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Report to the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee
from Steve Blakemore, Manager, Planning and Resources

Community Sewage Discharges

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of the status of community sewage discharges within the Wairarapa.

2. Background

- 2.1 Discharge of sewage to water is a discretionary activity requiring consent under the Regional Freshwater Plan.

Domestic discharges of sewage into land are permitted, provided they are under a certain volume, do not contaminate the land surface, surface water, or ground water. If they do not meet these criteria a Regional Council consent is required.

- 2.2 There are five main towns in the Wairarapa, plus Tinui, Castlepoint and Rathkeale College, which operate sewage treatment systems that discharge to water.

- 2.3 Excluding Featherston, Tinui and Castlepoint, each of these systems discharge directly or ultimately into the Ruamahanga River.

92% of the treated sewage and trade waste from the valleys contributing population (29,000 total) enters the Ruamahanga River. Masterton makes up 65% of this total and produces most of the trade waste.

- 2.4 Townships and settlements without community sewage treatment schemes, reliant on septic tanks are Mauriceville, Mataikona Riversdale, Lake Ferry, Whatarangi, Ngawi, and Mangatoetoe.

Pollution problems have been identified at Riversdale, Lake Ferry, Whatarangi and Mangatoetoe.

- 2.5 The attached table summarises the status of community sewage treatment schemes and includes settlements where pollution from septic tanks has been identified. (Refer Attachment)

3. Consent Status

3.1 Discharges With Current Consents

(1) Rathkeale

An upgrade or alternative system is currently being investigated, to be installed and operative before the expiry of the consent in February 2006

(2) Castlepoint

A retrofit and discharge via a wetland now means that discharges to the Castlepoint Stream occur only intermittently. Aeration is to be installed this summer to provide for the increasing population and other improvements are being investigated. Monitoring requirements are to be reviewed.

(3) Carterton

The consent requirement to discharge to land during summer from January 2003 is under review. Two options are being pursued:

- Spray irrigation to land under tree crops
- Tertiary treatment through micro filtration.

Annual plan funding provision is to be made so that the selected option will be in place before the required date.

(4) Greytown

Flow recording equipment and a rock baffle has been installed as required by consent conditions. Establishment of a Community Advisory Group and investigations are soon to commence so that a preferred long-term disposal solution is developed and implemented within the seven-year term of the consent.

Excessive phosphorus discharge is to be investigated before 1 July 2002 and mitigation measures put in place before July 2003.

3.2 Discharges with Expired Consents

(1) Masterton

This consent expired on 30 September 1996. A consent application was received without an Assessment of Environmental Effects in July 1996. This has enabled the discharge to continue under the previous consent conditions. These were written in 1986 and are very limited in terms of discharge standards and monitoring requirements.

The volumes of effluent discharged from the ponds is excessive, being well outside that expected from the population and far in excess of the consented volume of 6,800 cubic metres per day.

Under dry weather conditions the discharge is 17,000 cubic metres per day, rising to 45,000 cubic metres per day during wet weather. The likely consequence of these excessive flows is that effluent passes through the ponds too quickly, reducing the effective treatment of the waste by micro-organisms and chemical processes.

Consultants have identified two options for improved treatment; aerated oxidation ponds or maturation ponds with rock filters. Three disposal options have been identified; river discharge, wetland seep to the river, or rapid infiltration basins.

Planned trials of these approaches have been stalled for some time by negotiations with the neighbouring landowner. No recent progress appears to have been made. Under the original timeframe proposed by the District Council in September 1999, consent applications would have been made in September 2001.

(2) Tinui

This consent expired on 1 October 2001 and is currently unconsented. A consent application was received on 7 August 2001 and is currently on hold awaiting affected party sign off.

There are some concerns and uncertainties about this system. A short term, temporary consent is proposed that will give time for the system to be reviewed and a fully complying system put in place before expiry.

(3) Martinborough

This consent expired on 31 May 1997. It is currently operating under its 1987 consent conditions, which are very limited in terms of discharge standards, and monitoring requirements.

Following receipt of the AEE, the consent application has been notified, 34 submissions received, and a pre-hearing meeting held on 15 November. Subsequent to this the applicant has requested that the

application be put on hold so that the AEE can be updated. A consent hearing is likely in February/March next year.

The current system is a single pond with aerators. South Wairarapa District Council has purchased sufficient land to accommodate one or two additional ponds.

(4) Featherston

This consent expired on 31 May 1997. It is currently operating under its 1987 consent conditions, which are very limited in terms of discharge standards, and monitoring requirements.

This is a large two-pond system that discharges via land to Donalds Creek, then via Abbots Creek to Lake Wairarapa. In recognition of its lesser environmental effects, it was agreed with South Wairarapa District Council that this would be given the lowest priority of their three town sewage consent applications.

3.3 Discharges to Land

(1) Riversdale

Following a public meeting on Labour Weekend 2000, general community support was given to investigation of a community system. A steering committee is pursuing this goal with examination of septic tanks and testing of water quality in bores planned for this summer.

Pollution of streams and underground water has been detected in the past. Currently large activities are being assessed for short-term temporary consents pending a community sewage scheme.

In a November 2000 survey by the district council, 30% of respondents saw a community sewage scheme as a high priority, 31% as medium or low priority, and 33% as not a priority.

(2) Lake Ferry

There are continuing problems with surface and groundwater contamination of publicly accessible areas in the township and a community scheme has been mooted since around 1995. A developer is also keen for his subdivision to be included within a scheme.

A short-term, temporary consent has been issued to the camping ground, pending a scheme. The hotel needs to be similarly assessed. If a scheme does not proceed, considerable upgrading of major activities will be required under Regional Council consents, and compliance of septic tanks with permitted discharge rules will have to be pursued.

(3) Whatarangi

Surface and groundwater contamination problems were identified in this subdivision in 1990 and have prevented further building consents being issued. Consultants recommended possible improvement options in 1995, but apart from the stopping of further building, staff are not aware of other actions taken to deal with these problems.

(4) Mangatoetoe

Sewage contamination of roadside drains has been identified. Staff are not aware of actions taken to deal with these problems.

4. Improving the Environment

- 4.1 The Freshwater Plan identifies the Waiohine and Ruamahanga Rivers as having Regionally important amenity and recreation values. Their water quality is to be managed for contact recreation purposes.

The lower Waiohine River, and the mid to lower Ruamahanga River are identified in the Freshwater Plan as having water quality that needs enhancement for contact recreation purposes.

The Mangatarere River and the Makoura and Papawai Streams are identified as needing enhancement for aquatic ecosystem purposes.

- 4.2 In recent years, there has been a dramatic shift to discharging effluent to land on dairy farms. Of the 236 dairy farms in the Ruamahanga catchment, only eight discharges to water remain under short term, non-renewable consents. In three years time there will be no discharges of treated dairy effluent to water

Apart from these eight dairy farms, community treated effluent discharges constitute the only point source discharges of effluent into the Ruamahanga River system and its tributaries.

- 4.3 Whilst general environmental monitoring provides information on the state of our rivers and the impacts and compliance of consented activities, this does not lead to improvements in water quality. The consent process provides the important opportunity to lift treatment and discharge standards in pursuit of the policies and objectives of the Regional Freshwater Plan.

5. Communications

No particular publicity is proposed as this is a status report for the information of the Committee.

6. Recommendation

That the Committee receive this report and note its contents.

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