

## **Report 99.321**

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Report to the Environment Committee  
from Geoff Skene, Manager, Environment Co-ordination

### **Regional Policy Statement Implementation 1998/9**

#### **1. Purpose**

To inform the Committee of progress in implementing the Regional Policy Statement during the 1998/9 financial year.

#### **2. Background**

This is the fourth annual report on progress in implementing the Regional Policy Statement (RPS). Like last year's report, this one looks broadly at the contributions being made to implementation by departments across the Regional Council. This report complements other reports on RPS projects which have come before the Committee throughout the year and my six weekly Manager's report on RPS projects.

The actions that have been taken over the last year flow from the RPS Implementation Plan and other work in response to environmental issues. The Implementation Plan contains a list of all the methods in the RPS and identifies the time frame during which work on each method will be carried out. A number of implementation actions are on-going throughout the life of the RPS. Others have specific start and completion dates.

#### **3. Achievements**

Implementing the RPS is not about 'ticking off' items on a list of methods. Rather it is about taking action to meet the document's expected environmental objectives and outcomes. There are, of course, too many of these to report on here. In any case, that it is the job of the state of the environment reporting programme, and the annual and 5 yearly reports set up to do that.

However, the work that is done to implement the RPS each year, by staff in the implementation team in Resource Policy, by others in the Environment and

Wairarapa Divisions, and by many more across the Council in their normal day-to-day work, is done to achieve a result - addressing an environmental problem.

This year's report describes what has been done from this perspective. In doing so it makes reference to all of the methods specifically listed in the Implementation Plan for 1998/9 so that Councillors can be assured that the requirements of the Plan have been met. In addition, it describes a number of actions taken to give effect to RPS methods which the Implementation Plan gives no fixed dates to. However, for the sake of explanation and of brevity, it does not describe everything that has been done by the Council. As nearly everything that the Council does could fall under the rubric of the RPS's policies and methods, to report on them here would be overkill and pointless.

In the following paragraphs the letters and numbers in parentheses denote the relevant RPS method. For example, FW 12, is method 12 of the Freshwater Chapter.

### 3.1 **Using water**

Progress in implementing the water conservation provisions of the RPS was reported to the Committee at its May meeting (Report 99.207). A major initiative is the study of crop water requirements now under way in the Wairarapa (FW 8). A draft water allocation plan for the Waipoua River was completed with minimum flows and recommended restrictions for water takes (FW 4, 9). Though not a regional plan, the plan provides information for consent holders and for Council staff processing consent applications.

In the Hutt Valley, a study of the Moera Aquifer (undertaken last year but reported in September 1998) revealed its potential for water supply purposes (FW 13). A more significant investigation of the aquifer will be carried out in 1999/2000. In addition, work was done to improve our knowledge of the location of bore holes in the Hutt Valley and gain a better understanding of its geology (FW 13). By the end of the month we will have completed an internal report on how to promote the sustainable use of groundwater amongst users (FW 16). We also contributed to a national project to develop bore drilling standards and produce useful information for people wishing to drill bores (FW 16).

In the Wairarapa, low river and stream levels caused by low rainfalls meant irrigation restrictions were placed on nearly 30 consents on 10 rivers over the summer (FW 7). In the Wellington area, the Utility Services Division continued to promote its water conservation message (FW 9).

### 3.2 **Water quality**

The RPS puts considerable emphasis on keeping our rivers and streams clean and in good ecological condition. Whilst the annual freshwater quality report for 1998-9 is not yet available (it is due in September), work on the State of the Environment Report indicates a mixed picture with little change generally. Nevertheless, improvements are occurring in some areas, and the actions we are taking now should lead to greater improvements in the future.

Staff of the Resource Investigations Department completed a follow-up study of faecal contamination and turbidity in the Waikanae River at Otaihanga in February and another study of Hulls Creek in Upper Hutt in March (contributing to FW 22 and 24). Consequential work in relation to the Waikanae at Otaihanga is progressing in co-operation with the local tangata whenua and the Kapiti Coast District Council.

