



Changes at Environment Canterbury

by Bill Wasley, UDS Independent Chair

The recent government decision to replace the elected councillors at Environment Canterbury (ECan) with a team of appointed Commissioners led by Dame Margaret Bazley has raised the issue for the UDS partners of what, if any, impact does the government's decision have on the partnership and how it operates?

In the first instance, it is worth remembering that the partner organisations adopted the UDS, rather than individual elected members. ECan is a signatory to the UDS, its vision and outcomes and continues in its partnership role. The UDS has received a broad base of community support throughout the previous election cycles, irrespective of changes in elected members, and while that support remains strong, the partnership should remain strong.

The UDS is built on a vision, to be reached by achieving a series of outcomes through specific actions. Neither the vision, nor the outcomes, nor any of the specific actions assigned to ECan have changed – and none are likely to.

That's because much of ECan's work that relates to the desired outcomes sought in the UDS Strategy and Action Plan is actually governed by legislation that is unchanged. The Resource Management Act (RMA) and Local Government Act, along with various pieces of transport legislation determine much of how ECan operates. ECan's work on Plan Change 1 to the Regional Policy Statement (an RMA matter) will continue utilising this planning and land use framework, which is essential for implementing the UDS, agreed with the partners and community and anchored in various policy statements and plans.

In the area of transport for example, the current work on developing a new Metro Public Transport Strategy for Greater Christchurch, in consultation with the partners and wider community, and a new Regional Land Transport Strategy (RLTS) for the Canterbury region will continue.

ECan's excellent work improving air quality, a key outcome for the UDS, reached a major milestone this year when the Air Plan became operative. The winter use of open fires and solid fuel burners (over 15 years old) has been banned in Christchurch, and households breaking the ban can be prosecuted. Over the past few years ECan's Clean Heat Project has successfully helped thousands of households to convert from inefficient and polluting forms of home heating to clean heating, noticeably improving air quality in the process.

There is no suggestion these and other important ECan responsibilities and UDS outcomes will change as a result of the commissioners being appointed. The work of the organisation will continue, regardless of the change at the governing table.

In the second instance, the ECan Commissioners have the opportunity to make great use of the UDS partnership framework, since the legislation that appointed and empowers them requires them to consult with the district and city mayors. The UDS Implementation Committee (UDSIC) provides a proven mechanism for the mayors and councillors of the UDS partnership to regularly meet, exchange views and resolve issues between them. Commissioners Rex Williams and Tom Lambie have been appointed to the UDS Implementation Committee.

While the change at ECan may be expected to remain a sensitive issue for many, we need to engage with the new Commissioners and encourage them to use the partnership to assist them achieve their brief, and ensure that ECan continues to fulfil its UDS obligations so the Vision and outcomes are achieved for the benefit of everyone in the Greater Christchurch community.

Enhancing Environments – what the UDS is doing

At the core of the UDS Vision are five Strategic Directions, including a commitment to have 'enhanced environments'. Six key objectives were agreed to achieve the enhanced environments sought by the community. These are:

1. *Protecting the quality and quantity of groundwater in the aquifers and natural catchments as a top priority;*
2. *Protecting and enhancing indigenous vegetation and the eco-systems they contain;*
3. *Recognising the value of, and protecting the coastline, estuaries, wetlands and waterways;*
4. *Ensuring development protects and enhances natural systems and environmentally sensitive areas;*
5. *Promoting energy and water conservation and ensuring clean air; and*
6. *Protecting outstanding landscapes such as the Port Hills and iconic rural outlooks.*

This edition of the UDS partnership newsletter reviews progress towards achieving the enhanced environments by focusing on partners' projects with significant environmental outcomes.

These include the Christchurch Climate Smart Strategy and award-winning new Civic Building, which sets new national standards for energy efficiency and 'green design', and the new Ocean Outfall pipeline that is already diverting effluent away from the Avon-Heathcote Estuary.

Environment Canterbury's Air Plan provides additional legal clout to continue the successful campaign to improve winter time air quality, and a joint initiative with the City Council will continue last year's campaign to improve understanding about the health of urban streams and rivers.

Waimakariri District Council is joining Christchurch City and Selwyn District with the introduction of wheelie bins to replace recycling crates, to increase the volume of recyclables and reduce the waste going to landfill.

Around Greater Christchurch good progress is being made to enhance environments as this edition of the partnership newsletter illustrates.

New Zealand's greenest building

Christchurch's new Civic Building has been awarded the highest possible rating for environmental design by the New Zealand Green Building Council.

Green Star is a nationwide, voluntary rating scheme that evaluates the environmental attributes and performance of New Zealand buildings.

The new Civic Building, a joint venture by the City Council and Ngai Tahu Property, has been given a 6 Green Star rating with a record 83 points.

