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Report to the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee
from Wayne O'Donnell, Manager, Biosecurity

Regional Pest Management Strategies Review – Consultation Strategy

1. Purpose

To seek Committee approval for a public communications strategy to be implemented during the development of the new Regional Pest Management Strategies.

2. Background

The current Regional Pest Management Strategies (RPMS) for pest plants and animals both expire in June 2001. Council has indicated its desire, through the Long Term Financial Strategy review process, to continue to manage pests of regional significance. Councillors have also expressed their desire to expand current management programmes to permit the incorporation of biodiversity objectives. Funding provision for this vision has been incorporated into the Biosecurity Department's 10-year financial plan.

In order to deliver on our vision for the future, a new approved RPMS will be required prior to 30 June 2001. Whilst this is some time away, there is a need to provide adequate time for public consultation, document drafting, hearings and to conclude any appeals to the Environment Court.

3. Proposed Consultation Strategy

There are two major changes proposed for the new RPMS. Firstly, there are benefits in amalgamating the two current Strategies into one document. Secondly, Council's desire to incorporate biodiversity objectives into the RPMS will place greater emphasis on site led management, incorporating a range of key representative ecosystems. These two proposed changes will necessitate the implementation of a thorough public consultation strategy. It is therefore intended to commence the process as soon as possible to maximise opportunities for public input.

(a) Communication Initiatives

The consultation strategy incorporates a number of communication initiatives. These include –

- ◆ production of a Discussion Document;
- ◆ use of the Elements newspaper, incorporating a questionnaire;
- ◆ production of a pamphlet summarising key points of the review process;
- ◆ advertising in community newspapers;
- ◆ meetings with environmental interest groups, iwi, TLA's and Crown landowners;
- ◆ direct contact with previous submitters.

The use of a 0800 telephone number and e-mail contact are also being considered. There is no intention of holding public meetings. However, staff will attend meetings with community groups or similar if requested.

(b) Consultation Timeframes

The production of a Discussion Document has commenced. It is anticipated that this task will be completed in early April. The Document will be forwarded directly to previous submitters, iwi, TLA's and Crown landowners for comment. Public notification would follow. Submissions will close mid-June 2000.

The April edition of Elements will contain an overview of the RPMS review process, a summary of proposed changes, and a response form to determine the level of support. Respondents will be able to request additional information, including a copy of the Discussion Document or a summary pamphlet. Results from Council's 'Voice Your Choice' campaign indicates that Elements has the potential to involve a large number of ratepayers who would otherwise have minimal opportunities to participate in the RPMS review.

Following the preliminary round of consultation, a Proposed RPMS will be produced and notified. A late September, early October date is anticipated. Submissions will close at the end of November. This will provide the public with a second opportunity to influence the objectives of the Proposed RPMS.

Formal hearings, if required, would be scheduled to commence in late January or early February 2001 with formal notification of decisions in March. Any Environment Court appeals would proceed thereafter. The current RPMS would continue after the expiry date if the Environment Court decisions were delayed.

A diagrammatic representation of the review process is attached as Appendix 1.

4. Communications

This report outlines a number of proposals for communicating with ratepayers and other affected stakeholders concerning the RPMS review process. There is no intention to expand on this strategy unless Council deems it necessary.

5. Recommendation

That the Committee approves the proposed communications strategy, and associated timeframes, for development of the second generation Regional Pest Management Strategy for the Wellington Region..

Report prepared by:

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Attachment.