



THE WEST COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL

Media Release

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New Waiho River threats being investigated

Ongoing and substantial aggradation (building up) of gravel in the Waiho River has resulted in the main channel of the river deflecting to the true right, and forming an additional channel into the Tartare River.

This natural process, known as avulsion, occurs when a river becomes blocked due to sediment and abruptly shifts pathways or channels.

West Coast Regional Council Chief Executive, Darryl Lew, said that the ramifications of such an event were being investigated.

"Engineers were on the ground once we were aware that this was occurring. It appears that this channel remains dry until river volumes exceed normal flows.

We are working closely with Te Rūnanga o Makaawhio, Westland District Council and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency to assess the implications of any such shift in the river channels."

An understanding of the current situation, the future state of the river and potential options and design solutions is being progressed through a workshop in the second week of August.

"Council is bringing together some of the most experienced thinkers in this space to consider the options for the future and create a 10 year plan for the river. Once we have this plan we can then bring this to the community as well as seeking the appropriate funding."

Mr Lew noted that sediment rates, exacerbated by rainfall to the catchment of 10,000mm per year and located in a highly seismic environment, are contributing to the build-up of the riverbed.

"The Waiho is one of the most dynamic river systems in New Zealand. Being constrained within floodwalls has meant that the natural deposition of gravel over the river plain has been unable to occur with the river bed building up faster than ever before. When the accumulated sediment grows formidable enough to impede the flow of water, the river seeks an easier course."

West Coast Regional Council Chair, Peter Haddock, noted the importance of keeping the Franz Josef community up to date.

“We know there is considerable interest in the ongoing management of this river. We are planning to meet with local residents in early September on the outcomes of the workshop and the potential options from here.”

ENDS

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