



**Media information**

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## **Wairarapa water project investigations intensify**

Investigations into the potential for the Wairarapa valley to store water in the winter and distribute it for a variety of community and agricultural uses during the dry season have intensified.

Subject to meeting the environmental, social and cultural needs of the community, the Wairarapa Water Use Project aims to improve the productive capacity of land, and subsequent economic return through water storage and irrigation opportunities.

“While project investigations are still very much in the preliminary stages, good progress is being made to assess the demand for water, its availability, options for storage sites and possible financial models,” project spokesman Nigel Corry of Greater Wellington Regional Council said.

“Over the past six months a range of parallel studies have been working towards identifying a shortlist of potential storage and distribution schemes by the end of this year,” Mr Corry said.

“Extensive pre-feasibility work would then be needed during 2013 to decide which, if any, schemes warranted a full feasibility study.”

The project’s governance group which represents district and regional councils, iwi, environmental, agricultural and economic interests, met last week and endorsed the work plan.

A separate advisory group representing iwi, environmental, farming, health, recreational, local government and business interests of 19 national, regional and local organisations aims to work collaboratively to provide feedback on project studies and jointly address issues.

Carterton resource management lawyer, Jim Lynch, has been appointed to independently chair the advisory group. “Jim brings to the project a wealth of knowledge and experience in independent facilitation and resource management,” Mr Corry said.

A study of demand for irrigation water begun last year has indicated a strong desire by farmers to irrigate in future. To date the project’s technical coordinator, Greg Ordish, has interviewed 111 landowners representing 161 properties covering more than 26,000 hectares in the Carterton, Te Ore Ore and Woodside areas.

Owners of 68 per cent of properties expressed interest in new or expanded irrigation. Of the landowners not currently irrigating, 71 per cent expressed interest to do so in future. The extra volume of water required to meet the new demand would be more than 33 million cubic metres per year.

The study continues until October with farmer interviews now beginning in the Martinborough area. Results will be compared with a theoretical study of demand over the whole of the Wairarapa valley by Landcare Research.

An extensive study of options for water storage sites carried out by project consultant Tonkin & Taylor over the past six months has identified approximately 30 potential sites throughout Wairarapa. This was reduced from an initial 240 sites identified using topographical and geological maps, overlaid with environmental data.

Mr Corry said the next step was to assess the most favourable storage options more closely by matching them against areas of demand for water, environmental considerations and possible distribution systems. The site options would remain confidential until potentially affected landowners had been personally contacted by the project team. Environmental and engineering assessments of each site would then be made, followed by development of a shortlist of sites for pre-feasibility studies, due to begin early in 2013.

A newly-appointed steering group of experts from seven of New Zealand's leading environmental science agencies is advising the project on the potential effects of more intensive land use as a result of increased irrigation. It will also identify management options to address any such effects.

Following a \$750,000 contribution to project funding by Greater Wellington Regional Council last year, the council has allocated \$1.25 million per year for the next three years.

The project has also applied for funding of 50 per cent of project investigation costs from the Ministry for Primary Industry's \$35 million Irrigation Acceleration Fund. Mr Corry said the outcome of the application was expected to be known within the next month.

The water use project investigations run in parallel to Greater Wellington's Regional Plan review which includes a review of regional water allocations.

Further information can be found at [www.wairarapawater.org.nz](http://www.wairarapawater.org.nz)

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