

4. POSSIBLE NON-STATUTORY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE ESTUARY

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AVON-HEATHCOTE ESTUARY

At the Joint Committee meeting held at the City Council offices on 14 April 1999 a report was tabled which outlined options for the management of the Avon-Heathcote Estuary.

In their discussions the committee favoured the Non-statutory Estuary Management approach as being the preferred management option.

Still to be examined are the methods for achieving this.

Following the Joint Committee meeting, staff of the City and Regional Councils held a joint meeting to expedite matters in relation to the Avon-Heathcote Estuary. Despite open discussions there remains a difference of opinion over the process that needs to be followed.

This report deals with a Regional Council view on how the preferred management option might be achieved.

The non-statutory approach favoured is considered to have some significant advantages:

- Encompasses the diverse interests involved.
- Allows “participatory decision making” as distinct from “autocratic authoritative figure decision-making”.
- Process orientated.
- Retains flexibility. Not everything has to be decided from the outset.
- Can involve statutory instruments.
- Can consider the establishment of management structures.

BACKGROUND

There is a wealth of knowledge about the Avon-Heathcote Estuary, both amongst the community and from past joint staff examinations of issues and options assembled in a number of documents and reports. The question to be asked is, what has been the outcome from the assembly of all this knowledge?

Frustration over apparent inaction has lead to the Christchurch Estuary Association’s proposal.

Christchurch Estuary Association Proposal

Regional Council staff level opinion of the proposal is one of support for the principle of the Estuary being managed as an integrated ecosystem with the involvement of all interested groups. However, there is reservation about the component dealing with the creation of a separate body working under an appropriate statute. The reason is that the creation of a separate body, which is putting a structure before process, will not guarantee that all the issues will be dealt with. Currently no reasonable overarching statute exists and it is considered unnecessary to create another management structure. However, this could be an option to consider as part of the development of a strategy. The strategy should also consider how the community can be actively involved.

Community-Based Programmes for Environmental Management

There are numerous examples, both overseas and within New Zealand, that highlight where community-based programmes in partnerships with agencies have achieved outcomes that are significantly better than simply when issues are described to stakeholders and they are given a choice of options.

The Canadian experiences show that participatory decision making between the community and agencies increased the openness of the dialogue, enhanced the communities understanding of the ecosystems, moderated views and minimised the defensive/aggressive tensions between the parties and lead to the development of an open, totally inclusive system of management.

In addition many agency values statements mention customer satisfaction, quality outcomes, leadership, openness, cultural awareness, excellence and innovation as guiding principles.

In today's environment, Council's need to be at the forefront of encouraging innovation and initiatives by moving from a "command and control" model to one of enabler and facilitator. This also makes good economic sense because it avoids the setting up and servicing of bureaucratic structures.

The Estuary is a prime example where a community-based programme involving a partnership between the community and agencies could work.

Critical to that success, however, would be the appointment of an independent co-ordinator.

Development of a Draft Strategy

With the wealth of knowledge about the Estuary in the community and past joint staff examination and identification of issues and options, a full-scale issues and options process is considered unnecessary. It is proposed to build on the successful community forum, which the two authorities co-sponsored in 1998, and hold a further half, or whole day facilitated forum to focus tightly on the development of the issues and options.

From the forum it should be possible to develop a draft strategy through a small group of community representatives and staff of the City Council, Regional Council and DOC. This strategy will be refined through internal consultation in the agencies concerned, so that the actions of the agencies can be recorded and co-ordinated to integrate management for the Estuary and its environs.

There is no reason why the target date for the production of this strategy could not be by November 1999.

The Estuary Strategy

It is envisaged that the strategy will be a slim, non-technical document, setting out the activities of all agencies, and the community, and how these will be co-ordinated to tackle the various issues. The Strategy may also detail further work and investigations which are necessary. Technical reports can be accessed separately from the strategy. It would also cover the respective statutory background that the authorities work under and how that can be used to implement the strategy.

The community will then be able to expect commitment to the strategy to appear in the Annual Plans of the agencies involved with the Estuary. It will indicate agreement on how they can be involved in implementing the strategy.

**POSSIBLE NON-STATUTORY MANAGEMENT PLAN
FOR THE ESTUARY**

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Corporate Plan Output: Conservation Policy Advice	

BACKGROUND

Over the past two years, several reports have been presented to this Committee on joint management options for the Avon/Heathcote Estuary. These have included suggestions for:

- A joint “memorandum of understanding” to clarify areas of responsibility and day-to-day management of the Estuary
- A small brochure to explain these responsibilities and points of contact for the public

However, to date no comprehensive document has been produced which outlines a vision and policies for the Estuary, combined with a list of projects to achieve these aims. The public perception is that no integrated planning is happening. This has led to a move on the part of a couple of “interest groups”, particularly the Christchurch Estuary Association, to start developing their own “charter for the Estuary.

OUTCOME FROM A COMMUNITY FORUM IN MARCH 1998

A Community Forum, organised by the Christchurch Estuary Association and the Friends of the Avon, and supported by the Canterbury Regional Council and the Christchurch City Council, was held at the Mount Pleasant Community centre on Saturday 7 March. Over 50 people attended, including representatives from the Canterbury Regional Council and the Christchurch City Council. The general consensus of the group was a desire to see a community-evolved management for the Avon/Heathcote Estuary. However, the process for achieving this was not entirely clear.

WHO SHOULD DRIVE THE PROCESS?

Given that there seems to be consensus for the need for a non-statutory management plan, the main issue is who should have the overall responsibility for initiating and overseeing the process. The Christchurch City Council and Canterbury Regional Council both have statutory responsibilities under the Resource Management Act, part of which has

been expressed through the City and the Proposed Coastal Environment Plan. Both of these documents have been through a rigorous public participation process and form the basis for resource management planning of the Estuary and its environs. Therefore, the framework is already set. In addition, the outcome of the management plan should not conflict with the content of either of these plans. The other aspect to be considered is that the two Councils will have financial responsibility for any work to be undertaken to achieve the outcomes identified in the management plan. Taking these factors into consideration, the most practical option would seem to be a process initiated and guided by the two authorities, with realistic options and opportunities that would be taken to **all** interest groups for discussion and resolution.

It is important that the process used ensures that the wider Christchurch community and all interest groups have an opportunity to influence the plan, and that the decisions are taken by those with a direct responsibility for their cost implications.

Recommendation: That the Committee recommend to the Christchurch City Council and Canterbury Regional Council that the two Councils, in consultation with the Christchurch Estuary Association, prepare a non-statutory management strategy for the estuary, using a process which ensures that all interest groups and the wider community have opportunities for input.