


24 January 2024

File Ref: OIAPR-1274023063-24795



Tēnā koe 

Request for information 2023-299

I refer to your request for information dated 6 December 2023, which was received by Greater Wellington Regional Council (Greater Wellington) on 6 December 2023. You have requested the following:

“We request the following information:

- *The total cost of operating your consenting department, including all associated expenses.*
- *The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff employed in the consenting department.*
- *The percentage of resource consents processed within the legal time frame in the last financial year.*
- *Details of any additional funding or budget increases allocated to consent processing in recent years.*
- *Information on any backlog in resource consent applications and plans to address this.*
- *Any reviews or changes implemented to improve the consent processing system, including the use of external consultants.*
- *Details of discounts or waivers provided due to delayed consent processing and the total cost of these to the council.*

We do not wish to cause unnecessary expense or burden on your agency. If clarification of any of our requests is needed please call or email. Likewise, if a request proves unnecessarily burdensome in form and we are likely to be able to adjust it to be more specific or better suited to your information systems without losing the benefit of what is sought, please also get in touch. If there is likely to be a delay in being able to assemble or provide some of the information requested, please provide the rest of the information as it becomes available.”

Greater Wellington's response follows:

The total cost of operating your consenting department, including all associated expenses.

The total cost for operating our Environmental Regulation department for 2022/23 was \$5.89 million. This includes personnel costs, materials and supplies, and contractors/consultants. Our Environmental Regulation department includes all our compliance monitoring and enforcement staff, so we are unable to provide specific operating costs for our consenting function. However, as a guide, approximately 50% of our staff time would be focussed on consent processing activity.

The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff employed in the consenting department.

There are currently 34 FTE staff employed undertaking consent processing activity as at 6 December 2023. This includes staff vacancies and external contractors/consultants.

The percentage of resource consents processed within the legal time frame in the last financial year.

We have processed a total of 578 non-notified consents, 7 limited notified consents and 30 publicly notified consents in 2022/23. 100% of the consents have been processed within statutory timeframes.

Details of any additional funding or budget increases allocated to consent processing in recent years.

Apart from year by year increases to budgets to account for increased costs, there has been no additional funding to allocated to consent processing activity in recent years up until 30 June 2023. There has been additional funding and increased budget for 2023/24 arising as a result of restructuring of our broader Environment and Catchment Management functions. In relation to consent processing, two new Lead Consenting Advisor positions were created which increase consent processing staff by 2 FTE with a salary band of \$96, 926 - \$145, 389.

Information on any backlog in resource consent applications and plans to address this.

There are currently 481 resource consent applications lodged with a status of 'active' (currently being processed) or "deferred' (currently on hold e.g. due to outstanding information requests or affected party approvals). In terms of backlog, 279 of those applications were lodged prior to 1 January 2023.

In the vast majority of instances, the onus for progressing backlog consent applications is with the consent applicant. We periodically contact consent applicants to ascertain progress with their application. Whilst we could progress backlog applications without information or affected party approvals, this would involve expensive notified consent processes. As most backlog applications can be processed on a non-notified basis, that is not our preferred approach for addressing the backlog.

Any reviews or changes implemented to improve the consent processing system, including the use of external consultants.

We are constantly looking for opportunities to improve the consent processing system. For example, we regularly review our key templates and section 42A of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) officer reports to ensure they are fit for purpose and provide for consistency and efficient decision making. We also seek customer service feedback on every consent decision which helps inform us on how we can improve the consent processing system for applicants.

Details of discounts or waivers provided due to delayed consent processing and the total cost of these to the council.

No discounts have been applied to all non-notified consents as they were processed within statutory timeframes. The notified consents are currently being audited to confirm if discounts apply.

If you have any concerns with the decision(s) referred to in this letter, you have the right to request an investigation and review by the Ombudsman under section 27(3) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987.

Please note that it is our policy to proactively release our responses to official information requests where possible. Our response to your request will be published shortly on Greater Wellington's website with your personal information removed.

Nāku iti noa, nā



Lian Butcher
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