

REPORT

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Prepared for: Policy Committee
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Subject: The New Zealand Waste Strategy

1 Précis

The New Zealand Waste Strategy has been released in March 2002 by the MfE and LGNZ. Both the MfE and LGNZ have been committed fully to the Strategy. The Strategy has been reviewed comprehensively to assess its impacts on the Council and actions required by the Council have been recommended in this report.

2 Introduction

2.1 The strategy process

In light of growing concerns over high generation of waste and its adverse effects on the environment in New Zealand, in May 2000 the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) and Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) began developing a waste minimisation strategy using a Working Group. An initial response from the Working Group in December 2000 was in the form of a discussion paper, "Towards a National Waste Minimisation Strategy".

Following submissions and a consultation process, the Working Group provided its final advice in August 2001. In March this year "The New Zealand Waste Strategy - towards zero waste and a sustainable New Zealand" was produced by the MfE and LGNZ. A monitoring and evaluation system for set targets in the strategy will be in place by 2003 with a view to a first review of progress in the same year.

It is understood that the Minister for the Environment and the President of LGNZ have written directly to all mayors and regional council chairs advising them of the adoption (in principle) of the strategy. This is because the National Council of LGNZ has agreed to recommend to all councils that they (a) adopt the strategy as a basis for local plans, programmes and actions, and (b) continue to work in partnership with central government in enabling local and regional councils to realise the strategy's long term goals.

2.2 Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to assess the implications of the New Zealand waste strategy on the Council.

3 The New Zealand Waste Strategy

3.1 General

The strategy covers solid, liquid and gaseous waste. It contains goals (e.g. reducing the damage to the environment from waste generation and disposal) and policies. The five core policies are: to clarify functions of key players through legislative changes, provision of pricing policies on waste disposal, setting environmental performance standards, improved access to waste information, and efficient use of materials.

The criteria used in the strategy to prioritise actions are based on the volume and nature of substance, the rate of success in reducing waste, community concerns, and cost.

3.2 Targets

The priorities set by the strategy are: focusing on waste minimisation (organic, special, construction, and demolition wastes), hazardous wastes (including contaminated sites, organochlorines, trade wastes), and waste disposal. A range of targets have been set for the above priorities.

The strategy is positive in that many of the short-term targets can be achieved under the current system. Therefore the policies in the strategy will only be used to achieve longer term goals such as waste prevention.

4 Implications for the Council

The strategy does not legally bind the Council to adopt and action it. Nevertheless, the commitment of LGNZ throughout the development and release of the strategy signals territorial and regional authorities to show their respective commitments in the adoption and implementation of the strategy. Therefore the "do nothing" option does not apply.

The strategy has also committed the MfE and LGNZ to review the institutional and legislative provisions to enable the waste strategy to be effective, to monitor the performance of it and to actively participate in implementing it. As a result there may be legislative changes by 2004 clarifying functions and roles of the territorial and regional authorities.

In comparison, the implication of the strategy is very significant to the territorial local authorities (TLAs) than to the regional authorities and if implemented properly will affect the TLAs and the wider community substantially. Although regional authorities are relatively less affected, the actions they are required to take will further affect the TLAs. This is because territorial authorities are one of the major waste generators.

Provided below are the provisions in the strategy, their implications to the Council and possible actions taken by the Council to fulfil the strategy:

4.1 Targets set by the strategy

4.1.1 Waste minimisation

By December 2005 all regional councils will ensure that new or renewed industrial resource consents include a recognised waste minimisation and management programme and will report on the percentage of consents under their jurisdiction that have such a clause.

By December 2010, all regional councils will ensure that at least 25% of all existing resource consent holders have in place a recognised waste minimisation and management programme.

Implications

These targets apply to solid, liquid and gaseous waste, hence all industrial discharges are affected by these targets. Please note that these targets exclude the waste generated by the TLAs.

Until the RMA is amended to accommodate waste issues, regional councils are required to take an 'effects based' approach. This means in many cases that, until the RMA is amended (by 2004), industrial discharge consent processes will continue to take an 'effects based' approach.

Recommended Actions

Until the RMA is amended to provide for waste issues, the Council will continue to assess industrial discharges based on effects. Where appropriate (i.e. where volume and nature of waste cause adverse effects), the consent conditions will continue to require waste minimisation from industrial discharges. In doing so it is important for the Council to consider best practicable options (BPO) and cost benefit analysts of the reduction of discharge.

The targets set on the reduction of the following do not directly impact the Council:

- organic waste
- special waste
- construction and demolition waste
- hazardous waste.

4.1.2 Contaminated sites

By December 2008, all sites in the Hazardous Activities and Industry List will have been identified and 50% will have been subject to a rapid screening system in accordance with Ministry guidelines.

By December 2010, all sites on the Hazardous Activities and Industry List will have been subject to a rapid screening system in accordance with Ministry guidelines. and a remediation programme will have been developed for those that qualify as high risk.

By December 2015, all high risk contaminated sites will have been managed or remediated. A timeframe will also have been developed to address the management or remediation of remaining sites.

