



caring about you & your environment

Report 02.35

21 February 2002

File: X/27/2/1

[Report 2002.Env0235.NS:mm]

Report to Environment Committee
from Nicola Shorten, Policy Advisor, Resource Policy

Regional Monitoring Strategy - Background

1. Purpose

To explain the background to the Regional Monitoring Strategy.

2. Background

At its last meeting the Environment Committee approved the Regional Monitoring Strategy. At that time, members of the Committee requested further background information about the Strategy.

The Regional Monitoring Strategy outlines the Council's future direction for environmental monitoring and reporting in the Region. The main reasons for the development of such a Strategy are explained in the following paragraphs.

Greater Integration

There are a number of organisations within the Region with responsibilities for information gathering and reporting. As a part of the development of the Regional Monitoring Strategy, we have been working with the Ministry for the Environment, territorial authorities, Iwi and other organisations to ensure that information collection is not duplicated between organisations, and to encourage information sharing and greater co-ordination of monitoring activities.

In addition, our latest State of the Environment Report, 'Measuring Up', highlighted that we have been unable to assess our performance in some areas because of a lack of integrated information. As a result of this, our monitoring programmes were reviewed and a set of indicators to measure and report how well we look after our Region's environment have been developed.

Better Information for Decision Making

While information gathered as part of our monitoring programmes will serve a public awareness and education role, the main users of the information will be decision makers and policy analysts within Council. Quality information on the environment is essential for making sound resource management decisions and we need to ensure that the raw data we gather is translated into useful information.

Monitoring currently undertaken by the Regional Council is presented in annual environment reports, and a number of other technical documents. However, it is clear that in addition to these technical reports, we need to consider a full range of communications options to ensure the information reported is capable of:

- meeting the specific needs of the Council;
- feeding into district, regional and national reports; and
- meeting the needs of our regional community.

Meeting Legislative Requirements

The Resource Management Act 1991 sets out our basic responsibilities with respect to monitoring. It requires every local authority to gather such information, and undertake or commission such research, as is necessary to carry out effectively its functions under the Act.

In addition, under section 35(2) of the Act, we are required to monitor:

- (a) the state of the whole or any part of the environment of the Region to the extent that it is appropriate to enable the Council to effectively carry out its functions under the Act;
- (b) the efficiency and effectiveness of our policy statement and plans;
- (c) the exercise of any functions, powers or duties delegated or transferred; and
- (d) the exercise of resource consents that have effect in the Region.

3. National Monitoring Programme

New Zealand's first national report on the state of the environment was produced by the Ministry for the Environment and released in October 1997. It highlighted the need for much better environmental information to show national trends and to provide a base for making decisions about environmental management.

As a result, the Ministry for the Environment began developing a system for reporting on the state of the environment, called the Environmental Performance Indicators programme. Indicators are currently being developed which, when reported, will help track changes in the environment and assess the success of our environmental policies and laws. The programme will also allow comparisons to be made between the state of the environment in New Zealand and other countries.

The Ministry are working with regional councils to ensure that there is consistency in relation to what resources are monitored, and the way monitoring is undertaken. This

will allow data to be compared between regions, and will also allow changes over time to be observed. The Regional Monitoring Strategy aims to ensure consistency with national monitoring programmes.

4. **Communication**

The Strategy is an internal document and as such, there are no plans to publicise it. However, it will provide for better communication of monitoring information in the future.

5. **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (1) *receives the report; and*
- (2) *notes the contents.*

Report prepared by:

NICOLA SHORTEN
Policy Advisor, Resource Policy

Approved for submission:

WAYNE HASTIE
Manager, Resource Policy

JANE BRADBURY
Divisional Manager, Environment