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**Committee** Environment  
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## The future of *Take Action*

### 1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of the proposed future development of the *Take Action* programme.

### 2. Background

*Take Action* helps teachers and 8 to 12 year old pupils to become actively involved in caring for their local environment. The 4 to 6 week programme consists of classroom activities and a multimedia presentation that allow pupils to **investigate** water related issues. Pupils **explore** the health of 2 streams on a field trip and the *Action Crew* help staff and pupils to **take action** through action projects that help a local waterway.

The programme is successful and very popular. It was fully booked from an early date for 2003 and several schools have already expressed an interest in doing the guided programme during 2004. When *Take Action* was established it was intended that an additional programme would be developed every 2 years (e.g., *Take Action* for biodiversity, land, energy, air, and so on). Funds were allocated to meet this timetable. For a number of reasons, however, this paper proposes changing this development timetable and adopting an alternative approach. This is an approach which will better meet the demand for *Take Action for Water*, enable schools to do more action projects which are more lasting and effective, and make better use of our staffing resources.

### 3. Discussion

Since the launch of *Take Action* in February 2002 we have found that each school undertakes the programme in its own unique way. Pupils have diverse backgrounds and experiences. They are of varying ages and stages of development and can be vastly different in their understanding of the environment. Teachers apply their different teaching styles and emphases to the delivery of the programme to allow for the prior experiences and skills of

the students, as well as their own knowledge and degree of confidence with the subject matter.

Schools are coming to *Take Action for Water* because they want to raise the environmental awareness of their students, whilst meeting a number of curriculum objectives. As the students move through the programme they are introduced to a range of concepts and ways of thinking about their environment (e.g., catchments, erosion, runoff, pollution, vegetation, environmental care). Their ability to choose the aspect of their local waterway that they want to work on also increases. At the action project stage the flexibility of the programme allows the teacher to choose one or a few of many possible action projects. We have found that the aspect of the school's local environment that is most pertinent or dominant becomes the focus of the childrens' action projects.

Thus, action projects tend to fall into one or more of five general areas. These are:

- Water quality – in particular, raising awareness and telling others about the issue through advertising, signs, plays, songs fridge magnets etc
- Biodiversity – how weed removal, planting and native vegetation can benefit aquatic ecosystems.
- Coastal issues – how the stream interacts with the coast.
- Solid waste – how litter and waste needs to be managed to avoid it ending up in streams. This can also include re-cycling, worm farms, and waste reduction.
- Water conservation – how water can be used more efficiently and wisely.

While the focus of the programme is water, *Take Action* is being used by schools to educate students about the environment more generally.

Teachers sometimes find the management of several action projects per class difficult. Some action projects require detailed information, instructions and equipment. This stage can be time consuming for teachers and the lack of resources can mean pupils do not do their first choice of action project. There are few comprehensive resources currently available with an action focus to assist teachers and pupils. This can cause some teachers to miss out the important action project stage or not do the entire programme. This phase is also very resource intensive for us, using up a lot of staff time. Often we find ourselves helping to design an activity or device when our time should be spent on ensuring children gain knowledge and understand **how** their action projects will benefit the environment.

Teachers need more help with their classes' action projects. It would be an effective use of the Council's resources to develop ways to assist teachers to do these action projects, through the production of teaching resources or the supply of some simple equipment.

The fact that all of these themes and issues are being addressed by *Take Action for Water* means that the need for other programmes based on land or biodiversity is markedly reduced. While there would undoubtedly be many additional concepts that could be taught through such programmes we question whether these are needed in the short term. With one programme with the flexibility to focus on biophysical environmental issues as needed, the Council could concentrate its efforts and deliver to a greater number of students. With a fixed number of staff, the time taken to develop a whole new *Take Action* programme every second year represents a significant drain on our ability to get out to schools and deliver the existing programme.

Of course, what is not included in this approach are the issues that might loosely be described as the energy/air quality/transport group. These are deserving of a separate *Take Action* programme and it is our wish to develop such a programme in due course.

#### **4. What is being proposed?**

We propose changing the originally intended development of *Take Action* to the following:

- Consolidate the existing programme by developing new teaching resources to support the action projects. These would become available between 1 February and 30 June 2004.
- Emphasise in these resources the five “approaches” being taken already by teachers (waste, biodiversity, the coast, water conservation, and water quality) to enable schools to focus more strongly on locally relevant issues and enhance learning.
- Defer the development of a second *Take Action* programme to July 2006. This programme would focus on air, transport and energy issues. It could be developed with the Transport Division and be integrated with that Division’s ‘messages’ and those of the Corporate Communications Strategy.

The new resources would provide teachers with information, contact details and materials for doing action projects. Teachers’ time could be used more efficiently if information and materials could be more easily accessed. With more confident teachers, the *Action Crew* would be able to spend less time with pupils at guided schools, freeing up time for visits to self-guided schools. Teachers from self-guided schools would also approach the action project stage with added confidence and, by encouraging more schools to take the self-guided route, the new resources would help the *Action crew* meet demand for the programme. It should also be noted that we are also looking for other ways to meet this demand, such as territorial authority and corporate funding.

The written resources would be for teachers’ use and would be developed as a series in the most appropriate format. This could include worksheets, which could be photocopied for pupils’ use. Booklets would include useful information, suggested activities, links to other organisations, and contact details for getting further help. No additional funds would be needed, nor changes made to existing budgets.

The creation of some physical material kits to accompany the booklets (e.g. a Greater Wellington Regional Council compost kit or worm bin) could also benefit schools. With supporting teachers' notes, these could be the basis for ongoing science experiments and could be used by other pupils doing *Take Action* at a later date.

## 5. Conclusions

The *Take Action* programme is well received as a flexible resource that successfully helps students take action for their environment. The intended direction is to retain the *Take Action for Water* programme and assist teachers with better resources for action projects. These resources would allow a wide range of action projects to be supported in the near future, without the need to develop specific programmes for each subject area. Future *Take Action* developments over the next 3 to 4 year period would aim to cover issues such as air, energy and transport. These subjects will require the creation of a new *Take Action* programme including new written resources, trails, multimedia presentation and webpages.

## 6. Communication

At this stage there are no communication implications of this report.

## 7. Recommendation

*It is recommended that the Committee:*

1. *receive the report;*
2. *note the contents; and*
3. *approve the direction of the future development of the Take Action programme, as discussed in this report.*

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