



THE WEST COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL

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Outcomes on the Long-Term Plan – Consultation Document and what happens next

Community engagement on the Long-Term Plan Consultation Document is being praised by Councillors after receiving 621 submissions and hearing from 35 submitters over the process. The feedback received has helped Councillors make decisions about what, and how, to fund various aspects of Council business.

“I am really pleased with how the community have engaged with us,” said Allan Birchfield, Chair of the West Coast Regional Council. “They didn’t hold back, they told us how they see it, and I think we have listened to what they have had to say.”

Today, Council met to deliberate on the submissions they had received and whether the original Preferred Options in the Consultation Document were fit for purpose. The outcomes of the deliberations were:

Topic 1 – Changing our rating instalments. Council decided to retain the status quo. While approximately 50% of ratepayers that made submissions wanted to see a change in the instalments, general feedback indicated that more flexibility was what was wanted. Changing from two to three was not going to provide the benefits sought and so Council wanted to retain the twice a year instalment but requested that Staff provide more information to ratepayers on the options available for internet banking options. This way ratepayers could decide to make weekly, fortnightly, monthly payments to suit their circumstances or complete direct debit forms.

Topic 2 – Infrastructure insurance cover. Council decided to proceed with Option 2 which has 70% of the Insurance cost funded through the rating districts with 30% funded from the general rate. Retaining a portion to be paid from the general rate recognises that those outside of a rating district receive indirect benefits from this infrastructure. Option 2 also aligns more closely with the user pays approach than how it had previously been funded.

Topic 3 – Engineer, and other rating district services, cost recovery. Council decided to proceed with Option 2 (70% to be paid by the rating districts and 30% from the general rate). With similar reasoning as to Topic 2, Councillors also recognised the importance of having in-house expertise available for the region.

Topic 4 – Wanganui Rating District – infrastructure upgrade. Council decided not accept either Option 1 or Option 2 but engage in further consultation on the Topic during the Annual Plan 2022-23 process. Council acknowledged the feedback that they had received in the Submissions that shows that the Topic was not clearly understood by the ratepayers in the rating district. The impact of the COVID-19 lockdown had resulted in the cancellation of the planned drop-in session in the community as well as there had been delays in receiving copies of the Consultation Document.

Topic 5 – Wanganui Rating District – classification review. Council decided to progress with Option 1 and undertake a review of the classifications of the rating district during the Annual Plan 2022-23 process and in line with Topic 4. Councillors recognise that there is potentially a wider review required across all rating districts in the future to determine how best to fund these taking into account their hazardscape.

Topic 6 – Hokitika Rating District – boundary extension. Council decided to progress with Option 1 and extend the boundary of the rating district. Again feedback received indicates that further work is required on looking at how rating districts are funded in the future and where the boundary should fall.

Topic 7 – Hokitika Southside – boundary extension. Based on the Submissions, Council decided to progress with Option 2 and retain the status quo. Hokitika Southside has a complicated funding arrangement, and feedback from ratepayers in this area reinforced the decision to retain the status quo.

Topic 8 – Greymouth Rating District – boundary extension. Council decided to progress with Option 2, the smaller of the two boundary extensions. Again, Councillors raised the issue of where the line of a boundary should lie and that this also falls into the long term review on the best way in which to fund rating districts.

Topic 9 – Westport Rating District – flood protection. Council decided to progress with Option 2. There was overwhelming support from submitters for the construction of extensive floodwalls and stopbanks and to get this underway now. Council recognised that there was significant additional information that came in for consideration and that the work did not stop here. Council requested that consideration be given to the potential adverse impacts on the ratepayers upstream from the construction of the planned infrastructure. This is one tool in the tool-box for the further resilience, and future-proofing, of Westport. Council acknowledged and thanked the funding support commitment of \$100,000 made by Frank Dooley, Chair Buller Electricity, in his Submission.

Other matters from the Consultation Document on which Councillors made decisions included:

- Prudent reserves

Council decided, based on the feedback received, that the prudent reserve targets are to be deferred until a review of the Asset Management Plans can be undertaken. The Asset Management Plans will provide the analysis to sit behind the decisions that are made for these assets.

“I also want to acknowledge the work undertaken by staff in getting Council to this point,” said Chair Birchfield. “There has been a substantial amount of work gone on behind the scenes in developing the Consultation Document, getting it out to our community and turning round the submissions for us to deliberate on that can’t be underestimated.”

With deliberations now complete, Council will be updating the draft Long-Term Plan to commence the audit with Audit NZ next week. Council is anticipating adopting the Long-Term Plan, including the strategies and policies, and the Schedule of User Fees and Charges also consulted on over the past month, on 5 October 2021.

At that meeting Council will also be making resolutions on striking the rate instalment for the 2021/22 financial year.

For those who are waiting on their whitebait invoices, Council has decided that these will be charged at the 2020/21 fee of \$150 + GST this year. They will increase to \$175 + GST from next season in 2022-23.

ENDS

Media contacts

Heather Mabin | Acting Chief Executive | West Coast Regional Council | 021 346 826

Allan Birchfield | Chairman | West Coast Regional Council | 021 340 750