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Committee Council
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Management

Report on the Regulatory Committee Meeting held on 22 July 2008

1. Purpose

To inform Council about the meeting of the Regulatory Committee that took place on 22 July 2008.

2. Reports

2.1 Wellington Harbour marine sediment quality investigation

A report on marine sediment quality in Wellington Harbour presented to the Committee showed that higher concentrations of sediment contamination were found nearer to shore, and highlighted the impact urban stormwater can have on the coastal environment. The study, which was led by Greater Wellington and partly funded by Wellington City Council and the Hutt City Council, looked at 17 sites across the harbour, and was the most comprehensive work into sediment quality in the harbour in the last 20 years.

Results from the study showed that contaminants such as heavy metals, hydrocarbons and pesticides have accumulated in the surface sediments of Wellington Harbour. The highest concentrations are found in inner Lambton Basin and Evans Bay where they are above national sediment quality guidelines. These areas offer little flushing of contaminants. While there is little risk to human health as a result of this, there is a potential adverse impact on sea-floor marine life. The findings of this research have highlighted the need for Greater Wellington to review our permitted activity standards for stormwater discharges, a point that was also noted in the evaluation report on the Regional Freshwater Plan.

There was excellent uptake on the media release that accompanied this report.

2.2 Porirua Harbour broad-scale habitat mapping and fine scale ecological monitoring

Two further reports relating to harbour health were also presented at this committee meeting, this time in relation to Porirua Harbour. The reports summarised the findings of a habitat survey and ecological monitoring, which were jointly funded by Greater Wellington and Porirua City Council. Combined, the two pieces of work showed that both arms of the Porirua Harbour were moderately eutrophic (nutrient rich), and at a medium risk of sedimentation. In relation to these findings, it was noted that eutrophic conditions increase the likelihood of nuisance algal growths, especially sea lettuce. For instance, when assessed in December, it was found that around 70% of the intertidal reach of each arm of the harbour had at least some algal cover. The reports also highlighted that excessive sediment entering the harbour may lead to infilling with mud, reducing the harbour's biodiversity and recreational values. However, the type and number of organisms living in and on the sediment in the harbour indicate that the harbour is still in a reasonable condition. In addition, there is significant scope for the restoration of salt marsh and margin vegetation, which is something that Porirua City's Porirua Harbour project will focus on.

2.3 Regional Plan reviews

A report providing an overview of the legislation and requirements around regional plans was presented as a lead in to the pending reviews of our plans. The report emphasised that we now have the opportunity to look at streamlining our existing approach to plan development, by preparing one regional plan. Our recent plan evaluations have confirmed that our regional plans would benefit from better integration, both across the plans themselves, and also with the region's district plans.

The new draft Regional Policy Statement supports this approach as it links closely with the development of regional and district plans given the need for these plans to 'give effect' to the Regional Policy Statement. Another report will go to the October meeting of the Regulatory Committee where a more detailed programme for the plan reviews will be proposed.

2.4 Submission on the proposed National Environmental Standard for Ecological Flows and Water Levels

The Council submission on the proposed National Environmental Standard (NES) for Ecological Flows and Water Levels was also presented for approval at this meeting. This NES is part of central government's Water Programme of Action, which began in 2003. The intent of the proposed NES on flows and water levels is to promote national consistency in the way decisions are made around water allocation so to ensure that there is sufficient flow, and variability of flow, in rivers, groundwater systems, lakes and wetlands. Greater Wellington supported the overall approach of the standard, particularly around providing a process for selecting appropriate technical methods for evaluating ecological flows and water levels, and the setting of interim flows for those rivers that do not have limits already imposed through regional plans.

Our main concern with the proposed NES is the need for it to include a transitional period to enable flows in operative regional plans to be retained when plans are reviewed and while work in evaluating flows, in accordance with the NES, is being completed. We have sought a 10 year transition period. This is a particularly important issue for Greater Wellington because many of the minimum flows in our current freshwater plan were set using methodologies that will not comply with the NES. If there is no transitional period, and interim flows in the NES are reverted to, this would have a significant impact on the provision of public water supply.

3. Regular reporting

Regular summary reports on decisions made on non-notified resource consent applications, pollution control incidents, and the Council's input into city and district planning were also provided. This information is now also readily available on the Council's website to ensure public accessibility of the information.

4. Minutes

The minutes of the Committee's meeting are attached as **Attachment 1**.

5. Recommendations

That the Council:

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

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Attachment 1: Public Minutes