG and restoring the Taharoa Domain environment.

Option 5: Status quo – continue to protect the DLG and restore the Taharoa Domain with the current level of support from DOC.

The recommended options are **1 and 4**. This approach is anticipated to achieve better results through accessing greater resources and expertise from DOC as well as through the benefits of collaboration.

Policy and planning implications

The Working Group is working towards implementing the RMP by contributing to a greater understanding of the Lakes' ecology. This contributes to a number of actions under the RMP.

Inviting DOC to participate further in protecting the DLG and restoring the Domain environment, including requesting that DOC establish a Threatened Species Recovery Group for the DLG, would further contribute to implementing the RMP.

Financial implications

Inviting DOC to participate further in protecting the DLG and restoring the Domain environment will increase the resources available to this initiative.

If DOC establish a Threatened Species Recovery Group for the Dune Lakes Galaxias it will allow for input of scientific and technical expertise which the Working Group and the Committee are presently unable to afford to purchase.

Risks and mitigations

There is the risk that DOC may decline these requests. In which case, greater resourcing of the Working Group or funding for independent research may be necessary.

Significance and engagement/Hirahira me ngā whakapāpā

The decisions or matters of this report do not trigger the significance criteria outlined in Council's Significance and Engagement Policy, and the public will be informed via agenda on the website.

Next steps/E whaiake nei

Staff are to write to DOC regarding the establishment of a Dune Lakes Galaxias Recovery Group and inviting DOC to further assist with protection of the DLG and restoration of the Taharoa Domain.

A further meeting of the Working Group will be called to discuss DOC's response, the progress that is being made with the Working Group's research and next steps.

Attachments/Ngā tapiritanga

	Title
A	07 July 2020 Kai Iwi Lakes Dune Lakes Galaxias Working Group Meeting Notes