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Committee Environment Committee
Author 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 that have arisen since the Committee's last meeting.

2. Managers' reports

The Department Managers' reports, along with the Divisional Accountant's report follow as **Attachment 1**.

3. Building Act 2004

Councillors will be aware that the new Building Act introduces new requirements for regional councils around dams and the coastal marine area (CMA).

We are currently working through the implications of the Act as there is some uncertainty about the required processes and powers. Regional Councils have set up a working group with the Department of Building and Housing. Paula Hammond, formerly our Manager, Consents Management, is working for the Department (on our recommendation) to work through issues with this group. We are represented on the working group.

Nearly all regional councils have signalled their wish not to be involved in processing building consents in the CMA as we do not have this sort of expertise in house. This Council already has memoranda of understanding with our territorial authorities, under the former legislation, and we expect these to continue in a similar form. We are currently working with Wellington City Council on this. They are going to work up a draft agreement for us – which will probably be able to be used region-wide.

With regard to dams, it is likely that all regional councils will contract the same external supplier to carry out Building Act requirements. There is uncertainty, however, about whether we still have to become accredited and, if so, what the nature of that accreditation will be. This is being addressed by the working group.

4. Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment visit

Dr Morgan Williams, PCE, addressed Environment Division staff at our quarterly staff meeting on 15 March 2005. Dr Williams talked about his report, *Growing for good: Intensive farming, sustainability and New Zealand's environment*, which was released in October 2004. The report examines the sustainability of more intensive farming in New Zealand. It discusses two key farming inputs - synthetic nitrogen fertiliser and irrigation water – because they have fuelled the big increases in productivity over the last decade. The economic and political drivers of our food and farming systems are also covered. The report calls for a more strategic approach and considers the opportunities for redesign.

It was kind of Dr Williams to fit us in to his busy schedule and interesting to hear that he was anxious to talk to those whose work could directly make a difference.

I have put a copy of this report in the Councillors' lounge.

Interestingly, in my capacity as convenor of the Regional Councils' Resource Managers Group, I have recently been to one day conference on the "Wise Use of N-Fertiliser on Hill Country Pastures Project". This project is funded by the fertiliser industry and government and is investigating the use of N-Fertiliser under different commercial conditions. There are a number of focus farms across the country (the one in this Region is in Martinborough) and regional councils are being encouraged to get involved. On seeing the figures about the increase in use of N-fertiliser and its potential impact on water quality, it is clear that this is an important issue for the future.

5. Air Quality Standards

These standards, which were the subject of a report to the last meeting of the Environment Committee, are causing a great deal of friction between regional councils and the Ministry for the Environment. It does appear now that there will be some contestable funding from the Ministry. However, there are some still some outstanding issues about the "workability" of the standards.

Air sheds have to be defined and gazetted by the Minister by 1 July 2005. We are intending to put our defined air sheds to Council beforehand for information and approval.

6. Staff matters

Keith Lyons, Communications Advisor, left us on 29 March 2005. Keith found that he could not commit to the hours required for this job. He kindly stayed on with the Council until a new appointment was made. I'm pleased to welcome Natalie Quirke to the Division. Natalie has experience in a wide range of media matters, including media liaison, publications management, editing and website development. She has previously worked in central government.

I'd also like to congratulate Perry Davy, Air Quality Scientist and Geoff Skene, Manager, Environment Education who have now worked for the Council for 10 and 15 years respectively.

7. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 1. receive the report; and*
- 2. note the contents.*

Report prepared by:

Jane Bradbury

Divisional Manager,
Environment

Attachment 1: Department Managers' Reports