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Committee Rural Services and Wairarapa  
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## Wairarapa Hill Country Liaison Group

### 1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of the concept for a Wairarapa Hill Country Liaison Group and to seek the Committee's endorsement to proceed with its formation.

### 2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report do not trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

### 3. Background

A public meeting was held in the Cody Lounge, Masterton Town Hall on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2006. The meeting was called by the Wairarapa branch of Federated Farmers following extensive damage to the Wairarapa hill country in the storms of 4-6 July 2006. The meeting was attended by 70 people with Wairarapa farmers making up 75% of the audience.

Outcomes from the meeting included:

- Secure additional poplar and willow poles to meet existing client demands within Annual Plan provisions.
- Seek additional staff resources to meet existing demand and
- Consider the formation of a Wairarapa Hill Country Liaison Group.

The first two outcomes have been achieved with the inclusion of a new land Management Officer position in the 2007/08 Annual Plan, and the securing of a five year supply of poplar and willow poles from the Aokautere nursery in Palmerston North.

## **4. Importance of Land Management**

The Wairarapa hill country covers some 400,000 hectares or 45% of the Greater Wellington region. It contains a large proportion of the regions erosion-prone land and has been the focus of soil erosion control measures since the mid 1950's. In essence there has been 50 years of working with the landowners and communities within this part of the region.

Methods of engagement have been the individual Farm Plan and the community Catchment Schemes. Central Government grants and Regional incentive programmes have been instrumental in ensuring that steady and effective progress has been achieved. Interestingly, when Government grants were abolished in 1989, Greater Wellington continued with the regional incentives programme, a move that has brought significant benefit in light of recent storm events. The Manawatu storm in 2004 has refocused national interest in the farm plan model as a proven method of addressing hill country erosion.

It is important now to build on the results of the first 50 years and provide a vision for land management for the next 50 years. Under the framework of Integrated Catchment Management it is essential that key community groups are identified in order that the consultation process, policy development and programme adoption is totally inclusive and meets the long term needs of each partner.

The formation of a Wairarapa Hill Country Liaison Group will greatly assist in the vision for 2050, and ensure that a viable partnership is forged between Greater Wellington and a group representing the interests of landowners who occupy nearly half of the region.

## **5. Framework of Climate Change**

Climate change and its potential impacts on the Wairarapa hill country offers an opportunity to further engage with the Wairarapa hill country community. The scenarios for the east coast of the North Island are for greater extremes in weather patterns, meaning increases in high intensity rainfall events and droughts, plus an increased frequency in north-westerly wind patterns. Such a scenario will present challenges not only for the hill country but for the whole of the Wairarapa community. It is considered that because of the vulnerabilities of the hill country it would be a worthwhile exercise to review how the hill country can be made more resilient, both in the short and long term.

Central government has recognised the importance of achieving “sustainability” as a result of the threat of climate change i.e global warming. A discussion document has been prepared “Sustainable Land Management and Climate Change”. It focuses almost solely on the effects of agriculture as a cause of global warming rather than achieving sustainable land management. Committee members will be aware of the negative reaction to the document by forestry interests. We believe that very few members of the farming community will actually understand the issues and engage with the document. So the opportunity to build a bridge with the farming community has been lost.

GW as outlined above has been working with the hill country community for 50 years. It is a strong relationship built on its work on farms through the various Farm Plan options, at the catchment level with its catchment schemes and at a regional level with the Regional Animal Health Advisory Committee (RAHAC). GW is in an ideal position to facilitate change and on an ongoing basis to;

- Educate the community on the potential impact of climate change
- Research and trial new practises
- Assist in the transfer of knowledge to make the Wairarapa hill country more resilient.

## **6. A Process for Setting up the Group**

With the endorsement of the Committee we would like to have a series of discussions with a variety of groups with interests in the Wairarapa hill country. These could include;

- District councils including Go Wairarapa
- Catchment schemes
- Key farmers
- Forestry interests
- Servicing industries such as the fertilizer and the electricity industry.

The discussions could focus initially on how the recent storms in 2004-2006 impacted on the hill country, and what is the level of understanding of the issue of climate change. These discussions would allow us to assess interest in the establishment of a forum, the issues facing the various sectors, and to develop a sustainable land management vision for the Wairarapa hill country for 2050.

Following these initial discussions and endorsement of the concept, a draft process for adoption is suggested;

- Formal engagement with the sector groups
- Confirmation of commitment and sector representation
- Coordination of inaugural meeting
- Preparation of the Terms of Reference

## **7. Principles of Engagement**

The aim of this process is to;

- Engage with a representative set of the Wairarapa hill country communities
- To develop a partnership which clearly identifies how the various parties will be engaged going forward to 2050 (it is not an exercise to just gain greater commitments from GW)
- To develop a vision which will achieve a resilient hill country going forward to 2050

It is important that Greater Wellington does not dominate the engagement process. Parties will be expected to contribute in open dialogue respecting others point of view. The aim will be to integrate ideas and activities reinforcing the benefit of partnerships.

## **8. Communications**

A number of articles on the shortage of poles to meet current demand have appeared in Wairarapa printed media in the past two months.

Reports of the public meeting have appeared in the recent Rural Services Newsletter.

Publicity relating to the formation of the Group will be initiated once we have sensed general support and developed the framework for the Group to work within.

## **9. Recommendation**

*That the Committee*

1. *Receive the report*
2. *Endorse the concept of setting up a Hill Country Liaison Group using the process outlined in this report.*

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