

**A Better
Environment:
An Education/
Communication
Strategy**

1. **Key Message**

This strategy is about creating a better environment in the Wellington Region by enhancing the Council's connection with the community. It is a vehicle to facilitate a key Council responsibility of promoting the sustainable management of the Region's natural and physical resources for overall community wellbeing. It reflects a change in emphasis in the way that this Council approaches its work.

The strategy aims to raise awareness about the environment, identify the benefits of good environmental practice and provide people with the tools to change their behaviour.

2. **Our Environment – Our Future**

In recent years there has been an increasing realisation that our social and economic welfare depends on the health of our natural and physical environment. But alarmingly, we are slowly destroying the very thing that nurtures and protects us.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, writers such as Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, and Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, alerted the world to the fragility of our environment and the need for action to halt the decline in environmental quality. In response, international forums, such as the United Nations Conferences on Environment and Development (Rio Declaration) and Climate change (Kyoto protocol) have plotted out future directions, requiring action at the international, national and individual level.

Slowly, we have begun to take the message on board. Words such as *sustainability*, *guardianship* and *stewardship* are now commonplace in our environmental language and, in New Zealand, are enshrined in our environmental legislation. Yet we are still struggling to make progress and all too often succumb to the need for short-term economic gain at the expense of both long and short-term environmental health.

New Zealanders pride themselves on their environment. We use the “clean and green” image to promote ourselves – to attract visitors and sell our produce. But in reality our environmental practices are not always clean and green. We only get away with it because our low density of population places less pressure on the environment than the considerably more densely populated areas of Europe, Asia and the USA. However, when it comes to the crunch we invariably choose the quickest, easiest and cheapest way, irrespective of any adverse environmental effects.

This situation begs two questions. First, can we withstand these practices in the long-term? Secondly, is a deteriorating environment something that New

Zealanders are willing to accept⁷ Indications are that the answer is “no” to both questions.

There then follows a third question. Why are we doing it? At both an international and national level there is now an acceptance that bad practices are often the result of ignorance rather than malicious intent or lack of care. In many cases (though not all) people are simply unaware of the consequences of their actions. Therefore, there is a pressing need to raise awareness about the effects of actions and show people alternative ways, especially ways that may bring an economic or social benefit as well as an environmental benefit. This brings us to environmental education.

3. What is Environmental Education?

Environmental education can be defined as:

A multi-disciplinary approach to learning that develops the knowledge, awareness, attitudes, values and skills that will:

- *Change behaviour to improve environmental outcomes;*
- *Enable individuals and the community to develop practical solutions that can be applied to environmental issues and problems*
- *Contribute towards maintaining and improving the quality of the environment.*

However, the words “environmental education” suggest the classical approach of “classrooms” and “telling”. But there has been a move both internationally and nationally to broaden our approach as the benefits of involving, as well as informing, the whole community have been **recognised**.

Community participation is now thought to be one of the most effective vehicles to raise environmental awareness and to promote positive action. This international drive to involve the community in resource management is epitomised by the following United Nations’ statements.

UNCED Rio Declaration, Principle 10:

Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of concerned citizens at the relevant level.

UNCED Rio Declaration, Principle 22:

*(local) communities have a vital role in environment management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices. States should **recognise** and duly support their identity, culture, and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development.*

UNCED Agenda 21, Objective 17.5 (f):

Provide access, as far as possible, for concerned individuals, groups and organisations to relevant information and opportunities for consultation and participation in planning and decision-making at appropriate levels.

New Zealand recognised the important contribution that community participation can make to improve understanding about the environment and to develop environmental responsibility in its Environment 20 10 strategy. Following from this, a national environmental education strategy was released by the Ministry for the Environment in July 1998. This provides a framework for promoting environmental education and community involvement activities. It identifies local government as a lead provider of environmental education.

4. **Why Environmental Education Through Community Involvement?**

If we want effective environmental policies we must engage the hearts and minds of people. The way to do this is to *involve* people. A major theme of this strategy is “selling by doing”, rather than “selling by telling”. The approach can be encapsulated by the following community development rule:

- If you tell me – I might hear
- If you show me – I might see
- If you do it with me – I’ll understand

The Council already promotes education above regulation in its resource management planning processes. This approach has received considerable community support. A large proportion of the policies and 50% of the methods of the Regional Policy Statement and regional plans rely on some form of education initiative. For example:

Regional Policy Statement – Ecosystems – Policy 2

To encourage a greater awareness of the importance of ecosystems to human survival and well-being in all sectors of the regional community.

