

Report 99.210

File: X/8/3/1

20 April 1999

[Reports:1999-210.JH:lb]

Report to the Environment Committee
from John Holmes, Section Leader, Policy Advice

Implementing the Energy Chapter of the Regional Policy Statement: A Progress Report

1. Purpose

To report on progress in implementing the methods in the Energy chapter of the Regional Policy Statement (RPS).

2. Background

Energy is a central resource for our economic well-being, but its production, transmission and use can also cause some adverse environmental effects. The Energy provisions of the RPS aim to avoid or reduce those adverse effects by seeking a moderation in energy demand, greater efficiency in energy use, and encouragement for a shift from a fossil-fuel based economy to one where environmentally benign and renewable energy sources have a more significant role.

The RPS acknowledged that the Regional Council had only a limited statutory role to play in promoting these policy directions. The Methods identified ways in which the Council might set a good example through its own practices, but most of the Methods simply indicated what could be done by a host of other players and accordingly, had no specific date for implementation. Such methods are shown in the Implementation Plan as “on-going”. There are also other parts of the RPS (the Air Quality chapter, some of the provisions dealing with waste management, and the Built Environment and Transportation chapter) that deal indirectly with the use, and effects of the use, of energy. The range of these provisions demonstrates the need to take an integrated view of the management of the use of energy and dealing with the effects of that use.

In recent months, the Council has been presented with a number of reports that deal with issues that connect strongly with energy management. These include the consideration of roading reform, the Vehicle Fleet Emission Control Strategy and options for dealing with climate change.

It is perhaps timely, then, to report on what progress has been made in implementing the energy methods, particularly as we approach the review of the RPS and the need to assess how that document can help integrate energy-related actions for which the Council has responsibilities.

3. **Commentary on Progress**

(1) **The Council as Role Model**

Method 1 indicates the Council's desire to act as a role model for energy efficiency, and to implement a programme for dealing with its in-house energy-using assets. The Council has undertaken a number of energy efficiency initiatives in recent years. These have had financial benefits for the Council as well as helping to meet the policy direction of the RPS. These gains have been made through:

- the use of energy efficient equipment in water pumping,
- building design (for the refurbishment of the Upper Hutt depot),
- converting the Regional Council Centre to single metering,
- replacement of light fittings in the Regional Council Centre, and
- becoming an Energy Wise Company under a scheme developed by the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority (EECA).

Participation in the Energy Wise companies' programme carries several obligations with regard to planning for, and implementing, energy efficiency. We now have an Energy Manager and are in the process of setting up a group of staff to find practical ways of improving energy efficiency.

Further, as the Council progressively pursues environmental management systems to meet ISO 14001 requirements, energy management will be an integral part of the assessment of performance.

(2) **Energy Management and Transport Responsibilities**

A significant role that the Council can play in bringing about the energy policies of the RPS is through its transport policy work and public transport planning. This role is recognised in Energy Methods 2 and 4 (and through Method 3 of the Built Environment and Transportation chapter). Consideration of energy, both in terms of efficiency of use and energy sources, has been a factor in the preparation of the Regional Land Transport Strategy.

(3) **Renewable Energy and Managing the Effects of Energy Use**

Methods 3 and 5 identify ways in which the regional community could become more energy efficient and begin to make the transition to greater use of renewable energy sources.

Method 6 proposes environmental standards for dealing with discharges associated with energy use, and this Method has found expression in the provisions of the Regional Plans for air quality and discharges to land.

Method 7 identifies district plans as an appropriate means for implementing policies that deal with the adverse effects arising from energy use. We have encouraged territorial authorities to follow this method through the Council's submissions on district plans.

(4) **An Energy Forum for the Region**

Method 8 seeks to establish a better understanding of energy use in the region, and, linked with this, proposes the establishment of an Energy Forum (or working group) as a means of bringing together energy interests to advocate on energy matters on behalf of the Region. The RPS does not require the Council to carry out the Method, but rather recommends the idea to others as having some potential. In the absence of any initiatives, we have tested the waters to gauge likely interest in the concept. We have discussed this with staff from EECA and the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE).

Both organisations agreed that an important first step would be to get a better understanding of energy use, and the effects of its use, at the regional level. Unfortunately, relevant data is rare, and where it can be acquired (there are issues of market confidentiality), it carries significant costs. The discussions also identified the existence of other energy-related forums, two of which are organised by EECA, with others set up by industry groups (e.g. the NZ Wind Energy Association).

Officers at EECA do see, however, significant potential for a regional group in addition to these other groupings. They believe that it offers an opportunity to think more strategically across energy efficiency and different energy sources, including renewables. Consistent with Method 5, which includes the idea of understanding and taking advantage of the Region's renewable energy potential, EECA suggests that the forum would be a good way to bring together relevant local agencies and industries. EECA indicated a measure of staffing support for setting up and running such a group.

Thus far, we have taken a low key approach to the promotion of our RPS energy policies, largely because of resource and expertise constraints. Other than being able to advocate these policies, and pursue its transport functions, the Council also does not have a strong energy mandate in legislation.

However, we believe there would be merit in the Council establishing a regional energy forum. The forum could cover topics as diverse as energy efficiency measures, transport-related energy planning and the role of non-renewable energy sources in climate change. It would also provide an opportunity to draw together energy providers with a view to reaching common ground in making more of the region's renewable energy potential while respecting environmental quality, another key message of the RPS.

There is also a view in the industry, based on the Council's opposition to the proposed Baring Head wind farm, that the Council is against the development of renewable energy sources. This view is misguided; a forum could be a good way of correcting such impressions. A forum covering questions such as these would be consistent with our statutory functions.

In essence, the question of whether or not to establish such a group comes down to the Council's preferred role in energy matters. In implementing the RPS thus far, we have emphasised our more traditional areas of responsibility (e.g., freshwater, air quality), but done only what has been necessary in relation to energy matters. If the Council wished to take a more active role, the forum could be a way of doing so, now that we have established some credentials by starting to get our own house in order.

We would welcome an indication from the Committee as to whether this area of resource management is one where the Council should take a more active role in promoting its RPS policies.

4. **Conclusion**

We are making satisfactory progress in implementing the methods of the Energy Chapter. However, we have reached the point where it is necessary to decide the degree to which the Council should pursue its energy related objectives and policies. Given the degree of interest in energy related issues on the national political agenda at present, it may be an opportune time to advance our work in this area.

5. **Recommendation**

That the report be received and the information noted.

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