

6. CHRISTCHURCH WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT DISCHARGE CONSENT

RR 9809

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Corporate Plan Output: Liquid Waste	

The purpose of this report is to inform Councillors of progress with seeking a new consent to discharge treated wastewater from the main Christchurch treatment plant, and to advise of the programme of meetings and other activities aimed to guide the Council in lodging a consent application early next year.

PRESENT SITUATION

Since the early 1960s the Christchurch Wastewater Treatment Plant has discharged its treated effluent to the Avon-Heathcote estuary, and from there the effluent flows to the sea. The Consent for this expires in 2001, and the City Council needs to apply for a new consent, even if this is to continue with the status quo.

However, while the present plant has served the city well for 30 years, there is a strong call for environmental improvement and it is clear that the Council would not be granted a consent to continue with the status quo. Improvements are under way with the plant capacity upgrade, and more improvements will be required, quite possibly to both the quality of the effluent and the location of the discharge. The two main concerns are that there are significant nuisances from excess growth of algae and sea lettuce in the estuary, and bacteria levels in the estuary often transgress accepted recreation standards.

PROCESS SO FAR

In August 1996 the Council asked staff to begin preparing for a new consent. After a lot of planning and investigation the Council decided in August 1998 to “favourably consider for possible adoption, the implementation of an ocean outfall”, subject to a range of conditions. These conditions related mainly to the environmental standards that should be achieved, further technical investigation, ongoing public consultation, (including retaining the community Working Party) and co-ordination of any wastewater plans with other potential developments on the western edge of the estuary. (The so called Green Edge development).

The Council’s final decision will significantly affect environmental outcomes for the estuary for a generation, and if the ocean outfall is confirmed, this will be one of the largest financial commitments made by the Council for many years. Therefore it is intended to create maximum opportunities for Councillors to become familiar with the issues before they make a decision.

The programme of activities required from now until the Council lodges an application has recently been reviewed by the Council Subcommittee (Councillors O'Rourke, Wright and Close), staff and key consultants and is shown in summary in the attached table.

Technical investigations are now well under way with the help of many of New Zealand's experts in the relevant fields, and it is planned to present a preliminary report on their findings at a City Services seminar on 17 June. All Councillors are urged to come to this. Note also that the investigations are covering more options than just the possible ocean outfall.

Public involvement is continuing via the following activities:

- As part of a contract to assess environmental effects, a team of researchers is evaluating with small groups of various sector interests the impacts on them of different potential discharge options.
- The community Working Party that has advised the Council for over two years so far, continues to help the Council. (The Council Subcommittee and Council staff are working with this group).
- Council staff are frequently asked to speak on the topic at community meetings.
- An intensive programme of public meetings is being planned to obtain wider feedback once the Council has selected a short list of solutions that it wants to consult the public about.
- A public communications expert is soon to be engaged to advise on the communication programme and to prepare documents for educating the community on the issues and options.

Regarding the Green Edge co-ordination, a team from five interested Council Units has been assembled to enable a report (Team Leader Dave Hinman) to be prepared for the Council on this matter at the same time as the Council receives reports on the scientific and community impacts of the potential wastewater solutions.

KEY PRINCIPLES

The programme of consenting activities is designed with the following key principles in mind:

- The Council will be provided with the best technical, legal and policy information possible to enable it to make an informed choice of a solution, knowing the likely present and long-term impacts of the potential solutions.
- The Council will ensure it retains the integrity of the consultation process, firstly by researching with special sector interests the likely consequences to them of potential solutions, and secondly by engaging in a broad-based consultation process with full disclosure of research information and with a number of options still genuinely on the table.

- Public consultation meetings and documents will make it clear that feedback is sought to enable the Council to make a wise and informed decision, and not for the purpose of conducting a popularity poll.

STAGES IN THE CONSENT PROCESS

With these principles in mind activities have been arranged as broadly described on the attached table. Note that the timetable has been slowed from what has previously been reported to the Council because of the need for extra fieldwork and because of plans for extra Council meetings.

Key events for Councillors are (subject to ongoing confirmation):

- 17 June City Services seminar – all Councillors urged to attend
- 10 August/
2 September City Services and Council meet to decide what options to consult the public about
- 9-25 November City Services and Council meet to select final solution
- March 2000 City Services and Council meet to confirm conditions and mitigation measures before lodging applications

**STAGES AND ACTIVITIES FOR SELECTING
A WASTEWATER DISCHARGE SOLUTION**

Time	Stage	Activities	Purpose
now to mid June	Research	Research on ocean and estuary currents, and potential environmental impacts of treated effluent discharging in different locations; includes social impact research.	To ensure the best possible information is obtained so the Council can make the optimum decision in the end
mid June to early Sept	Public education and review of technical information	Experts review the information. The Council and Working Party receive results of investigation. The community is educated about the issues.	Assessments of effects are endorsed by the best expertise available in NZ and overseas. Councillors understand the implications of the potential solutions and select which solutions they want to receive community feedback about. The community understands the issues so it can give informed feedback later to the Council about the potential solutions
Sept to late October	Public Consultation	A wide range of public meetings will continue to educate people on investigations and seek feedback on potential solutions.	The Council will be able to choose a solution knowing the impacts on and attitudes of all sectors of the community. The consultation requirements of the Resource Management Act will be fulfilled.
November	Council decision	The Council selects which solution it wishes to proceed with.	
December 99 to Feb 2000	Development of details	The community is consulted about details of monitoring and mitigation measures.	The Council will develop a robust decision, ensuring strong community support when the consent application is being processed.
March 2000	Application lodged	The Council confirms details of monitoring conditions and mitigation measures it wishes to implement, and lodges the consent applications.	Optimum consent obtained.

The Committee Secretariat has been asked to ensure that the timing of other meetings avoid the above programmed meetings and seminars.

Recommendation: That a special meeting of the Council be convened at 2pm on 2 September 1999 to decide what options should be progressed for public submissions