

Report to Collaborative Stakeholder Group

26 February 2016

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To: Collaborative Stakeholder Group

From: Director Science and Strategy

Subject: **Waikato Regional Freshwater Discussion update**

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update the Collaborative Stakeholder Group on progress towards completing a Waikato Regional Freshwater discussion document and the proposed next steps. The discussion document is intended to address strategic issues relating to freshwater management for the region, not just for Waikato Regional Council.

Recommendation:

1. That the report "*Waikato Regional Freshwater Discussion update*" (Doc # 3689397 dated 16 February 2016) be received for information.

Background

At the Strategy and Policy Committee on 9 February, an update report was provided on the Freshwater discussion document. Councillors expressed concern that the timing for engagement on a wider water conversation may not be prudent given the concerted focus that will be needed over the upcoming months on the Waikato Healthy Rivers Wai Ora project. Members felt that potentially we are stretching our partners and stakeholders too much and that we could end up with sub-optimal feedback, and subsequently outcomes, for the critically important Waikato Healthy Rivers Wai Ora and the Let's Talk Water projects.

The matter was then deferred for discussion at the Councillor's workshop scheduled for the next day, where the Let's Talk Water engagement documents and engagement process were to be discussed. In response to the above, staff prepared an alternate engagement process for consideration by Councillors at the Councillors' workshop on 10 February 2016.

Freshwater Strategy evolving into the *Let's Talk Water* conversation

In the original project plan, for the previously termed Freshwater Strategy, it was signalled that a draft strategy for regional engagement would be complete by December 2015, with the strategy being finalised in June 2016.

In response to the discussion at the previous day's Strategy and Policy Committee, staff reframed the workshop, and particularly the engagement process, to address concerns of:

- Diluting two very important conversations (Healthy Rivers/Wai Ora and Freshwater)
- Change in timing for national freshwater conversation
- A vacuum of direction from central government with respect to iwi rights and interests
- Potential engagement fatigue with our stakeholders

Approach going forward

After comprehensive discussion a more considered and staged approach to engagement was supported as a way forward, and will be discussed formally at the 25 February Council meeting.

The revised engagement process is based on the following:

- Reframe documentation so that it is clear that it is the start of a wider conversation, and that we are looking to identify key issues and perspectives
- Identify in the engagement documentation what we have done, what we are doing, and what the big issues are for a future discussion
- That a staged approach to engagement will occur
 - One-on-one engagement will occur with sectors and stakeholders as previously identified
 - Wider regional engagement will occur upon request
 - Opportunities to join other engagement forum will be used where possible
- All engagement will be fed in to an Issues and Opportunities document, to be completed June 2016, to inform further conversations about regional freshwater management

Timeline for development of freshwater Issues and Opportunities paper

25 February 2016	Council agenda paper outlining the reasons for and change of approach to the Freshwater Strategy, to that stated in the LTP for the 2015/06 year
2 March 2016	Introduce the <i>Let's Talk Water</i> engagement document at the Sustainable Waikato Issues and Action Forum to be held at the Don Rowlands Centre, Karapiro
March – April 2016	Staff undertake one-on-one conversations with sectors and stakeholders, and those who invite staff to engage, to gather views and perspectives to feed into a Freshwater Issues and Opportunities document
May 2016	Analysis and synthesis of views and perspectives gathered
June 2016	Freshwater Issues and Opportunities document prepared for Council consideration

A copy of the latest newsletter outlining progress is attached for information (attachment 1). It is noted that the timeline in the attached newsletter refers to the adoption of a strategy in June 2016 which (subject to the 25 February Council meeting) will now be replaced with an Issues and Opportunities document.

Tracey May
 Director
 Science and Strategy

Attachment

1. Project newsletter (DM# 3683067)