

Coastal policy statement criticised

Evening Post.

By AUDREY EWAN
Kaiti reporter 2/4/93.

The consultant engineering firm that designed and won an environmental award for New Zealand's largest land effluent disposal scheme at Levin says the draft coastal policy statement favours land disposal without considering all the issues.

In Beca Steven's submission to the independent board of inquiry studying the policy, author John Harding says that in favouring shifting disposal impacts from marine to land environment it risked illogical outcomes in environmental management, resource conservation and sustainability.

"The purpose of a policy statement surely cannot be to shift environmental impacts from one environment to another.

There can be significant adverse impacts in land disposal of effluent, while in some cases there is little impact in the discharge of suitably treated wastewater to the sea," he wrote.

The policies placed too much emphasis on the origin of the contaminant rather than the affect of the treated effluent on the receiving environment — in some cases industrial waste water could be more damaging than human source waste, the submission says. The policies also seemed to ignore the considerable advances made in sewage treatment, particularly disinfection, in recent years.

There was no evidence that treated sewage discharge through a well-located outfall into the open sea caused undesirable effects to public health or the environment. By

favoured land disposal in all circumstances the draft document was inconsistent with other statements made in it and with the intent of the Resource Management Act.

It was a common misconception that land disposal of effluent was simple and without health or environmental consequences. So-called land disposal was not disposal because an average of about 20 percent of the liquid was released by evaporation or transpiration and the remainder joined the groundwater.

In practice land disposal might be difficult to implement because people lived on the land and preferred to live well away from sewage-related facilities, the soil had to have suitable porosity and be suitably graded, the area required was large, and it was often difficult to get suitable areas, particularly because

of NIMBY (not in my backyard) opposition.

While it was accepted some areas of the sea such as estuaries, harbours and aquaculture areas might be sensitive to discharge there were considerable lengths of coastline where the discharge of properly treated sewage through a suitable outfall would not cause harm. New Zealand's 11,000km coastline should be seen as an asset because of its natural beauty and spiritual and historic associations, and for its ability to accept properly treated wastewater. It should be managed in accordance with the first principle of the policy statement, "the coastal environment is available for sustainable use and development", the submission concluded.

The board of inquiry is considering 591 submissions.



Statement John Harding Beca Stevens Consultant Engineers.

Evening Post 15/4/93.

Costly sewerage plan needless, scientist says

By GEOFF MERCER
Civic reporter

No scientific justification exists for spending up to \$130 million on a sewage treatment plant for Wellington, according to Victoria University marine zoologist Bob Wear.

A cheaper option that relied on high quality primary treatment, a long outfall, and sea currents and organisms to disperse and digest sewage would be more than adequate, he says.

University studies off Fitzroy Bay showed milliscreeened Hutt Valley sewage harmed seabed life no more than a southerly storm.

Plants and animals near the shoreline Pencarrow outfall showed no effects of pollution beyond 750 metres from the outfall, he said.

Because the planned Moa

Point outfall into Lyall Bay was 1800m long, beaches would therefore not be polluted and shellfish along the south coast would be edible.

Primary treatment — milliscreeening followed by the removal through sedimentation of most other remaining solids, fats, oils and grease — coupled with an ocean outfall, was all that was required, he said.

"I bet my reputation we find out in ecological terms secondary and tertiary treatment would be totally unjustified in the high energy, rapid flushing Wellington marine environment — one of the best natural offshore flushing and dispersal systems in the world."

Secondary and tertiary treatment — which produce virtually fresh water — are both part of the council's current sewage treatment plant proposal.

Dr Wear's statements come at a time when the council is

considering putting construction of its Moa Point sewage plant on hold for a year, the time it could take to obtain a resource consent to dispose of sewage sludge at Happy Valley landfill.

The delay — forced because council staff had not obtained the consent — provided time for a more enlightened council and public to reconsider the city's requirements, he said.

Disposal of human sewage was an emotional issue perceived to be a problem out of proportion with reality. New Zealand's wild and domestic animals discharged faecal material equivalent to 20 million people into the sea each year.

The council should build an outfall and a primary treatment plant then monitor how the effluent affected the environment.

Cr Kerry Prendergast, who was criticised last year for proposing this alternative, said today she still believed it was the most cost-effective.



Statement Dr R.G.Wear Director Victoria University's Coastal Marine Research Unit.

Cook Strait ideal place for sewage — scientist

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The Evening Post,
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Virtually ideal conditions exist in Cook Strait for marine sewage treatment, visiting United Kingdom sewage and pollution researcher Dr Timothy Lack said today.

Dr Lack arrived in Wellington last Sunday to address a three-day international conference about marine disposal of waste water. About 160 people attended the conference, including representatives from Australia, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Brazil, the United States, Netherlands and Hong Kong.

During the week Dr Lack has visited local sewage treatment plants, outfalls and has "gone through a considerable number of reports."

He said the Hutt Valley Drainage Board had "excellent facilities" at its Seaview millscreen plant, but said the existing shoreline outfall at Pencarrow "let the system down."

If a long outfall were established which kept effluent away from coastal areas, Dr Lack said it would be a successful and cost-effective scheme.

There also appeared to be no ecological factors preventing a joint Wel-

lington-Hutt Valley marine treatment scheme.

To ascertain the affect a long outfall would have, the Hutt Valley Drainage Board is intending to use computer models developed by the British Water Research Centre, where Dr Lack is group manager of marine studies.

Dr Lack said the centre's computer models were used extensively in the United Kingdom, and were now being more widely used overseas. Thorough research of the long outfall option by such a method was well worthwhile for Wellington and the Hutt Valley, he said.

"The Cook Strait is almost ideal for marine disposal and it would be foolish not to make use of a natural resource."

One of the interesting aspects of the marine disposal conference was the polarisation of views expressed about marine treatment, Dr Lack said.

The public displayed an admirable interest in the issue, "but are possibly being misled about the effectiveness of a land-based system."

Such systems were good at removing solids from sewage but not particularly good at removing bacteria. This could cause problems, particularly if the effluent was disposed into an estuary.

Dr Lack said he was impressed by the high standard of research being undertaken in New Zealand and Australia, and the degree of interest displayed in culturally sensitive issues.

"In my experience this conference was unique in the amount of time given to considering the cultural, legal, political and social concerns about marine disposal."

These concerns should not be allowed to cloud scientific assessment of the schemes, however, he said, and the frequency of conferences such as this week's displayed the ever-increasing demand for information-sharing on what was "truly an international problem."



Dr Timothy Lack

transformation of sewage disposal