Proposed Regional Coastal Plan – Policy 3.3.3.3

*To increase public awareness about coastal resource management and encourage users of coastal resources to **recognise** intrinsic values and to adopt an ethic of guardianship for future generations,*

Proposed Regional Freshwater Plan – Policy 6.3.9

...to ensure that, as far as practicable, all interested people and communities have the opportunity to be involved in freshwater resource management processes.

Proposed Regional Soil Plan – Method 8.1

Implement a publicity and education programme to increase community understanding and commitment to the ethic of sustainable land management

Other regional councils share our view on the importance of community involvement. For example, in its preliminary environmental education strategy, Environment Waikato stated:

Many government agencies have traditionally fallen into the trap of relying on pamphlets, information kits, posters etc to “educate” people about environmental issues. Whilst much can be achieved by the provision of information, only education can empower individuals and the community to use that information effectively. In recent years, active participation of the community has been identified as necessary to successful environmental education.

As a Council we are already engaged in many activities that involve the community, eg Friends of the River, Sustainable Land Management Plans, Trees for Survival and various stream and harbour clean-ups. However, we could do – and need to do - much more.

5. What Are We Trying To Achieve?

The goal is to have a better environment in the Wellington Region through an environmentally responsible community.

The following objectives for this education/communication strategy have been adapted from the Tbilisi Declaration arising from the Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education in 1977. They have stood the test of time and are also included in the Ministry for the Environment’s national education strategy (1998).

- **Active participation and involvement:** the community is actively involved in environmental management;
- **Increased awareness:** the community is aware of the impacts of human activities and knows how to prevent adverse effects;
- **New attitudes and values:** the community is concerned and motivated to care for the environment;

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- **Better understanding:** the community has a basic understanding of the environment;
 - **Appropriate skills:** the community has the skills to play a part in identifying and actively solving environmental problems;
 - **Change in practice:** individual and workplace practices take account of and manage adverse impacts of activities on the environment.

6. How Will The Community Benefit From Environmental Education/Communication Programmes?

The strategy is designed to provide the following benefits to the community:

- **Self -determination:** by acquiring knowledge and skills, a community will have an increased ability to determine the state of its local environment;
- **Community cohesion:** experience shows that community involvement also brings community cohesion and has sometimes quite unexpected social benefits.
- **Community pride:** pride in the local environment is an obvious spin-off from projects where people are actively involved and where they can see or understand the results;
- **Improved local environment:** undoubtedly community involvement in environmental projects and changed practices will bring valued improvements to the local environment;
- **New skills:** With Council support, people will find that they gain new skills and new knowledge – which can be applied to other aspects of their lives;
- **Better health:** The relationship between poor environmental quality and poor health is well documented. There are obvious benefits from being involved in outside projects, many of which require some physical activity. However, the health benefits of improved environmental practices resulting in enhanced environmental quality (eg cleaner swimming beaches and less air pollution) should also be felt;
- **Economic advantages:** Changing poor environmental practices can cost money in the short term. The Council is ever mindful of the costs to the public that are incurred through its resource management planning and regulatory processes, eg soil conservation, pest management, resource consents. However, sound environmental management can provide short

term economic gains and, in the longer term, substantially reduce overall costs of doing business.

7. **How Will The Council Benefit From Environmental Education/Communication Programmes?**

There will be significant benefits to Councillors and the Council as a whole:

- **Enhanced community responsibility and awareness**

All too often people think environmental management is the responsibility of someone else – usually a local authority. In fact, it is everyone’s responsibility. When a community becomes aware of and understands an environmental issue - and is involved in solving a problem or enhancing an area - that community begins to take ownership of the problem and to assume responsibility for the solution.

- **Results and value for money**

The Council should consider including the community in environmental projects as a smart investment. Research suggests that involving the wider public in local resource management brings clear, positive environmental results at a low cost. For example, by encouraging volunteers to work alongside Council in **labour** intensive, time consuming tasks eg removing litter from streams, beaches and rivers or planting along a riparian strip, the Council can achieve significant environmental improvements for a comparatively low investment.

- **Gaining Public Trust and Support**

Strategies that involve the wider community in natural resource management have recorded very positive outcomes regarding public perceptions of the organisations and elected members involved. For example, many regional councils are involved in a range of “Care” groups. These are explained later in this document, but involve Council staff facilitating community groups to address specific resource problems. A report on these Care Groups identified the following benefits to Environment Waikato:

“less suspicion of Environment Waikato . ..and more allies in the community”.

