

8. NATIONAL GUIDELINE ON RADIOFREQUENCY TRANSMISSIONS

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| Corporate Plan Output: Policy Advice/City Plan | |

The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of the content of the new National guideline on radiofrequency transmissions, recently published by the Ministry for the Environment and the Ministry of Health.

INTRODUCTION

In December 2000 the Ministry for the Environment and the Ministry of Health jointly published “National Guidelines for managing the effects of radiofrequency transmitters”. A copy of the guideline overview is attached for your information. The full guideline document will be tabled at the meeting.

This guideline was produced in response to increasing public concerns about this issue and was a result of a Government directive in March 1998. The two Ministries consulted with interested groups before preparing the guideline.

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

The guideline seeks to provide information on radiofrequency technology and how scientists determine whether there are adverse health effects associated with radiofrequency transmitters. It does this to try and ensure people are able to consider the issues in an informed way.

It then advises on health effects and appropriate exposure levels. In this respect it concludes that the application of the exposure guidelines published in 1998 by ICNIRP and which are incorporated in the 1999 New Zealand Standard is appropriate. During the consultative phase of the preparation of this guideline Dr Neil Cherry had presented a criticism of the proposal to adopt the ICNIRP guideline. The Ministry had a critique of Dr Cherry’s paper prepared by the Institute of Environmental Science Limited. A copy of the critique is attached. In summary, the critique concluded that Dr Cherry’s critique suffered from a number of problems, most seriously being “an apparently limited awareness of the potential for bias that rendered most of the re-analyses and reinterpretations of studies invalid, or at least highly suspect”. The recommendation was that Dr Cherry’s critique of the ICNIRP guidelines not be accorded weight in determining the final shape of the Guideline. This recommendation appears to have been followed in the drafting of the final version of the guideline.

It considers radiofrequency transmission facilities in the context of the RMA and concludes the fields are not a ‘contaminant’ and therefore not a matter that should be addressed in Regional Plans. It notes the legislation is not ‘no risk’ but that with the understanding of the potential level of risk which is current, the Environment Court is unlikely to decline applications in relation to health effects.

The guideline concludes by providing guidance to the three key parties involved in the issue: territorial authorities, the telecommunications industry and the community.

The guidance to the three groups is as follows.

To territorial authorities, in relation to radiofrequency issues, it is recommended that activities transmitting radiofrequency be allowed for as **permitted activities** in district plans, where they comply with the maximum exposure levels for the general public in NZS 2772.1:1999. In other words where exposures to the public do not exceed $450\mu\text{w}/\text{cm}^2$. The guideline does not deal with other issues associated with such facilities, such as visual impact. The guideline recognises such controls are not best dealt with in a national guideline as amenity varies from community to community and amenity effects are best considered on a case by case basis at a local level.

To the Telecommunications industry:

- To recognise the value in communicating with concerned residents
- To recognise particular skills are needed for communicating with concerned people effectively
- To address community concerns where this involves no- or low-cost action

To communities, details on the implications of recent Environment Court decisions is provided. There was also recognition that community education on radiofrequency requires a partnership between industry, central and local government.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The City Plan team will now consider the implications of the guidance for the Proposed City Plan. There are a range of options open to Council:

- do nothing
- consider the scope for dealing with the issue in relation to outstanding references relating to Plan rules
- leaving the Plan as it is in so far as it supports a cautious approach to this issue
- consider whether a variation might be appropriate to take the guidance on board

It is also planned to make the guideline available to all Councillors and Community Board members over the course of the next few weeks.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the information be received.