

Irrigation group to seek community input

Community engagement is the first priority agreed by a high-level governance group to oversee the development of a regional water and irrigation project which has the ability to transform Wairarapa's future.

"Conversations with all parts of the community early on are vital to hear perspectives and ideas about water uses and values in Wairarapa, and to develop a viable and environmentally sustainable project. The group is committed to this approach," said Greater Wellington Chair Fran Wilde, who was elected to chair the group.

A series of presentations and meetings will be held with key interest groups over the next few months to provide initial information to a range of interested groups and to hear their questions, issues and views.

Ms Wilde said the purpose of any proposed project would be to future proof the productive capacity of the Wairarapa valley land, and the subsequent economic and social return through water storage and irrigation opportunities.

"It is well-recognised that the community's rights to access quality water resources must be retained," said Ms Wilde. "We also need to ensure that any proposal does not damage the physical environment."

"The Wairarapa Regional Irrigation Trust is delighted with the impetus that this group will give the project and its wide representation will help take the project to the next stage," said trust chairman and Greytown farmer, Bob Tosswill.

The 10-member leadership group represents the three Wairarapa district councils, iwi groups, Greater Wellington Regional Council, the Wairarapa Regional Irrigation Trust and Grow Wellington.

A technical working group has been formed and the work will be co-ordinated by project manager Bruce Geden of Greater Wellington Regional Council. The next phase will build on initial

investigative work carried out since 2001 by local economic development agencies and more recently by the trust.

Along with other regions in New Zealand, Wairarapa faces decreasing water availability, climate change and the increased likelihood and frequency of drought.

Preliminary studies commissioned by the trust indicate great potential for irrigating land that currently does not have access to water for that purpose. Fran Wilde said this raised exciting possibilities for exploring future diverse land uses that could contribute to economic growth and consequential social enhancement in the Wairarapa community.

Issues to be addressed by the group, technical working group and community participants over the next 12 months include environmental viability, scheme options, capital funding for any proposed project, land ownership and process costs.