“customer satisfaction – a sense of getting better value from Environment Waikato and of being heard”.

“enhancement of Environment Waikato’s image in the community”.

This Council has also had very positive feedback when it has involved the community in such projects as Friends of the River and Trees for Survival.

- **Increased internal effectiveness in the Council**

Community based resource management activities may provide a learning environment for the Council as well as the community. Experience has shown that the approach helps break down the internal organisational barriers of organisations with staff skills being imported from a number of departments. The “ecosystem approach” to resource management, outlined at the recent Councillors workshop on ecosystems, is an example where different areas of the Council would work together with the community towards a common goal.

- **Enhanced cross agency co-operation**

Often resource management issues cross the jurisdictions of regional councils, territorial authorities and central government. Community based work, eg beach and stream clean-ups, can establish or re-enforce links which can then be further utilised on other issues. This is certainly our experience with a number of plantings and clean-ups that we have undertaken recently.

8. **How Will Iwi Benefit From Environmental Education/Communication Programmes?**

The Resource Management Act 1991 requires the Council to take into account the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi in the management of the Region’s natural and physical resources. Consequently, the Regional Policy Statement contains objectives, policies and methods that include iwi in resource management. The benefits for iwi of a programme that focuses on the involvement of the community, including iwi, can be summarised as follows:

- **Enhanced knowledge and mutual understanding**

Community involvement leads to shared understandings and, in the case of iwi, is an opportunity for the Council and the community to learn about iwi management systems and for iwi to increase their knowledge of pakeha systems.

- **Kaitiakitanga opportunities**

A Council emphasis on community involvement in resource management will provide excellent opportunities for iwi to carry out kaitiakitanga (the exercise of guardianship) and for iwi management plans to be recognised.

9. Council's Image

This strategy provides for Council staff and Councillors to connect with the community.

Critical to the success of the initiative, therefore, is the Council's image and the way in which it is branded. In the commercial world a company brands itself on the product it is selling. Essentially, we are trying to sell a product – sustainable resource management – be it through the provision of regional parks, flood protection, transport, pest control, or water supply etc.

10. Our Approach

The strategy targets three sectors of the community:

- *Community Connections*

Community groups or individuals who have the ability to make a difference and who can get things done to resolve an environmental problem

- *Learnwell*

The next generation – children and young people – who can learn how to care for the environment in the future

- *Business Bridges*

Businesses, medium to small, whose activities affect the environment

The programmes for each of these sectors follow.

11. Proposed Programmes

11.1 Community Connections

11.1.1 What

The Region's community has a number of already established groups be they marae, Rotary, neighbourhood watch groups, sports clubs, young farmers clubs, guides and scouts, environmental organisations (eg Forest and Bird, Kapiti Environmental Action), common interest groups (bridge clubs, walking and reading groups). There are also a number of strong individuals who have the ability to inspire others and persuade action. They are generally untapped and willing resources.

The *Community Connections* programme aims to foster community involvement in specific projects that are both identified by the Council and the community.

11.1.2 Why

Through *Community Connections*, the Council can focus attention on and do something practical about the following resource management issues:

- Wetland protection
- Restoration and conservation of foreshore and dunes
- Soil erosion and land management
- Non-point source pollution
- Urban waterway management
- Restoration of coastal forest remnants

11.1.3 How

Community Connections will:

- **Identify** problem environmental areas/issues eg damaged coastal dunes in Queen Elizabeth Park, Pautahanui Inlet, water quality in Mangatarere River; and
- Respond to environmental problems where there is a clear community concern or interest eg Waitohu Stream, Mangaone Stream, Riversdale dunes

Council staff will then:

- Encourage and facilitate "Care Groups" to be set up. These groups are made up of people in the community who are willing to take practical action to address an environmental problem. Several regional councils

have extensive experience with Care Groups, particularly Environment Waikato. They are seen to be a successful way of engaging the community to produce a sustained result. This Council has recently had several approaches from the community for help to set up a Care Group. Care Groups can generally be categorised as “Landcare”, “Coastcare”, “Rivercare”, and “Streamcare”. The sustainable land management plan approach being followed in the Wairarapa is one example of the Care Group concept in practice.

- Provide administrative support and technical advice to these groups
- Organise resource material, workshops and field days for these groups on relevant resource management issues.
- Provide some financial support and/or materials for practical works.

