



Regional Affairs Committee - 18 March 2010

Date:	10 March 2010	MfE Priority:	Non-urgent
Security Level:	Not classified	Number of Attachments:	Two
		MfE Ref No:	10-B-10-00527

Action Sought

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Minister for the Environment Hon Dr Nick Smith	Note that you are addressing the Regional Affairs Committee Forum for 30 minutes on the 18 March 2010 at the Wellington Regional Council. Note the contents of this briefing and the key discussion points	3.30pm, 18 March 2010

Ministry for the Environment Contacts

Name	Position	Telephone		1st Contact
		(cell)	(work)	
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Director- Approval to send to Minister's office

Manager – Ket Bradshaw	Date
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Purpose

You are attending the Regional Affairs Committee (RAC) on 18 March. You are speaking from 3.30 to 4.00pm. This briefing note contains information about the RAC, and the key points that may be raised at the meeting.

The Agenda is attached as Appendix 1 to this briefing note.

Background:

1. The RAC meeting is being held on the 18 and 19 March in the Council Chamber at Greater Wellington Regional Council. You are speaking for 15 minutes with an additional 15 minutes for questions and answers. This is a 'closed' meeting and no media are expected.
2. Recent contact between officials and local government suggests meeting attendees will have a keen interest in the Environment Canterbury review. It is anticipated that you will be asked questions regarding the outcome of the review.
3. You are speaking within the "Strategic Work Programme" part of the Agenda.

Who

The Regional Affairs Committee (RAC)

The RAC is a sub group of the Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) Regional Sector Group. It is made up by representatives from regional and unitary authorities. The group meets four times a year to discuss regional government issues. RAC members are chief executives or chairs of regional councils. Meetings are usually timed to follow the Chief Executives Environment Forum (run by Ministry for the Environment) and the Regional Chief Executives meeting (run by regional council chief executives).

This meeting will be chaired by Stephen Cairns. Stephen Cairns is the Chairperson of the Otago Regional Council and represents the regional sector on the Local Government New Zealand national council. Stephen was elected to the Otago Regional Council in 2001 and is well known in the local government sector. His National Council portfolio is environment.

Key points for discussion

Regional Council Reviews:

- Environment Canterbury (ECan) and the Far North District Council (Far North) were reviewed:
 - Findings released 19 February 2010.
 - Far North's performance has improved.
 - Review of ECan identified failings in water management and institutional problems.
 - Government is considering recommendations from the ECan review, including the processes for allocation and storage provisions.

Remainder of Pages 1 – 3 out of scope

Appendix One

2 Pages out of scope

Appendix two – Supporting information

1. Regional Council reviews.

- On the 19 February 2010 Local Government Minister Rodney Hide and I released the findings of independent reviews initiated in October last year into the performances of Environment Canterbury and the Far North District Council.
- These reports were initiated as part of the Government's broader agenda of taking a more active role in the performance of local government on resource management issues. The two councils performed poorly in the 2007/08 survey of resource consenting processes.
- The review of Environment Canterbury was broadened to include Local Government Act issues in response to a joint delegation of Canterbury Mayors seeking wider Government intervention.

Far North District Council

- The review found while having performed poorly in the past, Far North District Council had made an impressive effort to lift its game.
- Significant changes have been made by the Mayor, Council and its Chief Executive to their resource management process that has resulted in a much improved performance.
- We see no need for further Central Government involvement but I encourage the Council to progress the minor additional improvements identified in the review.

Environment Canterbury

- The report on Environment Canterbury is concerning and challenging.
- The report identifies
 - major failings in the way that ECan is managing water in Canterbury;
 - long running institutional problems in ECan;
- The report recommends;
 - Replacing the existing ECan council with Government appointed Commissioners;
 - Establishing a permanent new authority to manage Canterbury water in the future; this agency would be managed by Government appointed members;
 - This would be by special legislation;

Government Response

- It is difficult for the Government to ignore the unanimous conclusions of the four reviewers and the major issues they raise about ECan's capacity to manage water in Canterbury.
- The Government is discussing and making decisions on these recommendations but has not yet come to a final conclusion on the major changes proposed in the report.
- The Government recognises water issues in Canterbury are of national significance.
- The scale and nature of competing demands for water is significantly greater in the Canterbury region than anywhere else in New Zealand, but that ECan's response to managing water issues has been inadequate
- Changes are needed to address water quality concerns, processes for allocation and provision for storage.
- Our response to this report will need to be aligned to the important work programme of the Land and Water Forum and the Canterbury Water Management Strategy."
- "We are consulting with Environment Canterbury, Canterbury Mayors, Ngai Tahu and key water stakeholders before making any decision to ensure we find the best options for Canterbury and New Zealand

- Our considerations will be mindful of the recommendations for urgent intervention, but also of the huge significance of these proposals for the long-term well being of Canterbury.
- I would like to thank the positive way the two councils had engaged with the review process and for the professional job undertaken by both review groups.
- I look forward to making further announcements in the near future once the Government has finalised its position.

Remainder of Pages 7 – 11 out of scope