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Committee Regional Sustainability Committee
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Climate change response - update

1. Purpose

To provide the Committee with an update on Greater Wellington's response to climate change.

2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report do not trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3. Background

Last year, staff from all the region's councils prepared a draft Wellington Regional Climate Change Response Plan (the draft Plan). Along with all councils in the region, this Committee discussed the draft Plan and suggested some amendments to it. The intention was to take the feedback from all the councils and incorporate it, as far as practicable, into a new iteration of the draft Plan.

Council-approved responses were received from Kapiti Coast District Council, Porirua City Council, Carterton District Council, Hutt City Council and Greater Wellington. The feedback was widely various, with some councils wanting the goals and actions to be strengthened significantly, to other councils stating that the draft Plan should be confined to activities and responsibilities of Greater Wellington. Most feedback requested changes at a tactical or editing level, and a few raised concerns as to how it would fit in with other regional plans, policies and strategies.

It was evident that incorporating all the feedback into a new document would be highly problematic. Consequently, Greater Wellington officers took the decision to "park" the draft Plan for the time being, take a step back and try to gain buy-in to a high-level strategy.

A draft Strategy is being developed and is designed to be a 'living' document, especially with regard to the territorial authorities' action plans. We hope to include summaries of the territorial authority action plans into the Strategy over time. Some territorial authorities have action plans, most notably Wellington City Council and Kapiti Coast District Council. Others will be prepared over time. Updates will also be needed once the results of the various scenario and vulnerability/risk assessment exercises are available.

Some informal discussion has been had with officers in the territorial authorities on this approach, which has received support. This approach and a draft Strategy will be discussed at the Councillor workshop scheduled for 8 September.

4. Discussion

There are several pieces of work that have been identified as critical in responding to climate change in the Wellington region. These are discussed below.

4.1 Scenario development for risk management

The Committee will recall a presentation made by Andy Reisinger to Councillors in a workshop on 16 April 2010 on the subject of using a risk management approach to planning adaptation to climate change. Councillors expressed a view that Greater Wellington should develop some scenarios, including 'worst case' scenarios to assist with planning to address the worst risks in the longer term. Three officer workshops have been held in which experts from Victoria University's Climate Change Research Institute (including Andy Reisinger), NIWA and Landcare Research. Officers from Greater Wellington and Wellington City Council have contributed to the development of a set of draft scenarios for the middle of the century. Work is continuing to project one or two of these scenarios out to the end of the century.

The results of this work will be brought to the Committee when it is in final draft form.

4.2 Vulnerability assessment

A project is being scoped which aims at providing the baseline data that councils in the region will need to make adequate plans for responding to climate change. The project will have a number of sub-projects including sea level rise, increased flood risk and increased erosion risk.

Greater Wellington's Hazard Analyst has established the first of these through a part Foundation for Research, Science and Technology funded project, with the research being conducted by NIWA. The aim of this project is to provide a regionally consistent assessment of the storm tide and wave run up hazard for the coastal margin of the Wellington region and to examine future impacts under a range of sea level rise scenarios. The project will focus on urban areas of the Kapiti Coast, Porirua, Lower Hutt and Wellington. It is important to understand this because a large amount of property, and many critical infrastructural assets vital to the Wellington region (and New Zealand), are situated

in low lying coastal areas. It will be helpful to extend this focus to include the South Wairarapa in the future.

The findings will be useful for a wide array of agencies in both the private and local government sectors, including coastal planning and management (housing, transport, utilities); engineering services; flood protection; water supply; transport; lifeline utilities (power, water, gas, fuel, telecoms) and Civil Defence Emergency Management.

The work on assessing the potential increased flood and erosion risks is at a very preliminary phase. It appears that some good data is held by some of the territorial authorities. A gap assessment will need to be done and the project will entail pulling existing data together and filling gaps where necessary.

4.3 Investigation of carbon sequestration opportunities

A project is being undertaken to evaluate the land use opportunities/options for carbon sequestration on council owned land. Discussions have been held with Landcare Research, and draft proposal has been developed.

The first phase of this work will provide an outline analysis of land use and carbon opportunities – to provide sufficient information evaluate the benefits of further investigation and to provide outline of opportunities for Greater Wellington.

4.4 Shared decision-making methods

There are clear advantages to decision-making on climate change issues by the councils in the region using broadly shared processes and criteria. The use of similar criteria and processes by the various councils is likely to reduce litigation risks to some degree and to make reaching agreement on cross-boundary issues more efficient and less contentious. This is especially so where adaptation measures are concerned.

The standard protocol used by councils in asset planning – Optimised Decision Making – which includes a process for multi criteria assessment appears to offer a useful model which could be extended to planning for adaptation measures (many of which will involve council assets). Greater Wellington is working with Wellington City Council to assess opportunities in this regard.

5. Communication

Matters relating to the Greater Wellington's climate change response will be communicated as projects are completed and relevant information is identified.

6. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. ***Receives the report.***
2. ***Notes the content of the report.***

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