

Royal Wellington was the second course in New Zealand to achieve GEO certification and is a leader for other golf courses wanting to contribute to the environment and sustainability



Environmental management expert Kate

Torgersen took time during the Australasian Turfgrass Conference to visit the recently GEO-certified Royal Wellington Golf Club.



PHOTO: ROYAL WELLINGTON GC

**A**fter returning from the inaugural Australasian Turfgrass Conference in Wellington, New Zealand, it's a perfect time to showcase Royal Wellington Golf Club and the achievement it recently made in attaining certification from the GEO Foundation.

For those who may not be familiar, GEO stands for Golf Environment Organisation. The GEO Foundation is a not-for-profit entity dedicated to helping golf to deliver and be recognised for having a positive impact on people and nature. GEO provides three programmes and also administers golf's sustainability assurance – GEO Certified® – available for golf facility operations, developments and renovations.

Royal Wellington was the second course in New Zealand to achieve GEO certification and is a leader for other golf courses wanting to contribute to the environment and sustainability.

Royal Wellington is situated 25 kilometres north of the Wellington CBD and provides a parkland transition between residential areas of the Upper Hutt township and the Hutt River. It blends well with the surrounding environment largely due to its stands of podocarp (conifer) forest, mix of native and exotic trees, impressive wetlands and waterways that meander through the site. The introduction of larger, naturalised areas that complement the beautiful presentation of the course occurred throughout the remodelling of the course from 2011-2013.

The course has an operating plan that sets out a vision, principles and practices that is updated regularly and presented to new maintenance employees on commencement. Some aspects included in the plan are locations of no mow zones, identifying suitable buffer zones from waterways, waste treatment options for washing machinery and grass clippings, just to name a few.

The certification includes all aspects of the club. Other departments have contributed to the achievement by investing in water-saving technologies, such as dual flushing toilets, and

transitioning into energy saving technologies, such as changing to LED lights and installing sensor lights. This is exactly what GEO searches for when certifying clubs.

While attending the conference, I caught up with Royal Wellington superintendent John Spraggs who was more than happy to discuss the GEO certification process.

**How did you find out about GEO?** I had seen endorsement from The R&A in a newsletter and enquired about using the GEO Foundation's 'OnCourse' as a tracking template programme. We commenced with OnCourse, then that model changed and I left it in limbo until I saw it again in The R&A newsletter. We reconnected with Will Bowden from Auckland-based company SSDM who guided me/us through the process.

**Why did Royal Wellington GC want to become GEO certified?** Royal Wellington was the first club in New Zealand to get 'Royal' status (there is currently only one other) and it's important that we are seen as driving the way forward with things like this. It started out as a nice feel. I wanted to be seen to be doing good things to the environment as there are many negatives associated around what we do. GEO appealed as it offers a whole of operation report not just a focus on agronomics.

**What sectors from the club were involved in the process?** Involvement in the process was from all departments, from the CEO to office staff, kitchen staff, pro-shop, operations and course maintenance staff. All departments jumped in on the process from light bulb replacement through to altering pest control strategies.

**Do any staff have to be specially trained for the certification?** No, not at all. I think we have subconsciously been working in caring for the environment and have been sustainable for a long

time. We just needed to get that compiled into reports that ticked the right boxes to say that we were of a certifiable standard.

**Was the process difficult?** I thought the process was very good. We had assistance from Will Bowden (SSDM) and he helped guide us through the processes. The only challenge was gaining numbers from Golf Operations personnel around their division. I can't speak highly enough of GEO and would love to see NZ Golf take it on board and offer to all golf facilities.

**Are your members aware of the certification? Are they supportive?** Certainly the committee is. Members are aware, however, we should be promoting it more throughout the club and highlighting the commitment we have made.

**Were you able to gain any financial support (e.g.: grants) from any stakeholders?** No, this offers no incentives from funders or local councils, but it should be recognised by them. Perhaps in the future there may be an option for us.

**How long does the certification last? Will the club re-apply?** Certification lasts three years from memory and yes we will continue to renew it.

**How much native vegetation do you have and what projects have you undertaken?** We have approximately 3ha of native areas that are regenerating. We have no spray zones, introduced 28 beehives and have 72 stoat (introduced mammal pest) traps spread around the course all in the hope of helping our environment. We have what is thought to be the oldest kahikatea tree in the greater Wellington region in the centre of one of our forest areas. It is thought to be 500 years young – quite majestic. I have thoughts to creating a board walk into it to minimise foot pressure on its roots.

**What has Royal Wellington gained by becoming certified?** I believe that it has opened our eyes by being more conscience of what we are doing. We

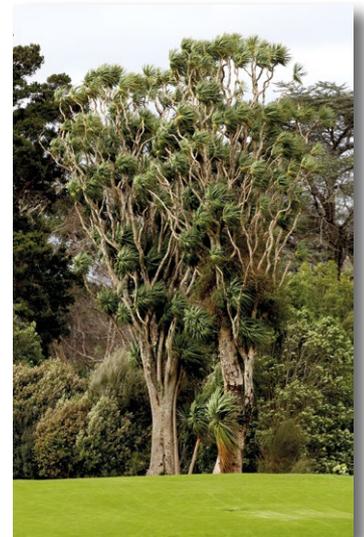


were already doing a lot right, but GEO certification just proves that we were. We are also currently working with Audubon International to get certified with them as well. Audubon is more course-related. It's a lot of fun, but like everything you've got to find the time to devote to it to do it properly. My aim over the next 12 months is to complete that process and hopefully become the second course in the country behind Cape Kidnappers to be Audubon certified.

**Royal Wellington Golf Club blends well with the surrounding environment largely due to its stands of podocarp (conifer) forest, mix of native and exotic trees, impressive wetlands and waterways that meander through the site**

Kristine Kerr from Kura Golf Course Design was the GEO verifier for Royal Wellington. Kerr visited the site throughout the process and submitted a verification report last September. In her report she stated; "The facility is well maintained and on the golf course there is a balance between the high expectation for playing experience and natural/naturalised areas – large stands of podocarp forest, streams with buffer zones and native riparian edge treatments... Royal Wellington takes its water use and care seriously and engaged one of New Zealand's leading environmental consultancies to provide a 'Stream Care Plan' for the waterways."

A copy of the full report can be viewed through the GEO website <https://sustainable.golf/>. Congratulations to all involved at Royal Wellington in achieving GEO certification; it is a testament to their dedication in providing a sustainable future for one of New Zealand's most historic courses. 🙌



## Gippsland Premium Quarries

### Rosedale Gold Turf Sand Now Available!

Rosedale Gold is a quality stand-alone turf sand that can be blended to achieve USGA standards, or used as the perfect base material for other soil blends

#### Rosedale Sand features:

- Consistent particle distribution
- Neutral pH
- Hydraulic conductivity

**We also supply - Water Services Association of Australia approved filter, pipe embedment and drainage products.**

Our sands are a non-dazzling beige colour, perfect for all sporting applications.

Contact **Ian MacPherson** to discuss your requirements  
03 5626 6499 [enq@gpq.net.au](mailto:enq@gpq.net.au) [www.gpqquarries.com.au](http://www.gpqquarries.com.au)



Washed Sand Products - 5626 6499  
[www.gpqquarries.com.au](http://www.gpqquarries.com.au)