

5. OUR WATER IN THE BALANCE

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| Officer responsible Allan Watson, Infrastructure and Facilities Policy Leader | Authors Jenny Ridgen, Eric van Toor and Robert Watts |
| Corporate Plan Output: Regional and District Plans and Policies | |

The purpose of this report is to advise the Council of a draft submission prepared on the Environment Canterbury document "Our Water in the Balance" and to gain support for this submission. A workshop for Councillors was held on Wednesday 21 February to discuss the document and the preparation of a Council submission.

Our Water in the Balance

Since the introduction of the Resource Management Act in 1991, primary responsibility for the management of water quality and water quantity has lain with regional councils, as set out in S.30 of the Act.

In Christchurch, Environment Canterbury has taken a policy and monitoring role while the Christchurch City Council has continued with the day to day management of the City's rivers. The City Council is also a major abstractor of groundwater for public supply purposes, taking approximately 51 million cubic metres per year or 50% of the total take.

With the release of the discussion document "Our Water in the Balance", Environment Canterbury has addressed the issues and options for managing the Christchurch-West Melton groundwater system, and for maintaining flows and managing water quality in the Avon and Heathcote Rivers. The two systems are closely connected with groundwater being the source of the springs that supply the headwaters of the Avon and Heathcote Rivers.

"Our Water in the Balance" sits alongside Environment Canterbury's issues and options document "Water – our future" (released October 1999) which deals with water resource issues across the entire Canterbury region. These documents, together with an analysis of submissions, will be used to form the basis of the water section of the Natural Resources Regional Plan (NRRP). The timetable Environment Canterbury has set for this section of the NRRP is to have prepared a draft by June 2001 and a proposed version by June 2002. Submissions on "Our Water in the Balance" close on March 31st 2001.

Main Issues for the City

One of the main issues for the City Council is the increased demand for good quality groundwater as the City's population continues to grow and the effects that increased abstraction will have on reducing the availability of water from spring flows. These effects are particularly significant following periods of low rainfall and for wells in close proximity to springs. Although there is no immediate concern, alternative supplies will need to be investigated along with methods of improving the efficiency of groundwater use and possibly prioritising different uses.

The effects of reduced spring flows in streams could be partly mitigated through changing the profile of stream beds and introducing appropriate plants to enhance habitat and preserve in-stream values.

Strong land use controls would be required in the aquifer recharge area in order to preserve the high quality groundwater the City currently enjoys. Measures will also need to be considered to ensure that the adverse effects of contaminants in stormwater discharging into the City's waterways are appropriately avoided, mitigated or remedied.

Desired Outcomes

As discussed at the Councillor seminars, the following outcomes are desired for the City's water resource.

- The City continues to rely on high quality "untreated" groundwater for municipal supply
- Healthy river ecosystems and attractive river environments are maintained
- Agricultural and commercial businesses have sufficient water for their operations
- Restrictions only occur during exceptional events
- The health of public and private gardens is maintained
- Important botanical collections are sustained
- Water conservation is accepted as essential and practised by all

The draft submission is intended to address the issues stated in the document “Our Water in the Balance” with a view to facilitating these outcomes through appropriate rules in the NRRP. The City Council will also need to review some of its own policies and practices, including reviewing education programmes and considering changes to Council policies. Future planning and infrastructure issues will also need to be addressed.

Recommendation: That the Council approve the attached submission prepared on the ‘Our Water in the Balance’ document for forwarding to Environment Canterbury.