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Report to Environment Committee
from Stephanie Livick, Accounts Manager, Consents Management
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Consents Customer Satisfaction Survey

1. Purpose

To present to the Committee the Consents Customer Satisfaction Survey which was recently completed for the Consents Management and Planning and Resources Departments.

2. Background

Improving the service that we provide to our customers is a continuing objective of both the Consents Management Wellington, and the Planning and Resource Department in the Wairarapa. This is the second study of this nature that we have completed, the first study was completed in 1997.

Copies of the survey will be provided at the Environment Committee meeting, and Michael Dunne from ACNielsen will give a short presentation of the results at this meeting.

3. Method

As was the case in 1997, the survey was contracted outside the Council, due to a lack of market research expertise and telemarketing facilities within the Council.

ACNielsen was selected to undertake the survey. ACNielsen undertook the 1997 survey for us following a tender process, and the market research market had not changed sufficiently in two years to merit re-tendering at this stage. Additionally, because we wanted to compare this 2000 survey directly with the 1997 survey, it was important we used the same methodology in both studies.

ACNielsen is the largest market research organisation in New Zealand. They are recognised as providing an impartial and authoritative source of information to their clients. ACNielsen are ISO9000 certified and were the first New Zealand research organisation to achieve this certification. Adherence to the ISO standard ensures that rigorous standards of quality in all areas of operation are achieved.

There are some benefits to having a reputable external organisation complete the survey. These benefits include:

- A more objective (and therefore robust) result is achieved;
- The quality of contact with our customers is assured;
- Some customers may feel more secure talking anonymously to a third party.

Four different customer groups were identified and surveyed: Recent applicants, Existing Consent Holders, Submitters/Interest Groups, and a new category, Complainants.

4. **Survey Objectives**

The main objectives of this study were to:

- Compare overall levels of customer satisfaction with the 1997 survey results.
- Determine current levels of customer satisfaction with the different aspects of service provided by the departments, so that further areas for improvement can be identified.
- Identify the relative importance of the different aspects of service in relation to overall satisfaction so that priorities for improvements can be set.
- Measure satisfaction level with a newly identified group of customers, our complainants.

5. **Summary of Results**

There is a high level of satisfaction with the performance of the Department. Additionally, there have been increases in satisfaction ratings for all the groups we measured in 1997. For example, our ratings of Good, Very Good, or Excellent overall service have increased from 76% to 82%.

ACNielsen commented *“The increases in customer satisfaction observed across all groups of customers can be considered to be an excellent result. Increases of this magnitude are not often seen in customer satisfaction research and are obviously the outcome of a concerted effort to improve levels of performance.*

The increase is even more impressive when taken in the context of what is occurring with other organisations and their customers. Many organisations are now focusing on customer needs and as a result customer expectations have been increasing in the last few years. This has meant for those organisations who have not actively worked

at improving their customer service, their level of customer satisfaction has actually decreased rather than staying stable.”

As was the case in 1997, Recent Applicants were our most satisfied group of customers, followed by Existing Consent Holders, then Submitters and Interest Groups. Our least satisfied group of customers, as might have been expected, were the new group of customers we have identified, the Complainants¹.

Complainants have a lower overall satisfaction level, with 63% giving us a rating of good or better.

As with the 1997 survey, the Wellington office achieved a slightly higher overall satisfaction rating (87%) than the Wairarapa office (83%). This difference may be attributable to the differing customer bases of the two offices. The Wairarapa office has shown larger increases in their customer satisfaction ratings.

Improved communication with customers appears to be the greatest reason why overall satisfaction levels have increased. The other area where there was a large increase in performance was the treatment that customers got from the hearings committee.

Areas where improvement is required include:

- The usefulness of the monitoring reports we produce;
- Explaining how long the process will take;
- Annual charge issues, including explaining better what the charge comprises; and
- Improving our monitoring methods and the communication of the same.

6. **Communications**

It is proposed to produce a press release that will summarise the main findings of the Customer Satisfaction Survey. Additionally, copies of the report will be made available to media. It might be useful to investigate ways to increase media interest, because despite a press release in 1997, no media outlets reported on the results of the survey.

7. **Conclusion**

There is extensive information in the Customer Satisfaction Survey. As in 1997, this survey will provide us with our main thrust for improving customer satisfaction both in the short term and over the next few years. We will be investigating a number of ways in which to implement the recommendations made in the report, and we shall address as many of the areas of customer concern as possible in this time.

¹ Complainants are those people who contact us to report a breach or potential breach of a resource consent such as an offensive odour.

We are very proud of these results. The hard work put in by the staff has begun to pay off. I'm particularly pleased that we've achieved these levels despite our 'controllership' or enforcement role.

8. Recommendation

That the committee receive the report and its contents be noted.

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