Our investigation of the Waiwhetu Stream's water quality was reported to the Committee in September (Report 98.411). As the investigation showed, the Waiwhetu has many problems. As a small step towards improving its aquatic environment we have worked this year on a riparian strip at Te Whiti Park. Planting will take place in the spring when the locally sourced seedlings have grown to a suitable size (FW 22, Eco 12). A stream bank clean up involving the local school also took place in May. In the longer term a more concerted effort will be required; an investigation of the options is still in progress but will be reported to the Committee shortly. Provision has been made in next year's budget for further work on this stream.

In the Wairarapa progress in improving water quality has been made on a number of fronts throughout the year. As farm based effluent discharges into the Whakawiriwiri stream are converted to land, the health of the stream has improved markedly (Report 99.258) (FW 22). Only three consents to discharge to the stream remain in the catchment. Elsewhere on the Ruamahanga plain, work is being done to convert another 35 dairy effluent discharges from water to land. The majority of owners plan to change to land within 2-3 years. The Carterton sewage treatment plant has been granted resource consents which should lead to an improvement in the quality of the Mangatarere Stream (FW 17). The renewal of the Wairarapa's remaining urban sewage treatment pond consents will be an important focus over the next two years or so.

The annual farm effluent surveys have occurred in both halves of the Region (FW 17, 28), with a more focused approach in the Wairarapa stemming from the decision last year to concentrate on problem areas and monitor in spring rather than summer (Report 98.306). This has delivered a truer picture of the levels of groundwater contamination by nitrates than we had previously. Some 24 farms were found to be not complying with their consent conditions and required follow-up. In the western part of the Region, 60 farms were inspected. About 10 per cent of these have built up a compliance record sufficient to proceed to a reduced level of monitoring in future (under the Charging Policy). Only 6 farms operating under the General Authorisation remain; all were discharging satisfactorily to land when inspected.

The subdivision of Wairarapa land continues apace, with implications for water quality. Council officers assess and make submissions on both notified and non-notified consents, with a strong emphasis on ensuring adequate on-site effluent disposal (FW 28), as well as dealing with stormwater, flooding, and erosion issues. On-site effluent is an issue for some parts of the west coast as well. This became apparent through our survey of territorial authorities for Built Environment Method 5 on integrated urban management (see below).

Considerable effort has been put into education and information to help clean up water quality. Much of the work of the Pollution Response services in both parts of the Region has to do with showing people how to look after water (FW 28). A “pollution card” which gives handy hints on avoiding domestic pollution will be printed before the year’s end. Staff have attended field days and addressed groups, provided information to schools, and continue to check on how resource users are exercising their consents (FW 21 and 28).

As in previous years, the Trees for Survival programme continues to contribute to the Council’s riparian management goals, as well as reducing bank erosion (Soil 7) and teaching young people about water care (FW 21).

Freshwater method 35 (the preparation of guidelines for conflicting river bed uses) is identified in the Implementation Plan as an *optional* method for 1998/9. With little apparent demand for this and a full work programme, we chose not to initiate work on this method this year. However, conflicts between users is included in the river management code of practice mentioned in the next section.

### 3.3 Soil

The methods in the Soil Chapter describe much of the work that is carried out by the Wairarapa Operations Department. The RPS Implementation Plan refers to nearly all of these methods as “ongoing”. However, Method 2 (prioritise soil conservation works) is identified for implementation in 1998. Using the NZ Land Resource Inventory, soil conservation priorities were reassessed to target Council funds at more highly erodible land. Seven Class VI units and 8 Class VII units were selected as target land classes with more severe forms of erosion.

