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Committee Council
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Climate Change Strategy

1. Purpose

To approve the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) Climate Change Strategy.

2. Background

Climate change is a major environmental challenge, the effects of which also carry significant economic and social implications for councils and communities, with increased risks to settlements, infrastructure and ecosystems from rising seas, storms and flooding. As a coastal region, hemmed in to the east, west, and south by the sea, the impact of even a small rise in sea level will be significant and expensive for some landowners across the greater Wellington region. Storms occurring on top of a higher sea level will affect public infrastructure such as transport networks, as well as private homes and other buildings. In some flood-prone areas, reliance on increased protection alone will become progressively less feasible.

There is strong and growing recognition both internationally and within New Zealand of the crucial role that councils can play in increasing climate resilience. This includes both reducing emissions and preparing for climate change impacts.

The Climate Change Strategy (**Attachment 1**) has been developed with input and guidance from staff across GWRC and interested stakeholders in the wider community. Key actions to implement the Strategy are contained in the Implementation Plan (**Attachment 2**).

The rationale for developing a Climate Change Strategy is to have a clear vision and objectives for improving climate resilience in our work across the region. Progress will be measured and reported on and it is proposed that the Implementation Plan will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis, while the Climate Change Strategy is updated on a three-yearly basis.

3. **Strategy Vision and Objectives**

The Climate Change Strategy is a non-statutory document that is designed to complement key statutory documents such as the proposed Natural Resources Plan, Regional Policy Statement, Long Term Plan and Regional Land Transport Plan, and non-statutory documents such as floodplain management plans and Greater Wellington's Corporate Sustainability Action Plan. It takes a long term view but contains actions to be completed in the short-term. The Strategy articulates a vision for GWRC to:

Greater Wellington Regional Council strengthens the long-term resilience and sustainability of the Wellington region through climate change action and awareness.

This vision is to be achieved through policies and actions stemming from three core objectives. Together the objectives span the range of areas that Greater Wellington will focus on to achieve the vision of strengthening the region's long-term resilience to climate change: mitigation, adaptation, and awareness. They are:

Objective one - Mitigation

Greater Wellington will act to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions across all its areas of influence, including its own operations, helping to create the conditions for a smart, innovative, low-carbon regional economy.

Objective two - Adaptation

Risks from climate change related impacts are managed and resilience is increased through consistent adaptation planning and actions based on best scientific information.

Objective three – Awareness

Community awareness of climate change mitigation and adaptation solutions increases and organisations and individuals know what they can do to improve the long term resilience and sustainability of the region.

4. **Engagement**

Initial community input into the development of the Climate Change Strategy was sought during a six week period from June 20th – August 1st 2014. This engagement process gave people an opportunity to contribute to the direction of the Strategy at a very early stage.

Following development and approval of the draft Climate Change Strategy, the document was released for public feedback in early 2015. It was publicised through a range of communications channels including: GWRC social media channels e.g. Facebook, Twitter; a Bang the Table engagement page; e-mails to a wide range of stakeholders, including community groups, residents associations, iwi, central government agencies, GWRC suppliers and contractors, businesses and territorial authorities; Press releases; Radio advertising; articles in Our Region and the GWRC website.

Sixty two submissions were received, and informal hearings were held with those submitters who had indicated they wished to be heard.

4.1 Key themes

Key themes from the submissions were:

- Stronger, more aspirational and inspiring wording is needed – soft language needs to be strengthened
- GWRC must go further than just endorsing the Strategy – implementation will be key
- GWRC should aim to inspire others through its actions and engage them in change
- Specific commitments and targets from GWRC are needed
- Behaviour change needs to be emphasised in the awareness objective
- The uncertainty associated with climate change should be acknowledged
- The vision should include sustainability as well as resilience.

