



Report 07.158  
Date 19 March 2007  
File ENV/05/01/17

Committee Environment Committee  
Author Murray McLea, Acting Manager, Environmental Policy

## National Water Programme of Action

### 1. Purpose

To update the Committee on the National Water Programme of Action (the programme).

### 2. Background

Central government had very little involvement in freshwater management during the first 12 years of implementing the Resource Management Act 1991, apart from making submissions on regional policy statements and regional plans. This changed in recent years and in 2003 central government decided that the “national interest” should take a more prominent role. Work on the programme began in 2003 and a public discussion document outlining issues and options was released in December 2004. This report identifies progress made since then.

Key reasons for the programme include:

- water availability has increasing implications for economic growth (irrigation)
- greater certainty is needed about the availability of water for energy generation (eg. Waitaki)
- greater protection of national icons (eg. Lake Taupo)
- water quality in lowland areas is declining as a result of changing land use
- concerns about the effectiveness of Maori participation in water management
- science that supports water management is falling behind in some areas.

Central government is committed to the programme. An underlying principle is that regional councils will continue to have primary responsibility for managing fresh water. Regional councils are working co-operatively with government to achieve the greatest freshwater management benefits.

The programme is highly relevant to Greater Wellington’s management of fresh water. Demands on our water resources is especially critical in the

Wairarapa where the need for water for farm irrigation has more than doubled over the last ten years. Increasing populations in the region's urban areas is also increasing water use.

Our monitoring of the region's rivers shows that urban and lowland streams fail water quality guidelines regularly. Biological monitoring shows that the diversity and abundance of stream life is poorest in urban and lowland streams.

The issues of water allocation and so called "non-point source pollution" are two key areas for the programme, and the results should assist with our management.

### **3. Programme goals**

Stated outcomes for the programme are:

- building partnerships with local government, industry, Maori, communities and science agencies and providers
- developing national policy statement(s) for water allocation and water quality
- national environmental standards – one for environmental flows and one for measuring water takes
- developing a programme to identify outstanding water bodies nationally and catchments with water quality that is at risk
- identify improved approaches for enhancing the transfer of resource consents, managing over-allocated catchments, consent conditions, setting science priorities, cost recovery.

### **4. Regional council involvement in the programme**

Regional councils are contributing to the programme through the following avenues:

- Membership on the "Leadership Group" which advises government ministers on the programme
- the Regional Affairs Committee of Local Government New Zealand is providing advice to government at a political level
- the Resource Manager's Group (second tier management) is providing regional council staff advice to government officials
- regional council staff membership of reference groups for specific projects (e.g. a specific national environmental standard).

## 5. Progress on the programme to date

Progress on key areas of the programme is outlined below.

### **A National Policy Statement for water**

Central government has signalled its intention to prepare a national policy statement for water management. The Regional Affairs Committee of Local Government New Zealand and the Resource Manager's Group are promoting a national policy statement that integrates the management of water quality and quantity with land use management.

### **A national environmental standard for measuring water takes**

In November 2006, the Ministry for the Environment released a discussion document proposing a national environment standard for measuring water takes. Greater Wellington's submission on the proposed standard is given in Attachment 1. The submission supported the content and scope of the national standard and commented on the need for electronic records (continuous recorders), the importance of careful installation and maintenance, and the frequency of recording and transferring data.

Our State of the Environment Report *Measuring up 2005* identified that limited information on the amount of water actually taken and used by resource consent holders in the region is hampering our ability to allocate water efficiently. We said in *Measuring up* that more metering of resource consents for water takes was needed. This national environmental standard is consistent with the approach Greater Wellington is taking.

### **A national environmental standard for environmental flows and levels**

Central government is working on a national environmental standard for environmental flows. It will apply to rivers, lakes, wetlands and groundwater aquifers. A reference group of people from government departments, regional councils and the New Zealand Fish and Game Council is helping develop this standard. Other user groups and Iwi are also being consulted.

The approach being developed is to identify objectives for which the river is to be managed and then apply appropriate methodologies. Work on the methodologies to be used in the standard is still proceeding.

### **A national environmental standard for drinking water sources**

Although it did not have its origins in the programme, a national environmental standard for drinking water sources will soon be finalised. The Ministry for the Environment released a proposed national environmental standard for drinking water sources in September 2005. The proposed standard required regional councils to assess environmental risks in catchments and groundwater aquifers used as drinking water sources. We are to ensure that permitted activities in regional plans and consented activities do not adversely affect drinking water.

Our initial concern with the proposed standard was that it would not be workable if applied untested to small community water supplies. Greater Wellington's submission on the proposed standard recommended that it be applied to permanent communities of more than 500 people. This approach has been adopted and a standard has now been approved by Cabinet. Final legal drafting is underway before the standard is gazetted.

## **Other**

Progress in other parts of the programme includes:

- a joint local government/MfE project is underway to find out where water quality or water availability are at risk and to look at current and potential mechanisms to address issues
- a draft paper has been prepared on "Methods to Assist Regional Councils to Recover Costs for Water Management". It examines options available for councils to distribute water management costs more transparently and provide incentives for improved water management
- central government is working with the agriculture sector on voluntary industry accords similar to the *Dairying and clean streams accord* reached between Fonterra for the dairy industry, central government and regional councils.

## **6. Communication**

The programme is a government initiative and any communication on it should come from them.

## **7. Recommendations**

*That the Committee:*

1. ***Receives the report.***
2. ***Notes the content of the report.***

Report prepared by:

Report approved by:

**Murray McLea**  
Acting Manager,  
Environmental Policy

**Nigel Corry**  
Divisional Manager,  
Environment Management

**Attachment 1:** Submission on the Proposed NES for water measuring devices