
REPORT
(1215/52/IM)

ENVIRONMENTAL REFERENCE GROUP UPDATE

1. Purpose of Report

To provide an update on the operation of the Environmental Reference Group (ERG) during the 2009 calendar year and an indication of planned ERG activities over the coming year.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 1. Receive the information.*
- 2. Note that there were three resignations during the year and that vacancies will be advertised publicly in December for the appointment of new members to the Environmental Reference Group (ERG).*
- 3. Note that officers will work with the ERG chairs to identify options for amending the Terms of Reference in an effort to improve the value to both the Council and ERG members.*

3. Background

The ERG was established in mid-2001, to provide the Council with a sounding board and peer-review group on issues relating to management of the natural environment. In August 2005, for alignment with the new Environment Portfolio, the Terms of Reference was reviewed to clarify that the natural environment includes energy and waste issues and the membership was expanded accordingly.

In May 2008, for alignment with other Council advisory groups, the Council agreed another revised Terms of Reference, introducing an attendance fee for members, allowing for the chair to be a member other than a Councillor, and permitting co-chairs.

4. Discussion

4.1 Meeting content and frequency for 2009

The ERG has continued to meet bi-monthly and sought to keep the meetings focussed on opportunities for member input (though invariably officer presentations tend to take up a fair amount of meeting time to provide information and set the context for group discussion). The Group has met seven times since the last update report to SPC in December 2008. Appendix 1 summarises the topics covered at each meeting, as well as attendance numbers. Some of the key engagement topics in the past year have included:

- engagement on the LTCCP 2009-19
- the impacts of the Waste Minimisation Act (2008) and discussion and early input into the Council's planning for waste minimisation
- discussion of the key issues for the water network and providing some preliminary input into the water conservation work area
- a workshop on the Climate Change Action Plan to provide input into the process, specifically relating to priorities and areas of focus.

4.2 Membership Changes

The ERG can have up to fifteen recruited members as per the Terms of Reference and Ngati Toa and the Tenths Trust have permanent attendance invitations. Current members are listed in Appendix 2. There is also a representative from the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) that represents GWRC in an official capacity. All other ERG members are not officially representing any organisation with which they are affiliated.

Two ERG members resigned since December 2008. Nominations for new members open on 20 November 2009 and will close on 22 December so that appointments can be finalised at the start of 2010.

4.3 Added value

The ERG membership has shown itself to be knowledgeable, engaged, committed and useful group. The group has a range of expertise and work experience including:

- economics
- environmental management
- energy efficiency and conservation
- business/corporate sustainability
- climate change impacts and emissions analysis.

A number of members are involved, on either a paid or unpaid basis, with various environment-related agencies, businesses and groups, such as Victoria University's Environmental Studies programme, the Ministry for the Environment, the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority, the Department of Conservation and the Sustainability Trust. These connections are useful in getting an understanding of developments on Government policy, academic research and projects developing on a local level (especially when they have an overlap with Council policy work). The diverse range of knowledge and background of ERG members makes them a valuable resource to the Council.

4.5 Existing role of the ERG and options for improvement

There was a concerted effort by officers to move beyond the sharing of information and one-way officer presentations. Officers have worked to engage with the ERG earlier in the policy development process as well as bring in more external speakers in areas where it has an impact on Council services or on the Wellington environment. Examples of early engagement are referenced in section 4.1 above and examples of external engagement include presentations by:

- the Department of Conservation on the Wellington Conservation Strategy Review
- the Greater Wellington Regional Council on the Draft Regional Policy Statement
- the Greater Wellington Regional Council on the Genuine Progress Indicator work.

There is an ongoing issue of getting the balance right at ERG meetings of officers presenting enough information and options analysis to generate quality discussion and debate without putting forward the agreed officer approach before it has been considered by councillors. ERG members have expressed an interest to have more workshops on Council policy or projects where their ideas can be referenced early in the policy development stage. Officers have taken this feedback on board and will look to ensure agenda items are delivered so that quality engagement and communication is maximised.

In addition, officers feel that the wording of the existing Terms of Reference, which states that the ERG will not make submission on draft policies and plans put out for consultation, could be limiting the ERG's effectiveness. Ideally input would be received pre- and post-consultation. Officers will engage with the ERG chairs to discuss options for amendments to the ERG's Terms of Reference in an effort to expand the scope of the ERG's influence.

4.5 Plans for 2010

Council officers and the ERG chairs will meet in late December to:

- finalise the ERG member recruitment process

- discuss a draft forward programme for 2010
- identify ways to improve the function of the ERG for both the Council and the ERG.

