6. CONSENT FOR CHRISTCHURCH WASTEWATER DISCHARGE UPDATE ON PROGRESS

RR 9421

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Corporate Plan Output: Liquid Waste	

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to inform the Board of progress with seeking a new consent to discharge treated wastewater from the Christchurch treatment plant, and to invite them to consider what role they might want to play in the public consultation stages.

Background on wastewater strategy

Since the early 1960's the Christchurch Wastewater Treatment Plant has discharged treated effluent to the western edge of the Avon-Heathcote Estuary, and from there it flows to the sea. The consent for this expires in 2001. While the city can be proud of the treatment provided in the past, it is timely to develop a longer-term vision for management of the city's wastewater. This vision will include the following components.

- Where feasible it is desirable to reuse and recycle wastes. For wastewater a major opportunity for this lies with the biosolids – the stabilised solids produced during the treatment process. A consent has been granted for their reuse in forests around Christchurch, appeals have been settled, and it is intended that the Council will be operating this by about the middle of 1999. However it is expected the Council will be able to develop both a greater quantity and better quality of biosolids, with wider opportunities for reuse, such as agriculture and domestic gardens.

- A second area for significant improvement is in reduction of contaminants in industrial wastes. The Council has negotiated details of a new Trade Wastes Bylaw with industry, and when this is implemented it will have substantial incentives to reduce the level of trace elements.

- An expansion is under way at the treatment plant to accommodate 30 years of growth in the city's population as the present plant is vulnerable to malfunction from overload. The expanded plant will produce a significantly improved quality of effluent compared with the present, particularly by reducing bacteria levels.

- In the future there may be a range of other improvement opportunities: e.g. reuse of "greywater", i.e. the non-toilet components of domestic wastewater, or opportunities to reduce the total volume of wastewater and the strength of its nutrient load. These opportunities are acknowledged in the recent Issues-and-Options report and a strategic plan for investigation and implementation of feasible options will be developed more during 1999.

However whatever happens in the future with these and other opportunities the treatment plant will still need to be operating, with a growing waste stream,

after the present consent expires in 2001, and it will need a new consent to discharge its treated wastes.

Discharge consent process

In August 1996 the Council approved a process of seeking a new discharge consent. The first action was to set up a consultation program. One of the main vehicles for this has been a broad-based community Working Party, which has included representatives from the two eastern Community Boards, and this group has built up a high level of expertise and understanding of the issues and options available. Community consultation through the Working Party and other means has consistently indicated two top priorities in the minds of citizens – i.e. a desire for clean water in the receiving environment so it is safe and pleasant for its range of uses, and a desire for a long-term plan that is not constrained by immediate budgets.

After two years of consultation with the community, and investigation by a team of consultants, the Council resolved in August 1998 to "favourably consider" a direct ocean outfall, but subject to a list of conditions. (The full text of the Council resolution is attached, and all members of Community Boards have received copies of the "Easy-read" version of the consultants' report.) The reason for this preference was that it was seen as the minimum cost option that would:

- ensure shellfish standards are maintained on the beaches
- maintain ocean bacteria standards at their present high level, or probably better
- give the maximum possible reduction of sea lettuce nuisance in the estuary
- lead to confidence that contact recreation standards will be achieved consistently throughout the estuary.

The main action since that decision last August has been to commission the following teams of helpers whose work is now well under way.

A team of consultants led by Woodward-Clyde Ltd, and consisting of environmental scientists, wastewater engineers, sociologists and planners has been engaged to complete a detailed assessment of environmental effects (AEE) of two discharge locations, for a variety of effluent qualities. (These two locations are the present estuary edge, and the tentatively-preferred direct ocean outfall.)

1. A team of consultants led by Unisearch, of Sydney, has been engaged to do a study of current patterns in the estuary and Pegasus Bay, to feed into the AEE contract and enable a good picture to be obtained of the comparison between the impacts of the different locations and a range of possible treatment standards.

2. A trio of experts has been engaged as "peer reviewers" to oversee the work of these two teams of consultants, so that we will be involving many of New Zealand's leaders in these fields.

3. A group of 10 users of Pegasus Bay and the local beaches has agreed to act as an "Coastal Reference Team", reviewing the work of the technical experts to ensure it matches their own real-life experience of current patterns in Pegasus Bay.

4. A group from the Estuary Association has agreed to perform the same function for the estuary.

In addition the Working Party continues to provide a comprehensive “citizens’ overview” of both the process and outcome, and later this year it will be asked to form a recommendation to the Council on what option to finally select. Discussions continue with other groups as well.

Next steps

The following key steps are planned from here on to obtain a consent. Note that the timetable is subject to change.

• complete scientific studies	April - May 99
• seminar for City Councillors	April
• review with teams 3 to 5 above, and the Working Party	May
• draft assessment of environmental effects written up	May
• consultation with interested groups, including Community Boards, special interest groups, tangata whenua,	May - June
• Working Party forms recommendation to Council	June
• Council selects final option	July
• assessment of environmental effects completed, on selected option	July-August
• application lodged for consent	August
• public submissions sought by Regional Council	September
• consent granted	December 99

Note that there will be on-going public interaction throughout the whole process. Note also there will be a more intensive period of public consultation, probably for the months of May and June.

Recommendation: For information only.