Care Groups would be an exciting way for the Council to meet its ecological and biodiversity objectives. The concept of Ecological Management Units (EMUs) that was outlined in the recent Councillors’ workshop would provide an excellent opportunity to connect with the community in specific areas. For example, the creation of an EMU for Pauatahanui Inlet would involve the Council supporting and co-ordinating individuals and community groups who were willing to work to achieve the EMU’s goals.

11.1.4 **When**

Initially Council will:

- Provide some staff training in establishing Care Groups
- Prepare basic resources to support groups
- Establish at least 5 groups in different locations around the Region
- Ensure that each of these groups has one major highly publicised activity

11.2. Learnwell

11.2.1 What

Our research shows that this sector, the formal education sector, is the one that needs to be approached with the most care to ensure targeting for maximum gain. It has the potential to eat up a disproportionate amount of resources. There are examples in New Zealand where sophisticated and expensive resource material has been prepared for schools that has not been used because it was not tailored to the school's needs or the curriculum. Consequently, it is recommended that our approach to this sector be step by step.

Our main target group within this sector is primary and intermediate school children. These younger children are likely to be the most receptive and, in turn, teach their parents. Furthermore, the curricula are more flexible in these schools and therefore more able to incorporate local environmental education. Any programmes for this primary/intermediate sector must:

- Address the achievement objectives of the New Zealand Curriculum
- Be exciting and motivating for teachers and children alike
- Provide children with lively, hands on experiences of the environment
- Ensure that the skills and concepts learned can be incorporated into other areas of learning
- Link classroom learning with outdoor hands-on learning
- Be FUN!
- Be LOCAL!

People, especially school children, are unlikely to understand or want to become actively involved in environmental issues that are remote or irrelevant to their own experiences. We want to bring resource management alive and promote pride in this Region's environment. All the issues are on our doorsteps and can be seen at first hand – and will be all the more real for the children for being local. Further, if we are to maintain support and motivation, children need to see results.

11.2.2 Why

To provide for a better environment in the future by raising children's general environmental awareness, especially as it relates to their local environment, and helping them gain some skills both to fix problems and ensure that problems don't occur in the first instance.

11.2.3 How

Learnwell will, for primary and intermediate school children:

- Develop some Environmental Trails through the Region for the 8-12 age group – probably one in Kapiti, Wellington, Hutt Valley and Wairarapa. These will be closely aligned with our Regional Parks and Council lands and will allow children to see an environmental issue “in action”. For example, one site could be a stormwater drain and another the ocean outlet – so children can see what happens if oil or any other pollutant is put down a stormwater drain and the adverse effects such actions have on our beaches and coasts. Other site examples are polluted streams eg Kaiwharawhara, Waiwhetu, or areas of native bush (using regional parks), coastal dune erosion, soil erosion. The focus will be on the cause of these environmental problems and practical actions that we can take to remedy these problems.
- Work with teachers to prepare resource material for use on the trails and in the classroom. Prepare **signage** for trails.

Learnwell will, for secondary, primary and intermediate schools

- Target some schools for an environmental care project – eg adopt a stream. The schools will be encouraged to take on simple on-going, local, care programmes. These will involve understanding what actions cause pollution or degradation, and how it can be avoided. Stream clean ups, tree growing and planting, along with some simple monitoring programmes (so that results can be seen) have proved to be very successful and enduring in some areas.
- Develop appropriate resource material for use in the classrooms and the field.
- **Publicise** school involvement in environmental care

11.2.4 When

A prudent, cautious approach is recommended. To ensure that we get value for money we shall focus on strengthening our links with teachers in order to develop workable programmes.

Initially, the Council will:

- Work with the Ministry of Education and teachers to develop an approach most likely to meet needs and directly connect with the school curricula
- Develop resource material (there is already much existing material)
- Develop one environmental trail

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- Target one primary school and one secondary school for a local environmental care and/or monitoring project
 - Make contact with other organisations concerned with environmental education in the Region to see if there are opportunities for joint approaches
 - Investigate opportunities for external funding, eg Ministry for Education grants, private sector sponsorship.

11.3. Business Bridges

11.3.1 What

Small to medium businesses in the Region – both urban and rural – represent a significant part of the Region’s business sector. However, they are invariably unaware of the Resource Management Act 1991 or the effects of their activities on the environment. A significant part of this Council’s existing compliance and pollution response work arises from these businesses. Unlike large corporations, people running small to medium businesses generally don’t have the knowledge, inclination, resources or the time to address environmental issues.

