



caring about you & your environment

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Report to Policy and Finance Committee
from Howard Stone, General Manager

Management of the Community Environmental Care Programme

1. Purpose

To advise the Committee of the reasons why the community environmental care programme is located and managed principally within the Environment Division.

2. Background

At a recent meeting of the Committee, Crs. Shaw and Werry sought an explanation for why the community environmental care programme is located primarily within the Environment Division. It was suggested that, given some care groups were also being led by the Landcare Division, there could be some merit in that Division managing the programme in its entirety.

3. Discussion

3.1 An Initiative to Improve the Environment

The community environmental care programme *Community Connections* was established as part of the Council's environmental education strategy, *A Better Environment*. The programme's origins and purpose are *environmental* - to resolve environmental issues and improve the environment by enabling communities to take responsibility for local problem areas. The programme is a major component of the Environment Division's drive to "make a difference" and achieve some real improvements in the Region's environment that the Council and the community can be proud of.

It was recognised from the outset that the programme should be delivered across the Region and that, while the Environment Division had the relevant expertise to deliver the programme, it would also benefit from the extensive knowledge contained in other areas of the Council. Both the Wairarapa and Landcare Divisions were already working with the community on particular issues, eg Riversdale Beach, Otaki/Waikanae River

management. This fact was recognised by Councillors when they developed the Long Term Financial Strategy. Councillors provided a budget for staff time for Care Groups in several departments within the Environment, Wairarapa and Landcare Divisions.

The Landcare Division was included in the Care Group programme because it was identified that there are problems to be solved on Council lands and that there are community members who are keen to help do this.

However, a decision was made when the Long Term Financial Strategy was being developed that the budget for the resources for the Care Groups themselves reside with the Environment Division and be dealt with by way of internal charging. This was to reduce duplication and ensure that a co-ordinated approach was taken. All the managers involved agreed that this was the best way to handle the issue.

Just to remind Councillors, **Attachment 1** shows the additional funding requirements included in the Long Term Financial Strategy and shows how the funding for Care Groups has been calculated.

3.2 **Connection with other Environment Division Functions**

The location of the major part of the programme within the Environment Division reflects the fact that Environment is best equipped to help the care groups resolve environmental problems. The programme supports projects that contribute to the sustainable management or enhancement of rivers, streams, and their margins, wetlands, estuaries, dunes, and the coast. These ecosystems require expertise in such matters as hydrology, water quality, riparian management, coastal processes, native species, ecosystem monitoring, statutory planning (to identify ownership and regulatory issues), and so on. All of these skills exist within the Environment Division.

In particular, the Division has a very good understanding of wetland, estuary, and aquatic ecosystem issues and has been helping community groups and the public to deal with these types of ecosystems for some time. It is good management to manage these sources of expertise, and the care group programme, together.

3.3 **The RPS and the Council's Ecosystem Initiatives**

The nature of the care group programme and the manner of its delivery are heavily influenced by the Council's ecological objectives and policies in the Regional Policy Statement. The implementation of the RPS is the responsibility of the Environment Division.

Councillors will recall the advice given during the Long Term Financial Strategy that without increased levels of activity, certain key ecosystems in the Region would be severely impacted upon or lost entirely (e.g., lowland bush, dunes, wetlands, etc). The Council was in danger of not meeting its RPS Ecosystem Objectives or playing its role under the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy. The Council accepted this advice and acted accordingly and there are now programmes being devised to deliver an improved set of outcomes.

The drive to improve the Region's ecological health impacts upon the care group programme in a number of ways. First, it adds to the significance of the programme, care

groups becoming one of the first lines of attack on the decline of biodiversity. Secondly, it has affected the focus of the care programme; the programme now only funds community initiatives that contribute towards the restoration of those key ecosystem types identified as needing help.

Thirdly, it has led to part of the care group programme being carried out on Council land. A major conclusion from our assessment of how well the Council was implementing the RPS was that more effort should go into managing or protecting special ecosystems on the Council's own land (Ecosystem policy 8 and method 13 require this). A number of high value ecosystems (including bush, river, wetland, and dune areas) were identified as requiring additional resources and the Landcare Division was tasked to undertake the improvements over a number of years.

As a consequence also, the care group programme was set up in such a way that, in addition to those groups that might apply to the Council for funds to work in their local communities, the Council itself could initiate some groups to restore key ecosystems in its regional parks and river corridors. The first two groups (funded from 2000-2001 onwards) are working on the wetlands in Queen Elizabeth Park and by the lower Waikanae River. The decision as to which Council owned areas would be suitable for these groups to work in is made jointly by the Environment and Landcare Divisions.

3.4 Management of the Ecosystem Initiatives

The enhanced ecosystem and biodiversity initiatives arising from the Long Term Financial Strategy represent a change of focus and a step up in activity for the Environment, Wairarapa, and Landcare Divisions. These initiatives are being developed at present and appropriate management mechanisms are being put in place to ensure they are provided in a co-ordinated and effective manner (e.g., Tim Porteous, a senior Environment Division officer has taken on the role of Biodiversity Co-ordinator to ensure the various initiatives are appropriately delivered).

Again, to remind Councillors, **Attachment 2** shows how the funding for this work has been dealt with across the Council.

A central component of this is the Ecosystems and Biodiversity Implementation Plan which is in preparation and which will be presented to the Policy and Finance Committee in early 2001. The need for this was flagged to Councillors in June during discussions on the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy (Report 00.357). There is a need for such a unifying and co-ordinating management device linking the activities of the Divisions because ecosystems and ecological processes pervade every aspect of the activities the Council undertakes but do not recognise our largely functional organisational structure.

4. Conclusion

I have satisfied myself that the management and leadership of the community environmental care programme appropriately resides with the Environment Division function. Indeed, I have viewed at first hand the work that is taking place and I am impressed by the results. Although the Environment Division has the prime responsibility for implementing the three parts of the Council's environmental education strategy – *Community Connections*, *Business Bridges* and *Learnwell* - it is involving many areas of the Council and the communication lines are strong.

Senior managers in all Divisions are comfortable with the present approach and, from my point of view, there are significant management, as well as environmental benefits, from Divisions working together towards common objectives.

5. **Communications**

There are no external communications implications arising from this paper.

6. **Recommendation**

That the report be received and its contents noted

HOWARD STONE
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