The RPS promotes the use of education and non-regulatory methods where these would be effective in improving resource use. In relation to soils and minerals, Method 4 promotes guidelines and codes of practice for activities such as gravel extraction, turf farming and river and forestry management. An Environmental Code of Practice was completed in March for river management in the western region. This document provides guidance for the management of routine activities, including gravel extraction. Guidelines for topsoil mining were included within the Regional Soil Plan and a report prepared for the Committee in February on the potential for Council involvement in this activity in future (Report 99.29).

Method 9 of the Soil Chapter commits the Council to investigate the potential of “other policy mechanisms”, such as economic instruments for managing erosion. The Implementation Plan proposes these be investigated in 1998/8 or after the completion of the Soil Plan. In practice, a variety of economic instruments was assessed when the Soil Plan was being prepared. The Background report to the Plan explains their usefulness. In addition, the Council continues to provide incentives for soil conservation works under the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act 1941. These include the preparation of property conservation plans and sustainability plans for the control of hill country erosion and wind erosion, and annual expenditure programmes in support of these plans. In the year to May 1999, this amounted to around \$85,000.

### 3.5 Air Quality

The ambient air quality monitoring programme continued at various locations throughout the western part of the Region (Air 3[1]). The monitoring station has recently been moved to Masterton.

An emissions inventory is also being developed to identify the relative contribution of various types of emissions to the Region's overall pollutant loadings. Stage Two of this exercise - covering the domestic sector - is expected to be completed by 30 June 1999 (Air 3[2]). This progress is consistent with the Implementation Plan, as amended by the Committee. In addition, we have established a meteorological station in the Hutt Valley to determine the factors that influence the dispersion of contaminants (Air 3[3]).

### 3.6 Ecosystems

Significant progress has been made this year in implementing the ecosystems provisions of the RPS. Relevant work includes:

- The development of the concept of the "ecological approach" and its application to the Council's resource management activities. This has been developed across the Council, with widespread buy-in from the relevant Managers. It has considerable potential to implement the ecological principles of the RPS and we hope it will be considered further through the Long Term Financial Strategy.
- The Regional Plant Guide. This is reported on elsewhere in this Order Paper (Eco 14, 15).
- A submission on the Government's Draft Biodiversity Strategy.
- A report on the "state" of the Region's ecosystems and biodiversity for Councillors. A similar chapter has been written as part of the State of the Environment Report (Eco 1).
- Field checks to verify the information we hold on remnant bush ecosystems in Kapiti, Porirua, and Upper Hutt (Eco 10).
- The enhancement of two important habitats, the mouth of the Kakaho Stream at Pauatahanui and the Te Whiti Park reach of the Waiwhetu Stream (Eco 11, 12).
- A discussion paper on linking corridors within the Region. This is the first stage in the investigation of this concept. Work is proceeding and will be completed on schedule.
- The preparation of a background paper on ways to manage wetlands. This will be used to inform our use of the ecological approach (FW 48).
- The draft Environmental Strategies for the Waikanae and Otaki Rivers. These have been adopted by the Landcare Committee and will guide any ecological enhancements on these rivers in future (Eco 13).
- The continued management by Landcare staff of our indigenous forests as ecosystems. The asset management plans in preparation will also help improve the management of Council owned ecosystems (Eco 12, 13).
- The replanting in natives of a substantial area at the Te Marua water treatment facility (Eco 11).

The prioritising of ecosystems for management (Eco 10) has been completed in part this year. Important sites that have been identified through the Key Native Ecosystems programme (KNE) and by the Department of Conservation have been placed on a computer database. However, the recognition that the Council's ecosystem work might be amended through the long term budgetary process, means that this work will now be completed next year. This was agreed to by the Committee in amendments to the Implementation Plan (Report 99.124).