4.2 Main changes following engagement

The informal Hearings Panel considered all the written and oral submissions, and recommended changes. The main changes to the Strategy are:

- The actions and performance measures have been moved to a separate Implementation Plan
- The ‘subtitle’ has changed from *A Strategy to Guide the Wellington Regional Council’s climate resilience activities* to *A Strategy to Guide the Wellington Regional Council’s climate change response*
- Sustainability has been added to the vision, which now reads - *Greater Wellington Regional Council strengthens the long-term resilience and sustainability of the Wellington region through climate change action and awareness*
- The wording of the objectives has been strengthened
- The costs of inaction are acknowledged
- A paragraph about dealing with uncertainty has been added
- GWRC’s commitment to emissions reductions and sustainability actions have been acknowledged
- New actions have been added, as follows:
 - *Advocate for land use development that is well-integrated with transport infrastructure and supports a compact, well-designed and sustainable regional form*
 - *Regularly measure and publish up to date information on greenhouse gas emissions in the Wellington region*
 - *Work with the community and with stakeholders to facilitate behaviour change*
 - *Take an active leadership role, fostering public debate and awareness through, for example, hosting talk series’, symposia, forums and other public events*

- The wording of several actions has been strengthened.

5. Other Actions

In addition to the development of the Strategy, some key pieces of work currently being undertaken include:

Regional GHG Inventory: GWRC and WCC are working towards an update of the Regional Greenhouse Inventory for the 2013/14 and 2014/15 years, as well as updating all components of the model to suit best practice.

2050 Calculator Tool: Discussions are taking place with WCC and National Energy Research Institute (NERI) to scope the development of an online calculator tool similar to the UK Department of Energy and Climate Change's "2050 Calculator". The calculator enables users to create 'transition pathways' and explore the choices and trade-offs required to reduce carbon emissions by differing levels between now 2050.

Regional Climate Change Forum: The possibility of establishing a regional forum, similar to the Waste Forum – Wellington Region, is being discussed. The forum could act as a central point for councils, the community, business and other relevant stakeholders to engage with on a range of climate change related issues.

Social cost of carbon: Staff are reviewing the literature relating to defining a Social Cost of Carbon and exploring how this could be applied in a regional context.

Transport emissions: A paper is being written for the Sustainable Transport Committee, which will outline how emissions and technology change are incorporated into funding models.

6. Communication

The web pages that were used during the public consultation period are being updated. These pages contain information about climate change, short videos, frequently asked questions and clips of locals sharing their thoughts about the topic.

All submitters will be contacted to thank them for their input into the development of the Strategy. They will also be directed to the final version of the Strategy and the updated website.

A press release highlighting the vision and objectives and linking to the website will be sent out.

7. The decision-making process and significance

Officers recognise that the matters referenced in this report may have a high degree of importance to affected or interested parties.

The matter requiring decision in this report has been considered by officers against the requirements of Part 6 of the Local Government Act 2002 (the Act). Part 6 sets out the obligations of local authorities in relation to the making of decisions.

7.1 Significance of the decision

Part 6 requires Greater Wellington Regional Council to consider the significance of the decision. The term ‘significance’ has a statutory definition set out in the Act.

Officers have considered the significance of the matter, taking the Council's significance and engagement policy and decision-making guidelines into account. Officers recommend that the matter be considered to have low significance. This level of significance is recommended because the draft Climate Change Strategy is a non-statutory document, primarily intended to act as a guide for climate resilience activities across GWRC's responsibilities and operations.

Officers do not consider that a formal record outlining consideration of the decision-making process is required in this instance.

7.2 Engagement

Engagement on the matters contained in this report aligns with the level of significance assessed. The engagement process is outlined in Section 4 of this report.

8. Recommendations

That the Council:

1. *Receives the report.*
2. *Notes the content of the report.*
3. *Approves the GWRC Climate Change Strategy and Implementation Plan.*
4. *Authorises to the Chair the ability to make minor editorial changes to the Strategy and Implementation Plan prior to publication to correct errors and improve public understanding.*

Report prepared by:

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Attachment 1: GWRC Climate Change Strategy

Attachment 2: Climate Change Implementation Plan