



# THE WEST COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL

## **MEDIA RELEASE – 2 October 2020**

### **Appreciation for secured co-funding contribution but consultation continues**

A \$155,000 co-funding contribution from BT Mining Ltd is being welcomed today by the West Coast Regional Council to progress the advanced flood warning system to assist with the evacuation of Westport in case of flood.

Consultation with the Westport community had been currently underway to gain feedback on whether ratepayers were willing to establish a Rating District to raise the funding themselves over the next three years to obtain the \$400,000 the Regional Council had secured from Central Government.

The advanced flood warning system was the number one short term priority recommended by the Westport 2100 Working Group to provide up to 8 hours advanced warning for the evacuation of Westport.

“We would like to thank Mayor Cleine for the work he has done on behalf of his community with BT Mining Ltd,” said Allan Birchfield, Chair of the West Coast Regional Council, “and acknowledge the generosity of BT Mining Ltd as well. The community is very fortunate to have a company such as this operating within its District.”

“We can now confirm the project will proceed. The donation of \$155,000 compliments the \$400,000 that the Regional Council secured from the Crown Infrastructure Projects fund allowing the delivery of the project at no cost to the ratepayer.”

However, consultation is still continuing.

“We are asking ratepayers to fill out the form as if the co-funding contribution was never made,” said Laura Coll McLaughlin, Regional Councillor from the Buller constituency.

The advanced warning system for Westport was one of 32 recommendations put forward by the Westport 2100 Working Group she said.

“I want to hear what people think about the rating district concept,” said Clr Coll McLaughlin. “It is fantastic that the first short term recommendation has been funded for the community but we have more work to do in the future managing and responding to our hazardscape and this is one option that could be used to fund future potential work.”

“If Westport had had a Rating District established when the Regional Council submitted their projects earlier this year to Government, which included hard protection infrastructure to help protect against the impacts of flooding, there is a strong chance that we could have received several million dollars like Hokitika and Franz Josef did,” said Clr Coll McLaughlin. “Several million dollars that our community wouldn’t have to find themselves.”

As New Zealand moves through its Covid-19 recovery, there is potential that future opportunities for co-funding resilience projects may occur. The Regional Council is committed to progressing delivery of the recommendations of the Westport 2100 Group, subject to community consultation, and is committed to lobbying for funding for these projects.

The Regional Council wants to hear from the current consultation, which has been very positive so far, to help decision making for the future of Westport.

“I believe that we, as a community, have an opportunity to position ourselves for future co-funding opportunities and I believe that we, as a Council, should ask the community if that is something that they want,” said Cllr Coll McLaughlin.

If a Rating District was formed following the consultation there would be no rate struck against the community in the 2020/21 year. Any works proposed would be consulted on with the community as is happening now with the advanced flood warning system.

Both Councils will meet to discuss the outcomes of the consultation and work out the best way forward to progress the Westport 2100 recommendations. There will also be the opportunity for the Westport 2100 Working Group to reconvene following the conclusion of the consultation to discuss the results and prioritise the next projects for inclusion into the Long-Term Plan for future consultation.

The Westport 2100 Working Recommendations were released in 2019 and presented to both the Buller District Council and West Coast Regional Council. Councillors and staff from both Councils met in January and February this year to discuss the inclusion of the advanced flood warning system in the 2020/21 Annual Plan to be fully funded via a Rating District. It was agreed to delay this until the 2021 Long-Term Plan. An opportunity arose through the Crown Infrastructure Project Funding as a result of Covid-19 and the Regional Council saw an opportunity to deliver this project at little, or no cost, to the Westport community. It was submitted requesting 100% funding. All three District Councils were kept up to date with the applications submitted. The advanced flood warning system project was accepted but not at the 100% funding rate as applied for, therefore the Regional Council progressed consultation on a rating district as this a standard mechanism by which co-funding is procured and hazard protection works are funded. This process has been consistent with the other projects that have received funding in Greymouth, Hokitika and Franz Josef.

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