The ERG will continue to meet bi-monthly and will focus on papers being developed for upcoming SPC meetings, as well as other issues raised by group members or Council officers. The preliminary reports and projects of interest to the group include:

- the Draft Annual Plan 2010/11
- the Climate Change Action Plan
- the Water Conservation Plan
- the Waste Minimisation and Management Plan
- Town Belt Legislation and Management Plan review
- Capital Spaces Open Space Strategy Review
- Wellington 2040 - The City Strategy
- the District Plan review
- transport and urban development implementation plans such as walking, cycling and bus priority measures (as they relate to the subject of transport emissions)

5. Conclusion

This report has provided a summary of the activity and contributions of the ERG. The ERG has met seven times since December 2008. Vacant positions will be filled at the start of 2010. The Terms of Reference of the ERG and the 2010 Forward Programme will be reviewed in coordination with the chairs for discussion at the first meeting in 2010.

Contact Officer: *Zach Rissel, Senior Policy Advisor*

Supporting Information

1) Strategic Fit / Strategic Outcome

This activity fits with the outcomes for the Environmental Strategy.

2) LTCCP/Annual Plan reference and long term financial impact

Minor financial impacts of this reference group relate to: members' attendance fees; officer time, photocopying and other administration costs; and provision of meeting rooms and refreshments.

3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations

There are no Treaty of Waitangi implications from this report.

4) Decision-Making

This report does not require a significant decision.

5) Consultation

a) General Consultation

Expressions of interest for the vacant positions in the group will be advertised publicly in the Our Wellington Page and on the Council website.

b) Consultation with Maori

Both mana whenua partners declined to become members of the group when it was formed on the understanding that officers supporting the group would maintain a communication link with the Wellington Tenth's Trust and Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira to assist in providing a Māori perspective in the work of the Group. This agreed approach is reflected within the Terms of Reference for the Group.

6) Legal Implications

There are no legal implications from this report.

7) Consistency with existing policy

The activities of the Environmental Reference Group are consistent with existing policy and provide robust input to ongoing environmental policy development.

APPENDIX 1: 2009 Environmental Reference Group Meetings

Date	Agenda Topics	Non-Council Members in Attendance
2 February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final recruitment selection 	NA
9 February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTCCP engagement results • Sewage and stormwater mixing – inflow and infiltration • Sludge process • Waste Operator Licensing Bylaw 	12
2 March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste Minimisation Act 2008 implications • Wellington Regional Strategy • Water Day • Group Goals 	9
6 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Consumption Figures • Draft LTCCP consultation document • Greater Wellington Proposed Regional Policy Statement • Group goals discussion 	10
8 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ngati Toa Treaty Settlement • Wellington Conservancy Draft Conservation Strategy • Safe and Sustainable Transport Reference Group 	12
3 August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ERG annual report to the SPC • Energy planning update • Water update • LTCCP update • Climate change work update • ERG meeting structures and content – discussion on getting more value-ad out of meetings for member and Council • ERG draft forward programme 	9
22 September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change workshop 	10
23 November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft of Year End Report • ERG Forward Programme for 2010 • ERG member recruitment 	TBC
3 December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Reference Group Update to SPC 	NA

NA: Not Applicable.

APPENDIX 2: Environmental Reference Group Membership as at November 2008

	Title	First name	Last name	Comments
1	Ms	Bev	Abbot	
2	Mr	Hamish	Allardice (co-chair)	
3	Dr	Ralph	Chapman	
4	Ms	Mel	Cutler	
5	Mr	Mike	Ennis	
6	Mr	Peter	Gilberd	
7	Mr	Graeme	Hastilow	
8	Ms	Liz	Hibbs	Resigned July 2009
9	Mr	Tushara	Kodikara	
10	Ms	Kathryn	Maxwell	
11	Ms	Liz	Mellish (Tenths Trust)	
12	Dr	Phillip	Mladenov	
13	Mr	Tim	Park (GWRC)	
14	Mr	Nick	Potter	
15	Dr	Sea	Rotmann (co-chair)	
16	Mr	Ian	Shearer	Resigned September 2009
17	Mr	Nigel	Smith (Youth Council)	

WCC Representatives

1. Councillor Celia Wade-Brown and Councillor Iona Pannett (Alternate)
2. Mr Chris Cameron (Policy)
3. Mr Mike Oates (Parks and Gardens / Open Space Planning)
4. Ms Nicky Karu (Treaty Relations), on behalf of Council Treaty Partners
5. Mr Mike Mendonca (CitiOperations)
6. Others on an as-needed basis, depending on topics to be covered