

9. QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT - CENTRAL PLAINS WATER ENHANCEMENT STEERING COMMITTEE

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The purpose of this report is to provide the parent councils with an update on the Committee's work and progress as required by the steering committee constitution.

SITUATION

The Central Plains Water Enhancement Steering Committee aims to complete the present phase of its work by December 2001. Reports presented to the parent councils at that time will advise whether or not a water enhancement scheme across the Central Plains involving extensive irrigation is viable and can be built and operated in a manner that mitigates environmental effects to the standards sought by consenting authorities. If such a scheme exists, the report will develop that scheme to a level that will define the actions required to further the project. Consent applications are the obvious next step but there may well be other negotiations and changes that would represent fatal flaws if not resolved. Examples could include possible changes to the national conservation order, alterations to the way Lake Coleridge is managed, critical land acquisition issues etc.

FUNDING

An update on funding will be brought to the Annual Plan Working Party.

CONSULTATION, COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

Newsletter/Fact Sheets/Website

A second newsletter is about to go to print advising stakeholders of the Committee's progress and updating them on development to the north and south of the Central Plains area. It highlights with the key achievements, such as the recent identification of Wairiri Valley as the preferred storage site as well as the key concerns, for example those expressed by residents situated downstream of the dam site and anxieties about process being expressed by the Fish and Game Council.

Fact sheets are in preparation which will deal with a range of issues and frequently asked questions. Some nineteen topics have been identified, priority being given to those most needed at this stage of investigation.

A website is now available where this type of information is being displayed. The site is <http://www.cpw.org.nz>.

Engagement with Stakeholders

During the period the Consultative Working Party has been active, principally considering options for the location of scheme storage. The results of its weight attribute exercise confirmed, the technical consultants view that Wairiri Valley is the preferred storage area.

In notifying this preference to the steering committee, the working party has funded a number of reservations, its suggested opinion being "In light of the fact that a number of groups represented on this forum are yet to be convinced, from the information we have to date, the options featuring storage at Wairiri Valley appear to be the best way forward. It is a diverse group, but risk, environmental impact and community impact of the scheme are consistently the most important considerations. Under these criteria, and with the limited information we have to date further investigation of this option does appear worthwhile." All the group is saying at this point is that in order that the effects of scheme development can be examined in detail, it is necessary to identify the more favourable options and from the options presented, the Wairiri Valley appears to be the best storage area.

As favoured options are being identified and the shape of a possible scheme becomes firmer, meetings have been held with affected township and their concerns relayed to the steering committee.

Meetings are also being held with a group that includes representatives from the Fish and Game Council, the Forest and Bird Society and the Department of Conservation interested in pursuing "a lease impact option" that can be placed alongside major development options.

A preliminary meeting with representatives from Te Taumutu Runanga, Te Ngai Tuahuriri Runanga and Te Runanga O Ngai Tahu also enabled the matters likely to be of critical importance to be recorded and placed before the steering committee, including mixing of waters from different sources, surface water takes from the Selwyn River, culturally significant historic sites, burial sites and the need to maintain unimpeded fish passage.

Presentations have been made to local MPs and plans are in place to provide the Businessmen's Association with an information update and opportunity for discussion.

Media Protocol

The Steering Committee has reviewed and tightened its media protocol following a lapse that caused some concern to both parent Councils.

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ASHBURTON COMMUNITY WATER TRUST

The Ashburton Community Water Trust (ACWT) is engaged in an exercise closely paralleling that of the Central Plains Water Enhancement Steering Committee (CPW) and has just announced the culmination of studies envisaging a scheme that would irrigate 153,000 ha (cf CPW scheme area 84,000 ha). Both schemes propose significant takes from the Rakaia River and co-operation between the two groups will be necessary if each is to realise their objectives.

Meetings between the two groups have been held and joint work is underway to model how the two schemes could meet their water needs, taking account of the constraints of the Rakaia River nature conservation order. Opportunities for further co-operative effort are being explored and seminars are being planned where elected members from Christchurch City, Selwyn District and the Regional Council can be informed about the interaction of these two major development proposals.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

Sheffield/Springfield Area

Scheme definition is currently taking a form that does not include the Springfield/Sheffield/Russells Flat area and it may be that a separate scheme will be developed for this sub-area. However, the Steering Committee has agreed to continue examining options that would bring water into this area from Lake Coleridge via High Peak or from the Waimakariri River.

Rangitata River Water Conservation Order Application

The steering committee has responded to the Fish and Game Councils application for a Water Conservation Order on the Rangitata River by lodging a submission and securing its rights to be involved in the hearing process. The committee has noted that restrictions on the Rangitata will move pressure for water extraction to the Rakaia River and affecting its own interests.

Significant costs could be incurred if the Steering committee is required to develop research and deliver its own evidence and it is more likely that such work would be shared by a number of submitters with similar interests.

Marketing Studies

The committee is aware that scheme viability is dependant on securing markets for the produce that irrigation will enable and is preparing to commission a study that will look at the farm options that become available with irrigation and assess their profitability given present markets, but also looking at possible future market scenarios and the ability of farmers to adapt to supply the adhered market opportunities.

Responding to recent media stories about the lack of people able to take up the rural job opportunities coming available through agricultural development, the committee is also looking at a Labour and Skills Impact Study that would examine this issue with a view to recommending ways to ensure that the skills are being put in place to meet the needs as they arise.

Dairy Farming in Canterbury

A workshop to examine the issues and outcomes from the increasing development of dairy farming in Canterbury was convened by North Canterbury Federated Farmers on 15 May 2001. A wide range of stakeholders including the steering committee, industry representatives, dairy farmers, environmental interest groups and local authorities were present.

An action plan was prepared and the process will be further developed under the guidance of New Zealand Landcare Trust.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the information be received.