It is the first renovated building and only the second building in New Zealand to achieve 6 Green Star – the first was Samson Corporation's Geyser Building in Parnell, Auckland (yet to be built).

Christchurch Mayor Bob Parker said it was outstanding to be awarded 6 Green Stars and achieve the result within the approved budget.

"When our new building opens in late August, staff will be working in one of New Zealand's most environmentally friendly and modern office spaces."

"Not only does it represent significant cost savings for ratepayers but it reflects Council's commitment to creating a sustainable future for our community and region."

One of the outstanding features of the new Civic Building is the installation of a tri-generation plant so the building generates its own electricity from a renewable energy source – biogas. This is piped from the Council's Burwood landfill site, and in future years the city's Wastewater Treatment Plant, being converted into electricity. Waste heat in this process is used to heat and cool the building, representing annual energy savings of about \$1.3 million.

Additional energy savings come from energy-efficient light fittings; automatic daylight dimming, occupancy controls and sensors on the escalators that activate only when people approach.

The northern double skin façade is a thermal solar buffering zone. A monitoring system detects when carbon dioxide (CO₂) has reached a certain level and fresh air is automatically circulated through floor vents. Rainwater harvesting is expected to provide one million litres of water annually, used to flush toilets, for landscape irrigation and the water feature.

"We have taken an unattractive building and transformed it into modern 21st Century office space," Mr Parker said.



Being Climate Smart

Being climate smart means Christchurch is reducing its greenhouse gas emissions and responding to the social, environmental and economic challenges and opportunities presented by climate change.

A climate smart Christchurch powered by renewable energy and resilient to the impacts of climate change is the vision of the Council's Draft Climate Smart Strategy. This Strategy sets the direction for community and City Council responses to the impacts and opportunities of climate change.

The Government has predicted big changes in weather patterns and sea level during the next 100 years and the Draft Climate Smart Strategy outlines the impact on Christchurch and how the Council will respond to these changes.

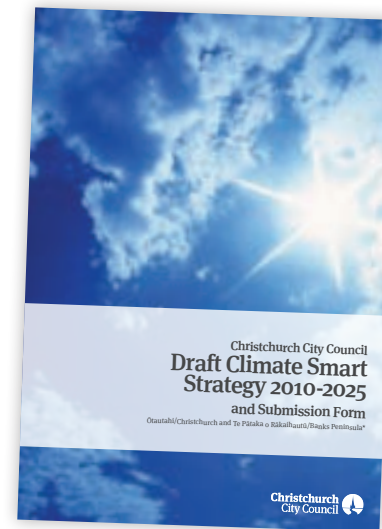
Christchurch is vulnerable to the physical impacts of climate change, such as any rise in the sea level, drought and floods. Our way of life, natural landscapes and our economy, based in agriculture and tourism, are vulnerable to these changes.

Being climate smart means reducing emissions by saving energy, reducing waste and using renewable power sources such as wind, hydro and solar. Being climate smart also means planning ahead to ensure our community is resilient to future unavoidable changes to our climate.

The Draft Climate Smart Strategy illustrates how climate smart choices are easy and effective. Greenhouse gas emissions can be reduced by walking, cycling or taking the bus, recycling and composting or by saving electricity.

The City Council has legal responsibilities under the Local Government Act 2002 to consider the wellbeing of today's and future generations. It must consider the impacts of climate change in activities undertaken through the Resource Management Act 1991. The Council's Draft Climate Smart Strategy is a way to meet these legal obligations.

Public submissions on the draft strategy closed in April, with hearings planned for late May. Council is expected to adopt the Strategy in June/July.



Clean Air rules improve air quality in Canterbury towns

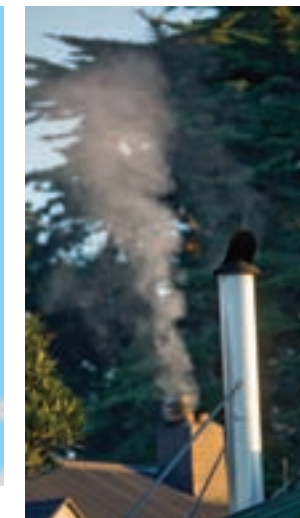
Over the past decade, winter air pollution has been a top environmental concern for people throughout Canterbury. In main urban centres including Christchurch, Rangiora and Kaiapoi, home heating is a main cause of air pollution each winter. Smoke from wood fires contains fine particles that get trapped in people's lungs and can cause serious health problems.

Christchurch people in particular have made it clear that they want better winter air quality. Environment Canterbury's Air Plan has introduced new air rules to improve air quality in Christchurch City and Kaiapoi, with rules proposed for Rangiora under appeal.

On April 1 this year it became illegal to use an open fire, or a solid fuel burner more than 15 years old, between 1 April and September 30 in Christchurch Clean Air Zone 1 (see map). These older forms of heating are less efficient and produce more smoke than more efficient, cleaner burners. People who use an open fire or old burner in Christchurch during this winter period may receive a \$300 fine for a first offence.



