

## Greater Wellington Regional Council News Release

17 March 2011

### **\$750,000 proposed for Wairarapa water use project**

Investigations into what could be one of the largest economic development projects in the greater Wellington Region would get a major boost from a \$750,000 allocation outlined in Greater Wellington Regional Council's Proposed Annual Plan for 2011/12.

"The proposed funding is for Wairarapa's regional water use project which has the potential to benefit the whole region," Greater Wellington Regional Council Chair Fran Wilde said. Fran Wilde is also Chair of the Wairarapa Water User Leadership Group.

The water use project aims to maximise the productive capacity of the Wairarapa valley through water storage and irrigation opportunities and also to meet a range of other community needs which might include recreation and reliable potable water supply.

"The idea is to harvest some of the vast amount of water that pours off the Tararua ranges primarily during winter, store it off-river and release it for a variety of community and agricultural uses during the dry season," Fran Wilde said.

"The proposed funding would be used to build on extensive pre-feasibility work completed over the past four years which has indicated a potential demand, strong economic returns, and identified potential sites for water storage.

"The key challenge – apart from the capital cost – is to ensure that the scheme is positive in terms of the environment. More detailed investigations into the demand for water, environmental effects and various engineering studies will be undertaken. We will also be looking at potential changes in land use as a result of the scheme to see how it might benefit both Wairarapa and the wider region. There is a range of potential high-value uses which might also attract processing facilities.

"Conceptual and feasibility studies indicate the project is potentially viable in engineering, hydrology and economic terms. Preliminary consultation indicates positive community support for the project, provided bottom lines are addressed. With a project this geographically large, it is critical that sufficient resources are applied now so we can make a concerted effort to move it to the next stage," Fran Wilde said.

The water use investigations are separate but parallel to other recent work undertaken by Greater Wellington.

"Greater Wellington has done a massive study of the groundwater and rivers in Wairarapa and we believe that a carefully conceived and executed water scheme could help restore the balance of our degraded systems.

“As part of a Regional Plan review we are looking at water allocation and storage issues and how we can manage the impact of land use in an environmentally and economically sustainable way,” Fran Wilde said.

The water use project is overseen by a leadership group representing the three Wairarapa district councils, iwi groups Rangitāne o Wairarapa and Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, Greater Wellington Regional Council, the Wairarapa Regional Irrigation Trust, environment and recreation representation and Grow Wellington. The group will meet next on 28 March.

Last year an initial survey to help assess current and future land use in the Wairarapa valley and the related demand for irrigation water found that 54% of respondents would be interested in irrigation if water was available at an affordable price.

Currently, approximately 10,000 hectares of the Wairarapa valley are irrigated. The Tararua Forest Park will not be used for storage and major rivers will not be dammed.