

## 5. ANNUAL SURVEY OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES 1999/2000 – RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACT

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The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of the results of the Ministry for the Environment's fifth annual survey of local authorities, copies of which have been circulated separately to Committee members.

The purpose of the annual survey is to:

- Assist the Minister for the Environment to monitor the effect and implementation of the Resource Management Act (RMA) as required by section 24 of the RMA.
- Provide the Ministry for the Environment and local authorities with information:
  - to highlight areas that may need further research and assist with research projects;
  - to highlight trends over time for some key processes under the RMA;
  - to provide a basis to consider comments on the RMA, including general enquiries and ministerial letters.
- Promote local authority good practice and improved performance in terms of benchmarks established in the RMA and/or guidance produced by the Ministry for the Environment.
- Assist individual local authorities in comparing performance with their peers.

The report contains a useful executive summary on pages 2 and 3. Appendices at the end contain detailed breakdowns of the results. The results are reported in 'family groups' of local authorities to enable comparisons between local authorities with similar characteristics. Territorial authorities are then further divided into groups on the basis of the number of resource consents they processed. Christchurch City is in Group 4, which is the group that processes the most consents (651-7,000 consents per annum).

The number of consents processed nationally was down by 1,100 from the previous year. This was particularly noticeable in the Auckland and Christchurch areas. Christchurch consents dropped from 3,466 in 1998/99 to 2,604 in 1999/00.

Nationally there has been no change in the proportion of consents notified (5%), declined (less than 1%) or appealed (1%) for the past three years. Christchurch City publicly notified 2.4% of consent applications, which is more than other territorial authorities processing similar volumes (Auckland 0.8%, Manukau 1.5%, North Shore 1.6%, Waitakere 0.8%).

There was no improvement or decline nationally in the overall percentage of consents processed within statutory time limits. Overall, 63% of notified resource consents were processed within the statutory timeframe (Christchurch City = 71%, up from 43% in 1998/99) and 83% of non-notified consents met the time limits (Christchurch City = 81%, up from 79% in 1998/99).

Although our timeframes have improved on the previous year, further work is required in this area. A number of initiatives arising from the review of our resource consent process are aimed at reducing processing times. This includes the development of a practice guide and procedures for the use of section 37(5a), which allows the extension of timeframes with the agreement or at the request of an applicant. The use of section 37 is not always recorded at present, which makes our performance on notified consents appear worse than it really is.

Almost all of the best practice examples mentioned throughout the report are followed by this Council. Examples include checking consent applications for completeness within one working day of receipt, formal acknowledgment of receipt within one working day, and not resetting the time-limit clock to zero once further information is received.

One best practice example we have only just started and would like to expand relates to customer satisfaction. MfE has noted that the public's primary contact with the RMA is through the resource consent process, and therefore many members of the public judge the success of the RMA based upon the level of service they receive from local authorities. MfE's survey indicates that 59% of local authorities use customer satisfaction surveys to establish what applicants think of their resource consent processes. Of that 59%, three-quarters use the level of customer satisfaction as an indication of performance for their resource consent processes.

The Environmental Services Unit initiated a customer research study on the resource consent process late last year. This is currently being expanded with a survey of residents' groups. We are now arranging for the customer research to be conducted each year and the intention is to include the results as a key performance indicator in the Annual Plan from 2002/03.

MfE has advised that the survey questionnaire will be reviewed and reduced in length. It will be made available electronically and will become biennial. Although it takes a lot of time and effort to complete, it provides a very useful benchmark as well as pragmatic best practice examples.

**Chairman's**

**Recommendation:** That the information be received.