

18. CONSENTS FOR THE CHRISTCHURCH WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT

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The purpose of this report is to inform Councillors of the decisions of the Commissioners who conducted the wastewater consent hearings and to recommend the next steps for the Council to take.

BACKGROUND

The Council applied in March 2001 for a consent to discharge treated wastewater from the Christchurch Wastewater Treatment Plant (CWTP) for a further 15 years, subject to substantial improvements in the quality of treatment given, and allied with a range of environmental initiatives for reducing and reusing waste and for development of the Estuary Green Edge. The application followed five years of investigations and public consultation.

The Council also applied for five associated consents to make the main one operative and to authorise discharges to air of various gases from the treatment plant.

Commissioners appointed by Environment Canterbury heard the application and submissions in three stages from September 2001 to April 2002.

DECISIONS

Following are brief summaries of the decisions released today (6 May) by the Commissioners.

1. Application to discharge treated wastewater from the CWTP for 15 years:
 - granted for a term of only five years (the Council had applied for 15 years)
 - a UV treatment plant required within two years, to reduce pathogen levels (the Council had proposed this as part of the 15-year estuary discharge package, and had budgeted for it in 2003/05)
 - trickling filters required within two years, to reduce ammonia levels (the Council had discussed this as a possible later contingency measure, if proved necessary)
 - a community Discharge Audit Group required to recommend further actions, investigations and community education
 - a range of other conditions relating to location and timing of discharges, allowable levels of contaminants during the five years, sampling, signs, etc.

Note that this is an interim decision and the Commissioners have invited comment on details of the conditions they have stipulated.
2. Two applications to discharge seepage from the bed of the oxidation ponds to land and on into the estuary via the present small drains:
 - granted for 35 years (as applied for)
 - Council required to pump all normal flows back into the ponds for re-treatment (the Council had not proposed to do this).
3. Two applications to build new attractively landscaped discharge embayments on the estuary edge:
 - both declined, one on the basis of not enough information provided, and the other on the grounds of not therefore being necessary.
4. Application to discharge various gases to air:
 - granted for some contaminants for 20 years (the Council had applied for 35 years)
 - granted for other contaminants until one year after a regional air discharge plan is operative (the Council had applied for 35 years)
 - required to meet MfE air quality guidelines after the regional air plan is operative
 - a range of other conditions relating to volume limits, technologies used, monitoring, engine operations, stack heights and alarms.

COMMENT

From an initial quick reading the key issue to address is the state of the estuary. It is clear that the Commissioners have interpreted the available information to say that the estuary is in a worse state than the Council had concluded, and therefore they have granted consents for only enough time for us to arrange an alternative solution, and have stated very strict conditions. The Council had proposed a more incremental approach to estuary improvement. The Commissioners imply that the alternative solution should be a discharge direct to the ocean.

IMMEDIATE ACTION

1. Staff will respond to the Commissioners as invited regarding details of conditions of the main discharge consent. This must be done by 24 May.
2. The Resource Management Act allows appeals within 15 working days of the announcement of a decision, i.e. until 27 May. Staff will lodge an appeal to preserve the Council's position and allow the Council time to consider thoroughly what action it wants to take.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the Sustainable Transport and Utilities Committee arrange a seminar for all Councillors as soon as possible to brief them on the decisions, including a reminder of the process of reaching the position taken by the Council for the consent applications, reasons for the Commissioners' decisions, implications for Council budgets and rates rises, and options open to the Council from here on.
 2. That the Council allow itself sufficient time to consider its position carefully before confirming whether to proceed with appeals and what details to take to appeal.

Chairman's Recommendation: Not seen by Chairman.