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## **Report 01.41**

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Report to Environment Committee  
from John Holmes, Section Leader, Policy Advice and Rosalind Groves, Hazard Analyst

### **Regional Council Submission on the Role of Local Government in Meeting New Zealand's Climate Change Target**

#### **1. Purpose**

To seek the Committee's input to and approval of a submission on *The Role of Local Government in Meeting New Zealand's Climate Change Target* to Local Government New Zealand and to the Local Government and Environment Select Committee.

#### **2. Background**

The Committee has received numerous papers over the years on climate change, most recently in April 1999 (Report 99.188) when it considered a submission on three options by which New Zealand might meet its international requirements for the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol from 2008-2012 at least cost.

Comments made by the Council in that submission included:

- That roles and responsibilities for central and local government be more clearly defined;
- That the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) is not an appropriate piece of legislation to address climate change at least cost;
- That there was a lack of co-ordination on a number of inter-related climate change policy initiatives (e.g. the Vehicle Fleet Emission Control Strategy, the draft Road Reform Bill, the Energy Efficiency Bill and the Draft Biodiversity Strategy); and
- That given the significance of the climate change issue and the magnitude of impacts arising from associated policy responses, extensive consultation would be needed.

Since forwarding the submission, there has been a change in Government, and further developments internationally. Recent indications are that the science of climate change “further strengthens the case for action” (Energy Minister, Hon. Pete Hodgson, January 2001).

The role of local government in achieving “action” has been the subject of two reports. The Select Committee, in undertaking its inquiry into climate change, asked Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) to present evidence. Harrison Grierson prepared a report for LGNZ for this purpose and the Select Committee released its own report, with associated questions and recommendations, in December.

Both the Select Committee and LGNZ are seeking responses from local government on their reports by early March 2001.

Along with the reports, the Ministry for the Environment is holding a series of seminars on climate change. One of these is to be held at the Regional Council offices on 13<sup>th</sup> February and councillors have been invited to attend.

### 3. **Comment**

There are inevitably common themes between the two reports, and a submission has been drafted that encompasses issues raised in both reports. A copy of the Draft Submission is attached to this report.

The submission acknowledges that the LGNZ and Select Committee reports provide some good ideas about how local government can increase its direct and indirect roles in helping move towards the achievement of NZ’s climate change target. The submission also recognises that the issues raised in the Council’s previous submission and noted earlier do appear to have been considered in the approach taken, both by LGNZ and the Select Committee.

As a general comment, however, the submission suggests that the Select Committee and the LGNZ reports may be overly optimistic, both about the contribution currently being made by local government to address climate change and in its potential to assist in future.

Climate change benefits, where they do arise as a result of local government activities, are often small scale and indirect - almost accidental - by-products of other policy initiatives. The reports identify numerous areas where they describe “co-benefits”, but the Regional Council takes the view that many of these co-benefits are co-incidental rather than purposeful. Local government currently addresses climate change in a fragmented way rather than as a deliberate policy focus.

Both reports recognise the significance of transport as a major contributor to climate change problems. However, overseas experience (referred to in the reports) suggests that effective ways of addressing this emission source appear to be difficult for local government to implement, despite the positive stance taken in both reports about local

government's role in transport and urban planning. Transport is a hard, but crucial, nut to crack.

More specific comments in the submission develop these general comments and can be summarised as follows:

- There is a need for leadership, clear roles and purposeful commitment to “on-the-ground” action to prevent, and to manage the effects of, climate change. This need for leadership and clarity on roles applies both between different levels of government and within individual government organisations;
- There is an associated requirement for climate change to become a legitimate policy area for local government to address, and to be suitably resourced (both in terms of technical skills and, where appropriate, funding). With a clearer mandate and resources, local government can deliver at the local level;
- Information about climate change, and policies aimed at dealing with the issue are, of themselves, insufficient means to achieve effective results. A more comprehensive and targeted package of implementation actions are needed to complement good information and desirable policies;
- Transport is the major source of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and trends in the use of energy (and creation of emissions) by transport are upwards. Given the geography of New Zealand and the distribution of its population, and the attitude of New Zealanders to their personal mobility, private transport and its associated emissions are probably the most important, but most difficult, area to effectively tackle; and
- Climate change as a “hazard” should be holistically addressed through an emergency management approach, and there is an opportunity to link the above climate change considerations into the current Civil Defence Emergency Management reform.

#### 4. **Communication**

Copies of the submission will be sent to LGNZ and the Select Committee.

## 5. Recommendation

*That the Committee adopts the Draft Submission.*

*That copies of the Submission be forwarded to Local Government New Zealand and to the Local Government and Environment Select Committee.*

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Attachments: 1