

CASE STUDY OF CONSULTATION FOR WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT, TIMARU

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

- In late 1997, the Timaru District Council embarked upon a consultation process with the intention of reaching a consensus with the community about how wastewater would be treated. The Council appointed an independent facilitator to assist them through consultation until the resource consent applications would be lodged. This has been a five year long process.

SUMMARY OF SITUATION

Timaru District Council needed to re view its current wastewater treatment for Timaru, Geraldine, and Temuka. The Council decided to involve the community at a very early stage to work with them on identifying the issues, the options and ultimately the preferred approach. Technical staff provided information as needed.

PROCESS USED

The highlights of the community consultation and parallel tangata whenua consultation process are:

- Council appointed a working party in consultation with the community. The working party consisted of representatives of particular organisations such as Federated Farmers, tangata whenua, and Industry.
- Engaged tangata whenua in separate consultation
- A public relations firm provided assistance in keeping the general public informed through the media.
- The facilitator was available to speak to concerned parties by an 0800 number supplied by Council
- Once the working party made a recommendation to the Operations Committee of Council, a peer review by independent environmental engineer was commissioned.
- The working party was kept up to date on the Assessment of Environmental Effects for the preferred option which was confirmed in October 1999
- Separate meetings with the residents who would be most affected by the preferred option have taken place over the past two years. Residents have been able to identify what other investigations they wanted undertaken and have Council carry them out. Some mitigation measures have now been agreed with them.

OUTCOME

The Council have lodged the applications with the District and Regional council. The designation and resource consent applications are likely to be notified in February 2003.

Lessons Learnt

- ✓ Both rural and urban communities were involved. It was hard to get some of these communities to attend meetings so facilitator had to accept other ways of exchanging information. The response to letterbox drops was excellent. In other areas this might have been unacceptable. Different communities suit different communication systems.
- ✓ Having tangata whenua participating in the community Working Party as well as having separate consultation helped ensure everyone aimed for similar goals.
- ✓ The community representatives were astute at assessing the attitudes of council staff and outside experts. Their decisions on who to trust had an impact on the project.
- ✓ Having several councillors observing or participating in community discussions was critical to a successful transition from community recommendations to Councillors decision-making.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The facilitator was Gay Pavelka. She can be contacted by email: pavelka@xtra.co.nz.
Timaru District Council engineer Ashley Harper has been instrumental in deciding upon this process. He can be contacted by email: ashh@timdc.govt.nz.