The KNE work is of critical importance to the Council achieving its RPS ecosystem objectives (Eco 7 [2], 12, 14, 15). Work in a number of areas has continued throughout the year and is regularly reported to the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee (see, for example, Report 99.84) . All of the known KNE sites within the Region have now been surveyed, although others may come to our attention as retirements of farm bush blocks occur. Some 11,000 ha has been treated this year with some of the major areas being Carterton East, Nga Manu, the Porirua Scenic Reserve, Khandallah Park, and the Haywards Scenic Reserve. In other areas the bovine TB programme (which gives effect to Eco 7) is expected to be completed on schedule.

### 3.7 **Heritage**

As Councillors will be aware, we have reported on the national framework for heritage management several times in the last 18 months and have activated the Regional Heritage Liaison Group to keep interested parties informed of progress. We are still awaiting the final schema of the Historic Heritage Review. The possibility that the legislation associated with this could change the Council's powers led us to recommend (Report 99.124), and the Committee to approve the recommendation, that an investigation into the need for a regional heritage plan be deferred pending the resolution of the review. The Implementation Plan had scheduled this for 1998/9.

### 3.8 **Natural Hazards**

Consistent with the requirements of the Implementation Plan, we have assessed the potential impact on the Region of climate change (NH 6) and the Council made a submission on the Ministry for the Environment's Domestic Policy Options Statement. The Committee will recall choosing to rethink its involvement in climate change matters as part of the Council's Long Term Financial Strategy assessment.

A study to determine the hazard associated with the transport of petroleum in the Region was completed (and reported to the Committee in May. Report 99.202). This study gives effect to Natural Hazards Method 10. Method 7 (making information available) was given effect to with the publication in The Dominion of the comprehensive earthquake hazard maps. In addition, members of the public and territorial authorities have continued to seek information from us on the Region's hazards (NH 7).

### 3.9 **Energy**

The Council's achievements this year in this area were reported to the Committee at its last meeting (Report 99.210). The possibility of a regional energy forum (E 8) was considered by the Committee (as mentioned in the Implementation Plan) but the idea was put on hold pending the outcome of the Long Term Financial Strategy.

### 3.10 **Waste Management and Hazardous Substances**

The only methods specifically identified in the Implementation Plan for 1998/9 are those relating to unwanted agrichemicals. Their implementation was amended by the changes made to the Implementation Plan in March. The methods will either be reconsidered as part of the Long Term Financial Strategy or when the RPS is reviewed in 1999/2000.

### 3.11 **Built Environment**

We are currently finalising our work on the potential for integrated management of the resource management issues facing the largely urban local authorities of the western region (BE 1, 5 [1 & 4]). This will be completed shortly and will be reported to the Committee at its next meeting.

## 4. **Conclusion and Priorities for 1999/2000**

Together, all of these actions have contributed to the Council meeting the requirements of the Implementation Plan for 1998/9.

As prefaced at the budget meeting of the Committee, we consider the priorities for 1999/2000 for the Environment Division's RPS work to lie in the following general areas:

- water quality, particularly the Waiwhetu Stream;
- ecosystems – further development of the ecological approach for the Council, the prioritisation of our ecosystem work, practical enhancements of the Kakaho and Horokiri stream mouths, and the Te Whiti Park reach of the Waiwhetu, and further work on linking corridors;
- Trees for Survival, including the Battle Hill riparian strip;

The Implementation Plan for 1999/2000 is not particularly directive although it does include one or two other methods which we will also address during the year.

## 5. **Communications**

The completion of the year's RPS tasks focuses attention on the diversity of the Council's activities. Communicating that diversity could prove difficult in a press release, given the range of topics and the ongoing nature of much of the work. However, it would be possible to highlight specific aspects, such as some of the ecological work (for example, the Kakaho Stream rehabilitation) or the changes in discharge practice which aid stream quality.

**6. Recommendation**

*That the Committee accepts the Report as evidence of the Council's implementation of the Regional Policy Statement for 1998/9.*

Report prepared by:

Approved for submission:

GEOFF SKENE  
Manager, Environment Co-ordination

JANE BRADBURY  
Divisional Manager, Environment