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Report to the Environment Committee
from Dr Jane Bradbury, Divisional Manager, Environment

Divisional Manager's Report

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee about the activities and progress of the Environment Division and about any matters which have arisen since the Committee's last meeting.

2. Manager's Reports

The Department Manager's reports and the Divisional Accountant's report are attached.

3. Resource Consents Performance Indicators and Benchmarking

At the Resource Managers Group's meeting on 17 March, the Group approved a number of resource consent performance indicators and performance standards. These have been developed by a small team of regional council staff (Rob Forlong was a member), in order to achieve more consistency across all regional councils and to develop best-practice procedures. The proposal is to trial these indicators and, pending approval by the Regional Chief Executive's Group, all regional councils will take part.

Rob Forlong has put a lot of work into developing these standards and I would like to formally acknowledge his input.

4. New Zealand Planning Institute Conference 2000

The above conference, entitled "Welcome to the Future", will be held 17-20 May 2000 in Christchurch. The conference includes a half-day session specifically for Councillors. This has been set aside at the start of the conference to ensure that these representatives do not miss out on the main programme. I have attached the preliminary programme to this report and am asking whether any Councillors are interested in attending the conference.

5. **Emergency Management Group**

As mentioned in Rian van Schalkwyk's report, the Minister of Civil Defence recently made some announcements about Emergency Management Groupings. We were looking forward to getting some clarity, as this legislation seems to have been in limbo for quite some time.

The Minister announced that the Emergency Management Groups would be formed around existing regional council boundaries, and that regional councils would be the administrative authorities for these groups. Later discussions with staff of the Ministry for Emergency Management, however, revealed that we were not necessarily limited to regional council boundaries and that there was still room for local solutions!

I am reluctant to go ahead formally with our EMG, until we have the legislation in place. It seems futile to expend time and resources in setting up an entity that could soon be changed by legislation.

Nevertheless, the best way forward is probably to develop a model that suits our situation and work with the Ministry of Emergency Management to ensure that the model will be permitted by legislation. Together with Stephen McArthur from The Hutt City Council, I intend to work with Local Government New Zealand to find a way to progress this further.

I must add, however, that the emergency management officers of the Region have begun to work effectively as an informal EMG. Understandably, these officers are frustrated and want to get on with formally establishing an EMG. However, for reasons already outlined, I want to be sure that our model has the support of Central Government.

6. **The New Government and the Environment**

There is every indication that the new Government is more environmentally aware than any Government we have had for a number of years. For the Committee's information, in their election promises Labour stated that they will:

- strengthen and refocus the Ministry for the Environment
- subject Government policy to formal environmental assessment
- expand the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment and refer all of the Commissioner's reports to relevant Select Committees
- support democracy and decision making by ensuring that councils or their chosen delegates retain control over the planning and consent process (ie, rescind suggestions of commissioners being appointed at the discretion of resource consent applicants)
- split the Resource Management Bill and bring back to the House a small Bill addressing widely agreed and urgently required amendments, including a right of review against non-notified decisions

- search out ways of improving the access of communities and iwi to planning and consent processes
- develop a series of national policy statements in such areas as energy, Treaty, sustainable land management, tourism, and others
- provide direct assistance to some units of local government who are experiencing difficulty with their resource management responsibilities
- ensure adequate mediation services are available
- enable community groups to apply for a capped legal aid fund for use at an Environment Court hearings and provide funding for a 'community environmental advocates network'
- ensure a significant increase in environmental research
- require accurate reporting of serious environmental accidents compulsory
- progressively develop 'natural resource accounts' to the point where they can stand alongside national accounts as part of the budget
- ensure that environmental education is integrated into all areas of the school curriculum
- instruct the Ministry to investigate how central government can most effectively support and strengthen urban sustainability work at regional and local government level, including ensuring that the ability to control urban sprawl and development under the RMA is retained
- place all waste management on a full cost recovery basis and upgrade all existing landfills to agreed standard (or have them closed) by 2010
- establish a waste reduction working party funded by a modest levy on landfills and work towards a target of 40% reduction in the solid waste stream by 2010
- set up a 'clean up' fund for orphan contaminated sites
- introduce a landcare scheme and develop, in consultation with local authorities and landholder groups, sustainable land management standards and goals
- set up an enquiry into the impact of climate change on all sectors in New Zealand.

In my view, one of the challenges for us is to achieve a relationship with Central Government so that we have national consistency and local flexibility. At present there seems to be some discordance between regional councils and the Ministry as to respective roles. It is up to us to work co-operatively and to recognise respective areas of expertise. There is no doubt that if this Council carries through with its environmental stance there will be a real chance for regional councils to enhance their environmental management performance.

7. Recommendation

That the reports from the Divisional Manager, the Departmental Managers and the Divisional Accountant be received.

That the Committee consider nominating a Councillor to attend the Environment 2000 Conference in Christchurch from 17 – 20 May 2000.

Report prepared by:

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Attachments