

## Memorandum

29 October 2018

<b>To:</b>	<b>Environment and Community Committee</b>
<b>Cc:</b>	<b>Planning Committee</b> <b>Local Board Chairs</b> <b>Jim Quinn, Chief of Strategy</b> <b>Dean Kimpton, Chief Operating Officer</b> <b>Independent Maori Statutory Board</b> <b>Rural Advisory Panel</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Central government led <i>Essential Freshwater work programme</i></b>
<b>From:</b>	Dave Allen    Manager, Natural Environment Strategy Auckland Plan, Strategy and Research Department

### Purpose

1. To outline the key elements of the *Essential Freshwater work programme*, which serves to deliver on central government's commitment to act on freshwater.
2. For Environment and Community Committee members to note that the *Essential Freshwater work programme* and Auckland Council's work programme for freshwater differs in emphasis and strategic focus.

### Summary

- The protection and enhancement of freshwater quality is a central government priority, and it intends to work more closely with the regional sector over the next two years. The central government's *Essential Freshwater work programme* was announced on 8 October 2018.
- The central government work programme is bullet pointed in this memo, and covers:
  - objectives and workstreams, and what programme principles apply;
  - new advisory groups identified;
  - other government programmes identified where integration is sought;
  - expectations of council delivery.
- There is an expectation by central government that councils will contribute to improving rural land management practices and waterway restoration activities, as well as considering improvements to freshwater outcomes in urban settings.
- The Auckland Plan, Strategy and Research department (Chief Planning Office) is well placed to provide strategic and impartial advice to elected representatives when formal central government proposals are released in April 2019.

### Context/Background

3. The *Essential Freshwater work programme* was announced by central government on 8 October 2018. The work programme sets out a clear expectation and commitment to act on improving freshwater outcomes. The full documentation is available on the Ministry for the Environment's

(MFE) website <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/node/24402/>. The summarised elements of the work programme are bullet pointed in subsequent paragraphs.

4. Programme objectives:

- There is a clear expectation and focus on stopping further degradation and loss through action
- Reversing past damage, and bringing waterways and ecosystems to a healthy state within a generation
- Working to achieve efficient and fair allocation of freshwater and nutrient discharges

5. Programme's six workstreams:

- At-risk catchments
- National Policy Statement – Freshwater Management (NPS-FM) amendments
- National Environment Standards for Freshwater Management (NES-FM) – new
- Resource Management Act (RMA) amendments
- Allocation of freshwater resources
- Future framework

6. Integration with other central government programmes:

- Compliance Oversight Group, considering council RMA enforcement
- Three Waters Review – Department of Internal Affairs
- Government's response to the Havelock North Drinking Water Inquiry
- DoC's programme – protecting and restoring freshwater ecosystems and species
- Sustainable Food and Fibre Futures Fund as it informs project investment
- Tools and support to lift environment and economic performance of primary industries
- One Billion Trees programme
- Climate Change policy
- Regional Economic development
- Science and Technology investment
- Government's response to the Tax Working Group in delivering positive environmental and ecological outcomes
- Whenua Maori Programme, seeking to sustainably develop Maori freehold land

7. Central government is setting up a network of advisors to test proposals and facilitate rapid progress. This includes:

- Essential Freshwater Taskforce – made up of officials across agencies (ie, MFE, MPI, Treasury, Te Puni Kokiri, Maori Crown Relations Unit, DIA, DOC, MBIE, local government)
- Kahui Wai Maori – Maori Freshwater Forum – collaboratively develop / analyse policy options
- Freshwater Leaders Group – primary sector and agribusiness, environmental NGO, and other parts of community; sounding board for policy, input ideas, challenge analysis and lead discussion in various sectors
- Science and Technical Advisory Group – explore and test approaches and advise on science and policy work
- Council Chief Executive's Water sub-group – ensure that options are implementable and involved in testing policy options
- Public input in 2019

8. Central government principles:

- Central government plays an effective leadership role, while retaining appropriate decision-making at local level
- Policies and solutions are enduring – science based, reflect matauranga Maori, be predictable, publicly understood, underpinned by effective regulation and enforcement
- Work with land owners, water users, Maori, communities, and local government
- Provide for flexibility and adaptability so that as knowledge and technology evolve, and the climate changes, policy settings and rules can adapt
- Promote an integrated approach to freshwater management, within catchments, across issues, and with the marine and coastal environment

- Promote sound environmental outcomes, optimising social, cultural, economic development and national identity outcomes
  - Address the rights and interests of Maori
  - Provide for inter-generational equality
  - Ensure the benefits of commercial water use are not captured solely by existing users
9. Central government future policy framework:
- A greater focus on catchment objectives and limits
  - Ensure good practice is applied everywhere, and where not good enough, drive centrally
  - Targeted support and disseminating solutions
  - Support councils and monitor performance
  - Transition to the future freshwater policy framework that halts further decline, in an orderly but timely transition for landowners, and clearly to signal a pathway for how tightening requirements will apply over time
10. Expectations for delivery include:
- Targeted action and investment in at-risk catchments, so that improvements become evident from 2023
  - A range of regulatory interventions, whether new legislation (RMA amendment), new or amended RMA instruments (NPS-FM, NES-FM)
  - The NES-FM is a potential mechanism for prohibiting activities or including rules that restrict activities such as the draining of wetlands or piping of urban streams, as well as direction on the review of existing consents
  - Discussion on future policy options for allocating discharges, starting with nutrients
  - Use of good management principles to guide developers and others in managing urban water and development
  - Reversing the trends in degradation through adoption of the Judge David Sheppard principles, including strong action to clean up dirty rivers over a generation

## Next steps

11. The central government work programme is being undertaken in conjunction with the regional sector. Beyond that, existing Auckland Council water related work programmes will continue. Relevant work programmes underway include implementation of the Auckland Plan 2050 and the NPS-FM, as well as strategic sediment and groundwater initiatives. The Auckland Plan Strategy and Research department is either leading or contributing significantly to progressing these various strategic initiatives. Separately, the Operations Division is undertaking an Auckland's Waters discussion document project.
12. The intent of the Auckland Plan, Strategy and Research department is to improve the organisation's integrated response, consistent with the recently adopted Auckland Plan 2050, its directions and focus areas (June 2018). The need is to facilitate an improvement in environmental trends, and to ensure that a broader range of decisions (eg, land use, infrastructure) better account for environmental outcomes. Further, the inter-relationship and feedback between planning, operations, consenting and monitoring decisions need to be improved.
13. Central government have asked council staff to help them implement elements of the *Essential Freshwater work programme*, beyond existing assistance. This could be resource intensive and include staff secondments. The benefit of regional sector contributions is that there is greater assurance that central government initiatives are practical and implementable when applied to council activities and other interests. Auckland Council staff are currently considering what, if any, additional support it can provide to central government's work programme.
14. Auckland Council staff from the Chief Planning Office (CPO) will continue to provide strategic advice to elected representatives about the national direction for freshwater, and how this could be integrated into Auckland Council's freshwater programme. Auckland Plan, Strategy and Research department staff are well placed to provide impartial advice to elected members, independent of operational business drivers. Staff will bring advice to the relevant committee when an Auckland Council position on any formal central government proposals are sought around April 2019.