

Report 99.401

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Report to the Environment Committee
from Dr Jane Bradbury, Divisional Manager, Environment

Divisional Manager's Report

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee about activities of the Environment Division and about any matters that have arisen since the Committee's last meeting.

2. Managers' Reports

The Department Managers' reports and the Divisional Accountant's report are attached.

3. RMA Amendments

I have attached a copy of the Minister for the Environment's speech to the recent Local Government Conference. The Amendment Bill had only been introduced the night before writing this report and we have yet to see a copy. The Minister's comments give us some idea of what it contains. Whilst we continue to support the majority of the amendments, we still have serious concerns about others - and will be saying so. Although we hope that the legislation is well thought through, our experience with this process indicates that this will not be the case. I may have more information at the meeting.

4. Annual Survey of Local Authorities

The Minister refers to this annual survey in his speech. At the time of writing I have only just received the complete report. I attach a copy of the executive summary. There are still some discrepancies in the way that councils measure performance with consent processing. For example, some councils do not "start the clock running" when they receive the consent. We formally receive applications within one working

day. Also, some councils, when they ask for further information, stop the clock and then re-set it to zero when they receive the information. Our practice is to stop the clock and then re-start it - so that the time already taken is included. Therefore, comparisons between councils can be misleading.

This Council's results are pleasing, although we have a lower percentage of non-notified consents processed within time than we would like. This is mainly due to a batch of gravel consents being processed out of time in the Wairarapa. Procedures have been tightened now and the results for the past year should be much better.

As mentioned in the Manager's report for the Consents Management Department, although not yet verified, we think that **all** consents were processed within time last year.

5. **Education Initiative**

We shall be advertising for an Environmental Education Co-ordinator very soon and setting up a small in-house group to identify work programmes.

Staff are excited about this approach and feel that the Council can really contribute something to the environment. I am trying to organise a brief seminar (probably following an Environment Committee) on Care Groups so that Councillors can further understand the benefits (and problems encountered) when including the community in environmental work.

6. **State of the Environment Report**

This is still causing us a few problems, but have made some real headway since the last meeting. I have called in the "cavalry" and would like to thank Wayne Hastie, Geoff Skene, John Holmes as well as John Sherriff, for so willingly taking on unanticipated work.

7. **Recommendation**

That the reports from the Divisional Manager, the Departmental Managers and the Divisional Accountant be received.

Report prepared by:

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Attachments.