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Report to Environment Committee
From Francie Pedersen, Sustainable Business Facilitator

The New Zealand Waste Strategy

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee about the New Zealand Waste Strategy prepared by the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) and Local Government New Zealand and its implications for the Council.

2. Background

The New Zealand Waste Strategy (the Strategy) was published in March 2002. The Council (WRC) submitted on the draft document in 2001 as part of the public consultation process.

The Strategy is the result of a partnership between the Government and Local Government NZ to look for ways to minimise waste and promote sustainable development.

The Government is committed to sustainable development and has recognised that waste reduction is crucial to living sustainably in New Zealand. The Strategy argues that if New Zealand is to become a more sustainable society, we need to not only better manage the waste stream, but also be able to grow economically while producing less waste. Using resources more efficiently is one way of doing this.

The Strategy is a non-statutory document to help regional councils and territorial authorities develop ways to increase resource efficiency and to implement waste minimisation strategies.

The Strategy is important to the Council because:

- Waste, and how it is dealt with, is fundamental to the Council's goal of a sustainable region. A by-product of the way we live, it needs to be managed

well if a good quality of life is to be maintained. It is for this reason that it is included as one of the “Top 10” Quality for Life areas;

- The community is worried about waste. It was the issue of most concern in our survey of environmental issues last year;
- It helps us identify what the Council can do, as we think about our future work and roles through the Long Term Council Community Plan.
- It is part of a suite of significant government initiatives which address sustainable development at the national level, e.g., the National Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy, the Government’s Climate Change Policy, the national Transport Strategy, the Government’s sustainability programme for the Rio plus 10 Conference, and so on.

3. **What Does the Strategy Cover?**

The Strategy covers solid, liquid and gaseous waste, but does not address non-point source wastes (such as animal waste), vehicle emissions and other wastes contributing to the greenhouse effect, or stormwater. It defines waste as “any material... that is unwanted and/or undervalued, and discarded or discharged by its owner”. It has a vision of moving “towards zero waste and a sustainable New Zealand”. It has three core goals which reflect the three aspects of sustainable development. These are:

- lowering the social costs and risks of waste
- reducing the damage to the environment from waste generation and disposal
- increasing the economic benefits of resource use through greater efficiency.

4. **How Will the Vision be Achieved?**

The Strategy proposes realising its vision and goals through local authorities, government, businesses and individuals working towards a set of national targets for various aspects of the waste stream, and through changes in institutions and practices. The Targets are not mandatory requirements. The expectation is, however, that the central-local government partnership will work towards them in a meaningful way.

By and large the targets relate more to territorial authorities than to this Council. This reflects the existing arrangement for managing waste, brought about by the changes to the Local Government Act (LGA) in the mid 1990s. However, there are some targets that affect the Council. These are discussed in detail in Attachment 1 to this Report.

In brief, the targets ask the Council to:

- Manage its own wastes appropriately, including having a waste minimisation strategy and reporting on progress in the Annual Report.
- Require waste management improvements as a condition of some resource consents.
- Develop partnerships with existing industrial consent holder so that waste minimisation programmes can be developed and implemented.
- Expedite the identification and remediation of contaminated sites.
- Monitor those aspects of the waste stream that the Council manages or is involved in.

5. Proposed Changes for Organisations and Roles and Responsibilities

In addition to the targets, the Strategy also talks of the need for “legal and institutional changes” and foreshadows a review of roles and responsibilities that would help put the Strategy into place.

At present the primary responsibility for managing waste disposal and promoting waste minimisation rests with territorial authorities. They are required under Part XXXI of the Local Government Act 1974 to prepare waste management plans for their districts. Among other things, these plans must include provisions for “the collection and **reduction, reuse, recycling**, recovery, treatment, or disposal of waste”. Through the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), district plans can also impose controls over land used for waste disposal.

The ability of regional councils to contribute is determined largely by the RMA. That Act enables the Council to:

- Manage discharges to the environment generally (to air, water, and land)
- Manage specific discharges from waste treatment, storage and disposal activities (by exercising powers under the previous bullet point);
- Carry out the integrated management of the region’s natural and physical resources (including waste) through the Regional Policy Statement.

The only waste management related function that regional councils have statutory responsibility for under the LGA, is the ability to provide hazardous waste disposal facilities for their regions in certain specified circumstances.

Thus far this Council’s involvement in waste disposal in this Region has been small, based largely on our statutory responsibilities under the LGA and RMA. The Council controls discharges through the RMA (plans and resource consents), helps prevent industrial pollution through *Take Charge*, co-ordinates the registration and prioritisation of contaminated sites, and plays a role in hazardous substance management through the collection of unwanted agri-chemicals (thereby pre-empting the release of these contaminants into the environment). The Council also plays an important part in regional waste planning issues, such as the proposed regional landfill and zero waste strategy for the Wairarapa.

In terms of waste minimisation, the efficient use of resources, and “cleaner production”, our role has also be minimal. We are involved through our funding for Enviromart (the Wellington/Hutt/Kapiti waste exchange), our support for BusinessCare (the national initiative promoting cleaner production), and our contribution to the work of the Wellington Region Environment Agency (a waste management co-ordinating group which includes business representatives and local council officers).

It is the view of the Strategy that the responsibility for waste should lie with waste producers (businesses and individuals) and with territorial authorities. It talks about “extended producer responsibility” and the need for appropriate incentives for waste reduction. This is a sensible approach. While the Council may be able to help territorial authorities in certain circumstance and at the margins, it is not necessary for the Council to take an active operational role in waste management or disposal (e.g.,

operating landfills, kerbside recycling managing organic waste, domestic hazardous waste collection).

However, the Strategy does hint at a larger role for regional councils in those aspects of waste that are of a regional nature. This is not spelled out and the suggestion seems to be that regions could sort this out for themselves (territorial authorities included). We await the review of roles and responsibilities for a steer on this.

Given the Council's existing relationship with business, we could play a role in assisting our territorial authorities and businesses with the regional aspects of waste minimisation and cleaner production. If one of the keys to sustainability is greater efficiency in the use of resources, then this is something we should all be working on together - business, central and local government combined. This would be consistent with our Regional Policy Statement and the Discharges to Land Plan (see Attachment 2).

It is intended that the *Take Charge* programme will include the promotion of cleaner production and waste minimisation in due course. This could be the means by which we encourage businesses to use resources more efficiently (this cannot be done in a regulatory way under current legislation). At present, however, the implementation of *Take Charge* is constrained and the priority is to ensure the programme is operational at the basic level of ensuring businesses comply with their pollution control responsibilities/

Until such time as the promised review occurs and roles are clarified, it would not be appropriate for the Council to consider any broadening of its role. This means that there is no need to fund new approaches, programmes or activities at this stage.

6. **Communications**

This report is intended to inform Councillors of our waste management role and responsibilities and to facilitate discussion. At this stage it does not carry any communications implications.

7. **Recommendations**

It is recommended That the Committee:

- 1) *receives the report; and*
- 2) *notes the contents of the report.*

Report prepared by:

Approved by:

FRANCIE PEDERSEN
Sustainable Business Facilitator

GEOFF SKENE
Manager, Environment Co-ordination

JANE BRADBURY
Divisional Manager, Environment

Attachments:

1. Discussion of Strategy Targets
2. Regional Policy Statement and Discharges to Land Plan