

Media Release

On Behalf of the Canterbury Mayoral Forum
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Water Management Strategy for Canterbury

A comprehensive public engagement programme with the Canterbury public to prepare a strategy for water management in the region has been announced.

The strategy will identify future directions for the region's water management including its agriculture, recreation and environmental aspects.

“Water management is almost certainly the biggest long-term issue facing the Canterbury region,” says Bede O’Malley, chairman of the Steering Group charged by the Mayoral Forum with managing the development of the strategy.

“It is very much a renewable but limited resource and increasingly there are competing demands for it. We need a strategy that enables Environment Canterbury to allocate this resource in the best and widest interests of the region.

“There are many considerations. The benefits for the regional economy from agriculture and tourism are vital. The opportunity to generate energy from renewable water resources is also vitally important. A wide variety of recreational and environmental interests are connected in some way with water and, of course, quality of drinking water is paramount.

“Building a strategy that has wide buy-in will not be an easy task, but the alternative is win/lose conflicts fought out in communities and courts often with a result that pleases no one,” says O’Malley.

Expected to take up to 18 months to complete, the strategy is intended to be a guide to water management in the region for at least the next 20 years. It will cover all major areas of usage across the whole region.

It will involve two stages of consultation, first about the uses and benefits of water involving both stakeholders and the public. Second, the focus will shift to specific projects and activities when, once again, there will be stakeholder and public consultation. There will also be a strong emphasis on local engagement right around the region.

Environment Canterbury Chairman, Sir Kerry Burke said that the strategy, once completed, will be considered by his Council for proposed introduction into the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement, the Natural Resources Regional Plan (NRRP) and ECan’s Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP). “Indeed, it will need these statutory measures to confirm it, to give it the force of law and for any public funding to be committed to it,” says Sir Kerry.

“Being a non-statutory process it will have the flexibility necessary to encourage positive interaction, even negotiation between the stakeholders. It must still face and pass the tests of the statutory machinery process,” says Burke. “This will be essential in order to have the strategy confirmed and have it locked in with the community’s support and backed by the law.”

Commenting on the proposal, chairman of the Mayoral Forum and Christchurch Mayor Bob Parker says that the regional mayors are under no illusions that this is an ambitious project.

“It’s ambitious, but absolutely necessary. It will require the goodwill of all involved to succeed. None of us wants to be in the situation of 20 years down the track with people saying if only our public officials had had greater foresight we would be in a much better position with water allocation and use.

“Now is the time to have foresight, and this strategy-building process is the way to do it, but we should have no illusions about the complexity of the task we are about to embark on.”

“It should also be noted that the world will not stop while this strategy is being developed. There are a number of water-related matters in public hearings or before the courts in the region and these should continue to their logical conclusion. Decisions made in these processes will become inputs to the strategy,” says Parker.

Some modern technology will be employed to deal with the complexity of the task. A method called Open Strategy is to be used. Developed in Canterbury, but largely employed in the UK over the last few years, Open Strategy is an online method of recording and sorting input into the strategy-forming process. It also enables inclusion of information from previous and current scientific studies of water use to ensure that the valuable work already done to date is not lost.

A range of communication techniques will also be used to ensure access of the stakeholders and the public to the evolving strategy and experience has been called upon from the recent and successful Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy programme involving Environment Canterbury and Councils.

“This will be a very open process. No one who has a contribution to make should be left out. We have also vetted the approach with a large number of people in the region and the general consensus is that it is well conceived, says O’Malley.

Stakeholder discussions begin in late June with the first round of public consultation beginning in August. A web site designed specially for the project will be launched in mid June. Also, at that time, an expanded membership of the Steering Group involving additional community representatives will be announced.

For further information:

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