

Item 8

Update Report: The Water Programme of Action

Sir Kerry Burke

Purpose

To update the Regional Affairs Committee (RAC) on progress with engagement between regional authorities and central government regarding the Water Programme of Action. It is noted that as part of this paper, a number of reports are referred to. These reports have all been circulated to Chief Executives for comments but have not yet been approved by the Water Management Sub-committee.

The Water Management Sub-committee meets on the morning of 20 April 2007 prior to RAC to consider the reports and any comments from Regional CEOs. The Chair of the Sub-committee will report any adjustments in the reports arising from the Water Management Sub-committee's consideration of the reports to the RAC.

1 Strategic Priorities

In accordance with the resolutions of the February 2007 meeting of the RAC the Water Management Sub-committee has identified the following list of strategic priorities where it will focus its efforts to engage with the government over the Water Programme of Action:

SHORT LIST OF DESIRED OUTCOMES

1. National Policy Statement (NPS)

A NPS which reinforces regional council management role, water as a public resource, the need for integrated management of water quantity and quality with land use, and supports the additional mechanisms (listed below) to enhance sustainable water management.

2. Management of "At Risk" Catchments

Legal support for addressing cumulative effects at a catchment scale (e.g. water quality in Lake Taupo, foothill erosion in the Manawatu, water availability constraints in Canterbury). RMA does not provide adequate statutory backing for management of cumulative effects.

3. Policy Agility

Mechanism which enables regional councils to respond quickly to new information or address a critical issue. This would create the ability for a regional council to designate a catchment or water body to enable a policy or action plan to be developed to address an issue and place consents applications on hold subject to Ministerial confirmation.

4. Water Measurement

Setting standards for water measurement to address water management requirements for quantity and quality. This would cover water takes and water use for surface water, for groundwater and for use of storage.

5. Private Plan Changes

Reliance on one integrated instrument for water management - the regional plan, with provisions for other interests (e.g. conservation orders, central agency requirements) as the equivalent of private plan changes.

6. Cost Recovery of Water Management Services

The specification of more robust mechanisms for cost recovery of water management services related to consented volume or water use including provisions for cost reductions for high standards of management for water quantity, use efficiency and water quality.

This paper reports on progress with each of these areas of work.

2 National Policy Statement

The Resource Manager's Group has prepared, for the Water Management Sub-committee, a discussion document that sets out the policy issues where a NPS on Water Management would add value.

The paper, along with any comments from the Regional CEOs will be considered by the Water Management Sub-committee early on 20 April 2007 and any amendments will subsequently be reported to the RAC on 20 April 2007.

3 Management of "At Risk" catchments

In February 2007, the RAC was advised that a joint local government/MfE project to identify "At Risk" catchments is underway. This project is to, in the first instance, review what regional councils have already undertaken (through their plans) to identify water bodies where water quality and/or availability are "at risk", the methodologies to determine key water bodies, the factors causing the pressures, the management being undertaken, the success of the responses to date, and the impediments to successful resolution. Some recommendations will also be made regarding the issues which may form the basis of central government direction.

This report is still in draft form and is not sufficiently advanced to be able to report back to the RAC or the Water Management Sub-committee.

4 Policy Agility

The NPS paper identifies some policy issues where an NPS may assist with policy agility. Beyond this, no work has been undertaken by either the Water Management Sub-committee or the Government to advance this strategic priority since February 2007.

5 Water Measurement

Submissions have closed on the discussion document on water management devices. Regional authority staff are in discussions with MfE officials regarding the implementation of any National Environmental Standard that may eventuate. Implementation planning is not sufficiently advanced for any report back to be provided at this stage.

6 Private Plan Changes

The NPS provides a policy instrument that might discourage future applications for Water Conservation Orders. Beyond this, no work has been undertaken by either the Water Management Sub-committee or the Government to advance this strategic priority since February.

7 Cost Recovery for Water Management

A paper has been prepared by the Resource Manager's Group, Brookfields and consultants Hill Young Cooper: "Methods to Assist Regional Councils to Recover Costs for Water Management". The document examines options available to Councils to distribute the costs of water management more transparently and provide incentives for improved water management. The paper not only focuses on the use of s36 of the RMA but also considers s150 of the LGA.

The paper was circulated to the Regional CEOs on 5 April 2007 and does not yet incorporate their comments.

8 Territorial Authority Membership of the Water Management Committee

Local Government New Zealand has approached the metro and provincial/rural sector for nominees to join the Water Management Sub-committee. The sectors have nominated Lawrence Yule, Mayor of Hastings District Council (representing the rural and provincial sectors) and Stuart Crosby, Mayor of Tauranga City Council (representing the Metro sector). If Stuart is unavailable the stand-in is Dianne Hale, Deputy Mayor of Northshore City Council.

At its meeting on 20 April 2007 the Water Management Sub-committee will determine how best to induct these territorial authority representatives into its work.

9 Integration between flood risk management initiatives and Water Programme of Action

The Chairs of the Flood Management Sub-committee and the Water Management Sub-committee and staff supporting these sub-committees have been keeping each other informed of progress and sharing documents.

Technical staff supporting these work programmes are in the process of defining areas of common interest between the two programmes of work to ensure that advocacy by the Chairs can be co-ordinated.

10 Recommendations

That the Regional Affairs Committee receive the report on the “Water Programme of Action”.

Hon. Sir Kerry Burke
Chairman, Environment Canterbury