The *Business Bridges* programme aims to raise awareness and provide advice. But it goes one step further by developing a marketing approach that, in turn, promotes not only the business, but also the Regional Council.

11.3.2 Why

Through *Business Bridges*, the Council can focus attention on and do something practical about the following resource management issues:

- Waste minimisation
- Pollution incidents affecting freshwater, soil, coastal water and air.
- Hazardous waste management
- Emergency response preparedness
- Regulatory requirements

11.3.3 How

Business Bridges will:

- Progressively target sectors of small to medium businesses, eg panel beaters, dry-cleaners and/or
- Select “problem” locations and the businesses in those locations eg Waiwhetu Stream

Council staff will then:

- Initiate personal visits to explain the problems, goals, and to elicit co-operation in finding solutions through changed practices
- Provide resource material to aid understanding, obligations and responsibilities
- Work with industry associations, where applicable
- Assist businesses, by way of advice, to develop an environmental management system appropriate to their needs (not necessarily ISO 14000).
- Develop an audit checklist for “responsible environmental practices”

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- Carry out an audit to certify “responsible environmental practices” and repeat these to ensure that changes in practices are enduring.

Council will then

- Present “successful” businesses with a branded Council certificate (eg WRC Envirocare)’ denoting responsible environmental practice
- Promote participating successful businesses by way of news releases and reports
- Give an award to the best small to medium Envirocare business of the year.

This approach is designed to impart a competitive advantage to the Region’s businesses. It is a way in which the Council can promote both economic development and good environmental management. Its success will depend on the Council promoting the Region as, for example, a sustainable Region.

This concept is being examined and developed further and a separate report will soon be available. It does have some exciting possibilities to raise the Council’s profile, assist economic growth and enhance the quality of the Region’s environment.

This segment of the strategy will involve us working closely with territorial authorities, especially in connection with waste management.

11.3.4 **When**

Initially Council will

- Provide staff training in small site assessments (some material is currently being developed by the Auckland Regional Council)
- Select a business type or problem area
- Prepare basis resources to support the business environmental education programme
- Encourage at least 3 businesses to adopt environmental management improvement programmes
- Develop the sustainable Region concept

¹*Envirocare* is simply a suggestion to make a point. More thought is required to brand this programme.

12. A Focus

The initial focus of the programmes (for the first two years) should be on water. This is something that the community feels strongly about. Survey information tells that water quality is the single most important environmental issue for the community. People want clean coastal waters and clean lakes, rivers and streams.

Water is an issue where this Council has some expertise and one that the community associates with the Council. Further, clean water is the end result of good land management and healthy ecosystems – so there is plenty of scope for community work.

A central theme will help capture the hearts and minds of people and also will assist with any imaging of the Council.

13. Resources

The programmes in this strategy have yet to be worked through in detail. An environment education co-ordinator has been provided for in the 1999/2000 and this person will play a major role in developing the programme further. The programmes can then be reflected in the long-term financial strategy commencing 2000/2001.

This strategy does not so much depict a change in direction for the Council – more an enhanced focus and change in approach. This means that existing staff will be encouraged to develop the skills to work successfully with each of the community target groups. Nevertheless, other regional councils have committed large resources to environmental education/communication.

14. Monitoring Effectiveness

Our aim is to have a better environment through an environmentally responsible community in the Region. This is unlikely to happen quickly; attitudes, practices and environmental processes do not change overnight. However, we should be aiming for a sustained change of behaviour and environmental improvement over a ten year period.

Environment education does seem to be an area of work where expenditure can be large and effectiveness small! Consequently, it is important that programmes are monitored closely. We can do this by measuring and community surveys, such as:

- *State of the environment monitoring.* The state of the Region's environment is measured through various monitoring programmes. A basic monitoring report is prepared annually and a more comprehensive

“State of the Region” report prepared is programmed to be prepared every five years. The latter report serves to show us how we are getting on with achieving the objectives of the Regional Policy Statement.

- *Attitudinal and behavioural surveys.* The Council has already carried out two surveys on environmental attitudes and behaviour. They provided some useful results – and indeed influenced the decision to proceed with non-regulatory and educational approaches in our resource management planning processes. Another survey is proposed for early 200 1.
- *Customer feedback.* We should seek feedback from individuals, businesses, groups and schools involved in the education/communication programmes.
- *Performance Indictors.* Each programme should have measurable performance indicators.

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