

High-level group to lead irrigation project for Wairarapa

A high-level governance group to oversee the development of a regional irrigation project for Wairarapa will meet for the first time on 31 August in Greytown. The initiative builds on investigative work carried out since 2001 by local economic development agencies and more recently by the Wairarapa Regional Irrigation Trust.

In a community-based approach, the Wairarapa Regional Irrigation Leadership Group so far consists of the three Wairarapa district mayors, Greater Wellington Regional Council chair Fran Wilde, Greater Wellington Wairarapa councillor Ian Buchanan, Wairarapa Regional Irrigation Trust chair Bob Tosswill and trustee Bob Francis, iwi representatives Nelson Rangi of Ngati Kahungunu ki Wairarapa and Yvette Grace of Rangitaane o Wairarapa, and Nigel Kirkpatrick, chief executive of economic development agency Grow Wellington.

“The Wairarapa Regional Irrigation Trust welcomes the move to involve representatives of multiple parties in the leadership group,” said trust chairman and Greytown farmer, Bob Tosswill. “Their involvement indicates that this project has moved to a new level and needs strong input from all sections of the community.”

A public liaison group to ensure co-ordinated involvement of the wider community and to allow for delivery of information and input will be established in the near future.

The project will be a major component of the Greater Wellington Regional Water Strategy and has the potential to transform the local economy and provide a range of recreational and other community benefits and generate export revenue.

Mr Tosswill said the purpose of any proposed irrigation project would be to future proof the productive capacity of the Wairarapa valley land, and the subsequent economic return through water storage and irrigation opportunities which also provide for environmental, social and cultural needs of the community.

“Initial stakeholder support in Wairarapa has been positive and the new structure to develop this initiative is a significant step forward.”

Greater Wellington Regional Council chair, Fran Wilde, said the membership of the leadership group recognised the importance of water and the right to its use by wide sections of the community. “The membership reflects the magnitude of the opportunity that faces the region in terms of economic development and potential community benefits and issues.”

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