

7 December 2007
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Minutes of the Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee held in the Committee Room, Greater Wellington Regional Council, 34 Chapel Street, Masterton, on Thursday, 6 December 2007, at 4.00pm.

Present:

GWRC Councillor Ian Buchanan (Acting Chairperson), Andy Pottinger, Jamie Falloon, Peter Gawith, Jenny Boyne, Michael Blundell, Emily Crofoot.

GWRC Officers Present:

Geoff Dick, David Cameron.

WHAC 1 Apologies

There were no apologies.

WHAC 2 Background to the new Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee

Cr Buchanan began the meeting with a background to the formation of the Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee. It came initially from a public meeting held in Masterton in September 2006 and was officially recognised and brought into the Council's committee structure in October 2007.

There are a number of national initiatives announced recently that clearly indicate a significant role for this committee. These initiatives are based around climate change, afforestation, and hill country erosion, as part of a suite of government initiatives that has been worked on over the last 18 months. An example of this is the National Policy Statement on Flood Management.

The primary aim of the committee is to offer to the Wairarapa hill country farming community an opportunity for input, both into policy

development and operational activities. The committee will also have the ability to recommend investigations and will be fully supported in the first instance by the Catchment Management Division of Greater Wellington, and secondly by wider Council support. This wider Council support has been recognised in the formation of the new Catchment Management Committee to which the Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee will appoint a member.

Cr Buchanan answered a number of questions from members. Specifically, these related to the numbers of elected and appointed members on the Catchment Management Committee, and whether these appointed members are embedded into the structure of the Catchment Management Committee. Cr Buchanan responded that for many years the appointed members have felt poorly done by in relation to opportunities to be part of Councillor workshops, information, and meeting invitations. It was clear that the mandate for the appointed members now included such activities and they would play a greater role in the running of the Catchment Management Committee.

The appointed members can be expected to be well informed. They will receive a lot of information and over time the amount of information they receive may well reduce once their roles and understanding of the committee activities is better understood.

Cr Buchanan was also adamant that the Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee survived through the committee formation process because of the positiveness that was seen to surround the formation of the Committee. It wasn't seen as a threat and therefore could be expected to be well received in the outcomes and resolutions that come from it.

In terms of the new Councillors, it was clear that hill country issues presented a steep learning curve for them, and it was anticipated that Councillors would be party to a large number of workshops and these would be integrated with the Committee meetings. Committee meetings were expected to be held throughout the region and would not be solely held in Masterton.

Considerable discussion then took place on the concept of total catchment management, how this would fit in with the committee structure and how it would fit in with the new Catchment Management structure. Particularly, members of the Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee were interested in the resources required and clearly based these questions on a feeling that land management had been under-resourced since 1989. There was a strong feeling that now was the opportunity to reinstate the appropriate level of funding to achieve the desired outcomes.

Cr Buchanan, under questions from the floor about economic viability of farming, responded that the process of total catchment management

would allow the rural community to flourish within an overall framework of sustainability and that he would be making every endeavour to ensure that farming in the Wairarapa hill country was not compromised through the total catchment management approach.

WHAC 3 Afforestation grant scheme

David Cameron spent some time explaining the details of the afforestation grant scheme and covered the areas where this scheme may add benefit to the current programmes run by Greater Wellington. Specifically, these were programmes around the control of erosion in the hill country.

It was unsure where pole planting fitted into the afforestation grant scheme and members sought clarification of how pole planting might be included in such a scheme.

Members were also keen to learn on how each different vegetation class might be covered by both the afforestation grant scheme and any emissions trading scheme that would result from these government initiatives. Of particular interest was how poplars and willows would be dealt with and what would be the situation regarding the regeneration of scrub land into bush.

WHAC 4 Hill Country Erosion Fund

David Cameron presented details of the components of this fund and how it might apply to the various programmes that were run by Greater Wellington in the Wairarapa hill country.

There was a clear mandate from members that human resources on the ground are the piece that is currently missing. If there was an opportunity through any of the new funding initiatives to increase that resource they should be explored with vigour. Resources not only covered staff but also the development of further supplies of poplar and willow poles.

In the discussion that followed, both the afforestation grant scheme and the hill country erosion fund were discussed as complementary programmes that Greater Wellington could take advantage of. It was clear that they were complex in themselves and for landowners to come to grips with the intricacies of the programmes it was important to get clear and concise information out to these landowners so that the decision-making was made easier. Further information sought by landowners included information on what the overall emissions level might be from a farm on a stock unit basis. This information was sought for the next meeting. Once this information was available then landowners would be in a better position to look at their emissions level and the two schemes on offer to see which one best fitted their

circumstances and how that might meet the requirements regarding balancing their emissions budget.

The closing date for the first round of applications into both these government funds is 8 February 2008 and members felt that there was little time for effective consultation and that a broad level application should be put in. This would require the Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee to convene prior to that date so that they could look over the draft documents and make comments as required.

There were three main areas in which the applications should focus.

- (1) Target money for increasing grants rates for erosion control planting.
- (2) Increase resources to build up the number of Farm Plans and the level of consultation with clients.
- (3) Speed up the process of converting Farm Plans to Land Environmental Plans.

WHAC 5 Poplar and Willow Supply

David Cameron gave an update on the current supply of poplars and willows from Greater Wellington's own nurseries.

Options for the future to increase this supply included discussions with the owners of the Aokautere Nursery in Palmerston North, ongoing discussions with the Masterton District Council as regards the Homebush sewerage treatment site, and the possibility of purchasing other land in and around the Akura Conservation Centre.

Members sought to be updated again at the next meeting on progress with each of these options.

WHAC 6 Chairperson of the Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee

Peter Gawith was nominated and seconded for the position of Chairperson of the Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee.

Moved Andy Pottinger/seconded Emily Crofoot

That Peter Gawith be appointed to the position of Chairperson of the Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee.

This was received unanimously.

The second stage of this process was to formally nominate Peter Gawith as a member of the Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee to sit on the Catchment Management Committee as an appointed member.

Again, this was moved and seconded unanimously.

Moved Jamie Falloon/seconded Emily Crofoot.

The next meeting of the Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee will be held at 3.30pm on Monday 4 February 2008, in the Committee Room, Masterton office, Greater Wellington Regional Council.

The meeting closed at 6.10pm.