Implications

The Hazardous Activities and Industry List has been produced in 2001. This list supersedes the previous ANZECC list which is not significantly different to the current list. The Council has used the ANZECC list and made substantial progress in identifying high risk sites to deal with remediation. There are seven high risk sites with five timber treatment (two consented) and two old landfill (one consented) sites. The Council will continue to investigate contaminated sites and targets set by the Strategy are achievable.

Recommended actions

The Council will continue investigation and refine contaminated site database in the process.

4.1.3 Waste disposal

Targets set for waste disposal (not specified here) will not directly impact the Council. However, closure or upgrading of substandard landfills by 2010 and closure or upgrading of all substandard wastewater treatment facilities by 2020 mean pressures applied on the TLAs by the Council through consent and compliance process.

The Council has been working closely with the TLAs and substantial progress has been made.

Recommended actions

The Council will continue to use consent and compliance process to improve all substandard landfills and wastewater treatment systems.

4.2 Policies and programmes of the strategy

4.2.1 Sound waste minimisation and management legislation

a) Ensure sound institutional and legislative base for implementing the Strategy that clarifies the responsibility for waste minimisation and management of central, regional and local government as well as Maori, business and community groups.

b) Achieve effective regional and local government planning for waste minimisation and management.

Implications

The above objectives will have major impact on the Council. The full impact will only be known once the legislative changes have occurred in 2004. As for objective (b) the Council has an operative Waste Plan from 1997 that has waste minimisation policies.

Recommended actions

Use the Council Waste Plan to implement waste minimisation policies to achieve the objectives set out in the Plan.

4.2.2 Waste reduction and material efficiency

Develop and implement tools and techniques to reduce waste generation and maximise re-use, recycling and recovery by government, business and individuals.

Reduce barriers to using recovered materials in New Zealand.

Develop and implement economic incentives to change wasteful behaviour.

Implications

Of the key programmes (cleaner production, green purchasing policies, waste minimisation policies for government, economic instruments to fund waste reduction, extended producer responsibilities), green purchasing and waste minimisation for government will affect the Council directly.

Green purchasing policies are expected to be adopted by the central and local government by this year. According to this policy central and local governments are expected to lead by example in purchases that minimise waste generation and report this through Triple Bottom Line accounting measures (social, environmental and financial performance).

Similarly, in-house waste minimisation policies for government are expected to be developed and implemented by the Councils this year.

Until the above in-house policies are developed it is difficult to quantify the impact of such policies. These policies will affect many of the Council's operational activities (including flood and drainage management, passenger transport).

Recommended actions

The Council assess the above policies, their impact and consider adopting realistic policies to achieve waste minimisation.

4.2.3 Information and communication

Develop and implement relevant and consistent information systems on waste minimisation and management as a basis for decision-making and monitoring of strategy' implementation by central and local government, and waste generators.

Enhance community understanding of waste generation issues and management, and encourage individual efforts to reduce waste.

Implications

This year MfE will make partnership agreements with the Councils to share information on environmental issues including waste. There will be selected waste indicators used in the pilot partnership agreement with a view of further developing waste generation indicators.

The Council does not hold any specific solid, liquid or gaseous waste information, however, if required such information can be collated depending on the indicators. The information on contaminated sites is readily available.

The Council may also require to improve its public communication with regard to waste minimisation in collaboration with the TLAs.

Recommended actions

As for waste generation information do nothing until the pilot indicators are developed. As for the communication with public collaborate with the TLAs to educate the public to minimise the impacts of waste as provided in the Waste Plan.

4.2.4 Performance standards and guidelines

Achieve consistent, high standards of environmental performance for waste treatment and disposal facilities.

Institute comprehensive standards and guidelines covering minimisation, transport, storage and disposal of wastes with hazardous properties.

Have all waste treatment and disposal facilities account for the full cost of operation, including environmental costs, and ensure charging policies reflect these costs directly and transparently.

Implications

Most programme elements under this programme (i.e. landfill standards and guidelines, wastewater treatment, hazardous wastes, organochlorines) will indirectly impact the Council.

In terms of landfills and wastewater treatment plants an ongoing consent/compliance requirements are to be maintained with a view of improving such facilities. The completion of the national environmental standards may result in change to Air Plan.

5 Conclusions

The above comprehensive review of the NZ Waste Strategy indicates that the Strategy will directly and indirectly impact the Council. Since the LGNZ is fully committed to the development and implementation of the Strategy the 'do nothing' option does not apply to territorial and local Councils.

The impacts of the Strategy will be fully realised after the proposed change in law to accommodate waste issues in 2004. Nevertheless, at least following issues will require Council to improve its current position on wider waste management issues:

- Implementation of the Waste Plan which includes co-ordination with TLAs

- Consents and compliance on landfills, wastewater treatment plants and industrial discharges
- Contaminated sites
- Communication
- Information gathering
- In-house waste minimisation

The recommended actions in the report will assist address the above issues specifically.

6 Recommendations

That the Committee.

- 1) adopt the New Zealand Waste Management Strategy and
- 2) endorse recommended actions to implement the Strategy.

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