

15. CENTRAL PLAINS WATER ENHANCEMENT: STEERING COMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORT

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The purpose of this report is to provide Councillors with a progress report on the undertaking of feasibility studies for water enhancement projects in the Central Plains area.

BACKGROUND

Councillors will recall that the City and Selwyn District Councils agreed last year to establish a joint special committee tasked with carrying out feasibility work on Central Plains water enhancement, with an emphasis on irrigation.

Councillors O'Rourke and Harrow were appointed City Council representatives, two Councillors were appointed by Selwyn and the balance of the membership appointed through a publicly notified call for expressions of interest. Doug Marsh has been elected chairperson with John Donkers, Jack Searle, Doug Catherwood and Willie Palmer as members. Officer support is being provided by the author, Walter Lewthwaite and Eddie Thomas (Selwyn District), with an oversight provided by the Director of Policy. Bruce Henderson, Water Supply Manager, is also part of the Christchurch City Council officer team.

From its initial meeting on 28 March 2000, the Steering Committee has tackled its job with real energy and enthusiasm and made significant progress.

MILESTONES ACHIEVED

In its first three months of work, the Steering Committee has:

- prepared and had approved a constitution and terms of reference
- established three subcommittees charged with technical and economic, liaison and consultative duties, and prepared and approved their terms of reference
- prepared a programme of activity to complete the feasibility work by September 2001
- established a consultation working group through a publicly notified call for expressions of interest and appointed the group, ensuring a wide range of interest is represented
- prepared the terms of reference of the group
- sought and appointed a communication adviser (PR South) through an interview process, and prepared and approved a terms of reference/brief for this role
- sought and appointed a consultation facilitator (Richard Budd) through an interview selection process and prepared and approved a terms of reference/brief for this role

- prepared to apply for Agmart funding
- visited the Waimakariri Irrigation Scheme
- prepared and approved the terms of reference for the feasibility study
- called for expressions of interest in the feasibility study, shortlisted the applicants through an analysis of submissions and invited four consulting companies to provide firm proposals
- analysed the proposals and selected a consultant

The Steering Committee is now ready to commence the study through its selected consultant. The brief requires the consultant to produce a scoping study within three months which will be carefully assessed by both councils before the balance of the work is commissioned. This initial study will have to identify development prospects that justify progressing further—a decision that will be taken by the two councils rather than the steering committee.

FINANCIAL

Each Council has so far committed \$150,000 to this study, \$300,000 total which is required to cover steering committee costs, the principal consultancy as well as ancillary professional costs (officer support, consultation and communication consultancy fees, etc).

The steering committee now has a good idea of the likely principal consulting costs and it is estimated that at project completion, i.e. September 2001, total costs will certainly exceed the current allocation. From the outset, the steering committee has been encouraged by the Agmart Trust to apply for funding to support the feasibility study and is very hopeful that this application will be successful. Once the outcome of this is known, each Council will be advised whether or not additional funding could be required.

It is anticipated that presentation of the initial scoping study to the two councils, planned for October 2000, will be the right time to discuss funding matters.

CITY COUNCIL INTERESTS

Justification for Christchurch City Council involvement in this study is based on both the employment opportunities that intensive horticulture/agriculture activity will provide, and on the very significant regional economic multipliers that flow from these developments. Emphasis on the regional opportunities is being well maintained by the Council representatives, but is also well understood by all steering committee members. Those with a rural orientation realise that recognition of regional benefits will encourage wider investment interest, both public and private.

A wider view is also being taken of the environmental and community benefits that could arise from a water resource development project. All Committee members recognise that for an irrigation project to be successful through its consent processes many varied interests will have to be involved and accommodated.

PROCESS

The steering committee is required to report quarterly to the parent Councils, which is the purpose of this report. Presentation of the scoping study in three months' time will conveniently coincide with the next reporting date.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the information be received.