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Dear Mercedes

## **National Policy Statement on Fresh Water Management**

Thank you for your letter dated 14 December 2007 requesting Greater Wellington's views and comments on what issues should be addressed in the National Policy Statement for Fresh Water Management (the national policy statement).

### **General comments**

Greater Wellington recognises the effort that has gone into the Freshwater Programme of Action to date, and we support recognition of the pressures facing New Zealand's water resources. Greater Wellington also supports, in principle, the development of national policy statements where they are able to provide clear, meaningful and useful guidance to local authorities on matters of national significance.

Greater Wellington endorses the comments from Local Government New Zealand in the attached paper *Desired Contents of a National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management*. We particularly want to reinforce that the national policy statement should be enabling rather than prescriptive. It should allow regional and sub regional variability that provides for the social, economic, cultural and environmental well being of communities rather than applying a one size fits all approach. It will also be very important that the national policy statement does not create additional costs for councils. By targeting areas of potential litigation in the national policy statement, the opportunity exists to reduce costs of future regional policy statements, regional plans, district plans and resource consent applications.

### **Issues**

Your letter raises water quality and water allocation as two matters that the national policy statement will address. Greater Wellington is currently reviewing the Regional Policy Statement for the Wellington region and a draft was approved for public release by the Council on 25 February 2008. It has three freshwater issues. Two of these – water quality and increasing demand on limited water resources - correspond to the issues you have indicated. The third issue is poor ecosystem function in rivers, lakes and wetlands, and we would like to see this issue included in the national policy statement.

State of the environment information for the Wellington region indicates that poor ecosystem functioning in urban and lowland streams is a significant issue in the Wellington region and we are aware that other regions have similar problems. The recent national state of the environment report *Environment New Zealand 2007* targets water quality and uses aquatic biological indicators in a water quality context. However, these indicators provide more than just information about water quality. They also tell us about the state of land and freshwater ecosystems in a catchment. While poor water quality is an issue that warrants attention nationally, it is just one element that affects aquatic ecosystems. The wider pressures on aquatic habitat such as filling in ephemeral streams, piping small streams, removing streamside vegetation, and modifying streams by channelling or straightening them all directly affect aquatic ecosystems and contribute to the decreasing fish diversity observed in many river and lakes.

### **What should the national policy statement include?**

Greater Wellington's draft Regional Policy Statement for the Wellington region sets out policy direction for water management in the region and we invite you to look at its provisions. It has been developed following a lot of consultation with territorial authorities, iwi and the regional community. While a national policy statement should contain less specific provisions than a regional policy statement, it should support what regional councils are doing, including promoting:

- The identification of purposes for managing water bodies and the use of associated quality, flow, and ecosystem targets/standards. It would not be appropriate to identify the purposes for management and targets/standards for water bodies in the national policy statement but it should ensure that these are determined at the regional and sub regional level.
- The use of allocation limits for rivers and groundwater that do not compromise environmental flows and levels.
- The retention and restoration of natural features (form, flows, riparian habitat), and ecosystem, amenity and cultural values of water bodies.
- A cautious approach when cumulative effects and/or scientific uncertainty may lead to adverse effects on water bodies - targeted and specific provisions about the circumstances when caution should be applied will be needed, instead of broad policy, such as in the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement, which has not helped decision making.

### **“Deeming” provisions**

Greater Wellington supports the use of provisions in the national policy statement that are agreed with regional councils as being “deemed” provisions in regional policy statements and plans. This would have the advantage of avoiding both central government and regional councils having to go through separate statutory processes to include the same provisions in their planning documents. It would have the added efficiency of avoiding the potential for repeated litigation at the regional level when appropriate investigation and research has already been done by central government.

## **Integrating resource management**

We understand that a revised New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement will soon be notified. It is important that the provisions in any national policy statement on fresh water are consistent with national coastal policy. Central government is also developing a national policy statement for flood protection, and it will be important to ensure that these closely related national policy statements are well integrated. There are significant opportunities for freshwater management and flood protection policies to support each other, such as promoting suitable riparian vegetation adjacent to rivers and avoiding development in areas susceptible to flooding.

The national policy statement also provides an opportunity to improve the integration of land and water management. In the Wellington region, there is a direct relationship between poor water quality and the dominant land uses in the catchment, with urban streams being the most degraded. The direct involvement of city and district councils will be vital in avoiding further pollution and deterioration of water bodies, particularly deterioration of water quality and aquatic habitat caused by urbanisation. Given that one way of addressing this is through low impact urban design, which is a land use matter controlled mainly in district plans, any national policy statement must direct city and district councils as well as regional councils.

Greater Wellington is now implementing the *Stormwater Action Plan for the Wellington region* jointly with territorial authorities. The action plan is the result of collaborative work with city and district councils. It recognises that mitigation and treatment of stormwater at source is more effective than treatment at the end of the pipe. City and district councils have a crucial role to play in reducing the effects of development by promoting low impact urban design through their district plans and subdivisions and land use consents.

Our draft Regional Policy Statement also requires city and district councils to control earthworks and vegetation clearance to minimise sediment runoff. We have been working closely with territorial authorities in the Wellington region over the last five years and they are now getting more involved in stream protection issues than before. A national policy statement that only targets regional councils would severely compromise the progress we are making and could hold other city and districts back. At least two territorial authorities – Kapiti Coast District Council and North Shore City Council – have provisions in their district plans that manage streams.

It should also be noted that better integration of land and water management is consistent with the issue suggested above for the national policy statement of “poor ecosystem function in rivers, lakes and wetlands”. Addressing this issue recognises the need for total catchment management and would also improve integration between the national policy statement and the National Priorities for Action for Biodiversity.

## **Water Allocation**

The approach Greater Wellington is taking to promoting more efficient use of water is to target “technical” efficiency. It includes such things as water harvesting, water conservation, consent applicants justifying that the amount of water they need is reasonable for the intended use, measuring water use, water demand management, and water reuse and recycling. We would hope to see support from the national policy statement on these matters.

With the exception of giving priority to the abstraction of water for the health needs of people, Greater Wellington is not providing other measures to promote “allocative” efficiency at this time, although this may be a tool that could be used effectively in the future. It would be helpful for the national policy statement to provide a clear definition of “technical” and “allocative” efficiency as these terms are currently being used inconsistently around the country.

I suggest that the national policy statement warrants a board of inquiry rather than any of the alternative processes available under the Resource Management Act because of the importance of water as a public resource.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to make these comments. I hope they are helpful. Instead of just receiving documents and making formal responses, I would like staff at Greater Wellington to meet with you and discuss these comments further. Could you please get in touch with Nicola Shorten on 802 0337 to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely

**Fran Wilde**  
Chair, Greater Wellington Regional Council