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Committee Regional Sustainability Committee
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State of the Environment – Annual Summary 2006/07

1. Purpose

To present to the Committee the annual summary of our state of the environment monitoring.

2. Reason for monitoring

The Resource Management Act 1991 requires us to monitor and report on the state of the environment in the region. Monitoring the state of the environment allows us to:

- observe and interpret trends or changes in environmental quality and determine the reasons for these;
- have good information for guiding resource consent decision making;
- evaluate the effectiveness of the Regional Policy Statement and regional plans, and identify where policy changes may be necessary for the sustainable management of the region's natural resources; and
- convey information about our natural resources to the wider community.

3. Annual environmental reporting

We have presented annual summaries on the state of the environment as a package of report cards since 2001. A copy of the State of the Environment - Annual Summary 2006/07 will be available at the meeting. The cards cover air quality, recreational water quality, the health of rivers and coastal environments, rainfall and river flows, groundwater, and soil health and contamination during the period of the last financial year (1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007). The cards are a summary of the full monitoring reports in which the results of the past year's environmental monitoring are analysed in detail. There are also cards about our work in pollution control and natural hazards.

The cards present key information about the state of the region's resources and compare results with national standards and guidelines. This allows us to check the "pulse" of the environment in between the full analysis of trends done every six years for our major state of the environment report, *Measuring up*. *Measuring up* will next be prepared in 2011, and will be used to determine the effectiveness of our Regional Policy Statement and regional plans.

4. Selected highlights from the 2006-2007 cards

As with previous years, we have summarised the key points on the front page of each card. Here are some points of interest:

- Two rainstorms in winter 2006 caused flooding in the Wairarapa in July and landslips around the region in July, August and October. All main roads into Wellington were cut off by landslips at least once.
- The dry summer of 2006-2007 extended into June with a very dry autumn. Wainuiomata experienced its second driest autumn in 118 years of record (the driest was in 2001), and the Wairarapa had only about 10% of its average rainfall for May. The dry weather caused extreme wildfire risk and low soil moisture levels. Increased water abstraction for pasture irrigation lowered groundwater levels to below average around the region, with record lows in some Kapiti aquifers.
- Land use continues to have the most effect on river and stream health, with urban streams and most lowland rural streams in the poorest condition. Poor water quality in rivers, especially after rain, means that many popular swimming spots are not always suitable for contact recreation and some coastal beaches are also affected.
- Wairarapa coastal beaches, dunes and river estuaries support a range of ecosystems, mostly in good condition. The main threats to them are loss of habitat and biodiversity from sea level rise associated with climate change, coastal erosion, and invasion of marram grass. Water quality may be a problem in Lake Onoke.
- Soil monitoring last year showed that market garden soils have high phosphorus levels and are losing organic matter, while dairy farm soils are compacted and have high nutrient levels. This is consistent with results from three years ago when these land uses were last monitored.
- The National Environmental Standard for air was breached once in winter 2007 (in Wainuiomata), and three times in winter 2006 (in Masterton). All breaches were for particulate matter.
- Likely breaches of the Resource Management Act, 1991 reported to our pollution hotline decreased by 20% from the 2005-2006 year alongside an increase in enforcement action of 21%. Greater Wellington issued infringement and abatement notices to 71 parties, and the district court imposed enforcement orders on four parties, and prosecuted and fined seven parties.

5. Communication

A press release will be sent out when we distribute the report card package in early December. The package will be sent to over 500 users of environmental information in the region, including iwi, local and central government decision-makers, non-governmental organisations, environmental and community organisations, industry, interested individuals, schools and universities as well as all libraries. The cards will also be available on our website, along with the more detailed annual monitoring reports.

6. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. ***Receives the report; and***
2. ***Notes the contents.***

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