

Media Release

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Canterbury Water Management Strategy Available for Public Discussion 3 September 2009

Today marks another important milestone in the preparation of the Canterbury Water Management Strategy (CWMS) with the release of the draft strategy.

The approach of the strategy set out in this draft document has been the product of extensive consultation and its final development and detailing requires further input from the public and stakeholders.

“The general thrust of the strategy has been agreed by the Steering Group, the Mayoral Forum and the Minister of Agriculture on behalf of Government.

“There is more work to be done on the detail but we have a broad direction”, says Bede O’Malley, chairman of the multi-stakeholder Steering Group which has masterminded the preparation of the strategy.

“To understand this strategy we need to understand the problem it is trying to solve. Perhaps for the first time we are facing the reality that the supply of water is not limitless. We need it for farming, but we also need it for environment, conservation, tourism and recreation. We have to learn to share this resource in a way that benefits all these interests and that’s not easy.

“As pressure has come on our precious water resource in the last decade the Resource Management Act, which is the principal piece of legislation for dealing with these matters, has become less and less effective and we need some new instruments for water management,” he says.

The CWMS has a number of key elements to it:

- Parallel and balanced development of water storage infrastructure, environmental restoration, conservation, recreational and cultural uses.

- Strong local involvement in planning to encourage the diverse water interests to address their differences and find solutions
- Commitment to early environmental restoration
- Improvement in land-use practices to improve and protect water quality
- Increased water supply reliability through storage
- Focus on improved water-use efficiency across all uses
- Strengthening the management of water supply through irrigation by creating a water infrastructure and services entity.

“Many of these elements are major departures from current practice, but comprise the essential parts of a total solution.

“A foundation idea of the strategy is the need for new water which would come from new storage. This new water would provide greater reliability of supply for farmers and would bring revenue that would be used to encourage more efficient use of existing water, provide water for environmental flows, incentives for improved land management and cash for long term environmental restoration.

“The strategy only encourages as much storage as is required to do the job, recognizing that any storage will have environmental impacts.

“It truly is a comprehensive strategy which requires all parts of it to work in unison otherwise nothing will be achieved,” says O’Malley.

The strategy also emphasises the idea of Canterbury acting on its own initiative. For example, it is preferred that a water infrastructure and services entity proposed in the strategy be owned by local authorities and that the whole strategy is authorised by a Canterbury-focused Act of Parliament.

“These are matters that require further thinking. However, the thinking has come a long way and there is still some distance to go,” says O’Malley.

“The strategy is still in draft and we are seeking feedback, comment and debate from stakeholders and the public to take it through to completion in October/November. Feedback needs to be sent to the Steering Group by 2 October 2009.

“The strategy has created an opportunity. There has been extensive debate, but this time with a focus and a purpose. Parties who previously haven’t talked are now talking and progressing. I am very optimistic that we can get a positive and productive way forward,” he says.

Ends

For further information:
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