

## 14. WATER SUPPLY CUSTOMER RESEARCH

<b>Officer responsible</b> Water and Waste Manager	<b>Author</b> Eric van Toor, DDI 371-1980
Corporate Plan Output: Supply of Water	

The purpose of this report is to advise the Council of research undertaken to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions, desires and requirements of the businesses and residents of Christchurch relating to their water supply, and to recommend any changes in policy or level of service required to make appropriate improvements.

### BACKGROUND

In March 2000 the Water Services Unit engaged Opinions Market Research (OPR) to carry out a comprehensive review of customer attitudes to Christchurch's water supply for the following reasons:

- A peer review of the Water Supply Asset Management Plan identified the need for wider and more detailed consultation on level of service issues.
- Customer attitudes and perceptions regarding resource related issues and water conservation are necessary for long term strategic planning of the water supply and for providing input into Environment Canterbury's Natural Resources Regional Plan.
- Planned changes to the Annual Survey of Residents is expected to take a more strategic outcome focus in future years and will put more responsibility on individual units to carry out their own more detailed surveys. This OPR research will provide a baseline for these more detailed surveys.

The research was carried out in two stages. The first stage comprised interviews and focus groups to obtain qualitative information on the views of various stakeholders. Detailed questionnaires were then prepared for quantitative surveys of commercial and residential customers. The residential quantitative surveys involved a random sample of 500, plus a further sample of 100 customers who had had recent contact with the Council's Water Services Unit. The commercial random samples comprised 100 customers with water use exceeding 1000m<sup>3</sup> ("high use") annually and 100 that used less than 1000 m<sup>3</sup> per year ("normal use").

### RESULTS

A summary of the results of the research is tabled. The key findings are noted below.

- The high quality of Christchurch's water source is widely appreciated and it appears that in general the residents and businesses are prepared to make any necessary efforts to protect it provided they are aware of the reasons for it. There is some confusion however as to whether there is "plenty" of water available in Christchurch. There was a common attitude that the Council should examine its own water practices and ensure it "leads by example" with the efficient use of water.
- There is a high level of trust in the Council's management of the supply with 82% agreeing (strongly or slightly) with the statement "I trust the City Council to manage the water supply in the best interest of the community". Both domestic and commercial customers generally get what they expect when they turn the tap on, consider the supply to be good value and are happy to leave the details to the supply authority.
- Two-thirds of customers who had dealings with the customer services section of the Water Services Unit were quite satisfied or very satisfied with the service received. The service received in relation to politeness and promptness came close to expectations, however a noticeable (although not large) gap between whether staff were professional, knowledgeable and helpful indicated any staff training would be most appropriately targeted in these areas.
- There are a number of issues regarding high water-use commercial and industrial customers that would benefit from an integrated approach between water supply, trade waste and waste minimisation. These include water-use efficiency, backflow prevention and continuity of supply. Industry experts included in the research support a collaborative relationship with the Council regarding any initiatives that may influence the supply.

### CONCLUSIONS

The research indicates that current water supply levels of service are appropriate and should be continued.

Most residents are aware of the need to control use, and attempt to do this and minimise wastage to the best of their abilities, however beyond this there is little effort made. Indications were that many supported the idea of higher rates and expenditure on the water supply to protect quality and also to ensure sufficient supply.

The research contained information on attitudes to water resource issues that will provide input into the Council's submission on Environment Canterbury's issues and options document for Christchurch's water resources (which has recently been released).

The scope for improvement in the professional training of customer service training has been noted and will be addressed in future training programmes within the new City Water and Waste unit.

A review provision of water supply services to industrial and commercial high-use customers will be considered in conjunction with trade waste and waste minimisation initiatives. The interest of some industry experts in participating in the development of a water strategy for the future needs of the City is acknowledged. It is suggested however that such involvement should wait until a clearer indication of management options is received from Environment Canterbury during consultation for the Natural Resources Regional Plan.

This project is the first comprehensive water supply customer research carried out in Christchurch. It is proposed that the quantitative domestic and non-domestic surveys be repeated every three years to coincide with the Asset Management Plan revisions. Questions for which it is desirable to obtain annual trends will be asked annually through the Annual Survey of Residents or similar survey.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the tabled report be included as an appendix to the revised Asset Management Plan (to be presented to the Council later in 2001), to be used in support of retaining levels of service at current levels.
  2. That a new promotion strategy be developed which uses the "pride" Christchurch people feel about Christchurch water to underpin the message of efficient use.
  3. That further information material be developed to increase resident's knowledge about what they can do to help ensure the quality and quantity of groundwater is maintained.
  4. That the Council confirm it does not intend to charge domestic water consumers for water via use of water meters and prefers the use of education and minimal use of restrictions.