Christchurch Clean Air Zone 1 is shown in green.



"People can find out about the help on offer through the Clean Heat Project by calling 03 353 9276 or about other financial assistance available by calling the Canterbury Home Energy Advice Centre on 0800 388 588," said Ms Kirk.

"As rules come into play, initial enforcement will focus on complaints to the 24 hour pollution hotline. Each time a report is received it confirms that smokey chimneys are a nuisance to neighbours and that poor air quality is unacceptable to the wider Christchurch community," said Ms Kirk.

The pollution hotline number is 0800 76 55 88. More information on the air plan can be found at www.ecan.govt.nz/air

Out with the old, in with the new. The flue from a low emissions burner with the smoke from an open fire in the background. Courtesy John McCombe, photographer.

Ocean Outfall begins operation

The Avon-Heathcote Estuary Ihutai received a healthy boost on March 24, when Christchurch's biggest construction project to date, the \$87.2 million Ocean Outfall pipeline, was formally completed and began official operation.

Mayor Bob Parker, Minister of Economic Development Gerry Brownlee and McConnell Dowell Constructors Ltd General Manager Roger McRae launched the Ocean Outfall at a button-pushing ceremony.

The commissioning ceremony marked the official start of the city's highly treated and UV-disinfected wastewater being discharged to sea rather than into the Estuary.

The outfall system is made up of a new pump station at the Christchurch Wastewater Treatment Plant oxidation ponds, and a 5km pipeline stretching 3kms into Pegasus Bay.

The city's wastewater is diluted by discharging it through a series of risers and diffusers at the end of the pipeline to ensure there is negligible impact on the environment, water quality or sea life. Extensive analysis has shown the discharge will not impact on people gathering shellfish or swimming in the area.

The only evidence of the outfall people might notice is a more reflective area on the surface of the water which may be visible in calm sea. This is caused by fresh water mixing with salt water.



Outfall pipeline during construction.





Renewed campaign to clean up urban waterways

The 'let's change our ways to change our waterways' campaign is running again to build on last year's campaign to improve understanding around the health and quality of Christchurch's streams and rivers.

Ken Taylor, Environment Canterbury's Director of Investigations and Monitoring, says people are keen to understand the issues around urban waterways.

A survey of 400 Christchurch residents was conducted in September 2009 following last year's advertising campaign that ran in July and August. Of the survey respondents 86 per cent agreed or strongly agreed Councils should tell people more about how they can improve the health of waterways in Christchurch.

This year's advertising campaign is being funded by Environment Canterbury with support from the Christchurch City Council. It includes a series of bus-backs carrying the 'let's change our ways to change our waterways' images for three to four months, as well as print and radio advertising.

"This year's campaign will again have a major public awareness component to remind people their actions can have a significant effect on urban waterways. The campaign is part of an integrated Environment Canterbury programme to improve urban waterways' health which includes public awareness, community engagement and education, scientific investigations and monitoring, consent compliance monitoring, as well as working with industry to reduce the impact of discharges to waterways," said Ken Taylor.

"At the very least we want more people to understand that when it rains the storm water system carries untreated water and contaminants from roofs, driveways, and roads directly into our streams and rivers," he said.

The survey found 74% of people agreed or strongly agreed that water from gutters ends up in streams and rivers, up 7% from a pre-campaign benchmark survey conducted in June 2009.

"It's encouraging that understanding of the health and quality of urban waterways was higher following last year's campaign, compared with the pre-campaign benchmark survey," said Ken Taylor.



Stormwater drains lead directly to streams and rivers

"There are positive actions people can take to reduce the effects on waterways, such as washing cars on grassed areas rather than on the road or driveway, using water-based paints and washing brushes in an inside sink, limiting chemical use in gardens, as well as disposing of hazardous waste such as used oil at transfer stations."

A website – www.cleanwaterways.org.nz – has more information for individuals and businesses.

Wheelie Bins for Waimakariri District

Planning is underway for the proposed introduction of wheelie bins for recycling in the Waimakariri District next year.

The introduction of wheelie bins, to replace the current recycling crates, is tentatively scheduled for March 2011. Council staff plan to draw on the experience of neighbouring UDS partners, Selwyn District Council and the Christchurch City Council phasing in the new system.

Although the current proposal is simpler than the Christchurch or Selwyn systems (the Waimakariri District Council intends introducing a single bin system rather than a multi-bin system) some of the issues are similar.

It is intended to have two different capacity bins at 240 litres and 140 litres to meet the varying needs of households (compared to the current 70 litre recycling crates). Experience in Christchurch and Selwyn shows an average family will need the larger capacity bins, but people living on their own or with others in flats, whose volume of recycling materials is smaller, may choose the smaller bin.

Solid Waste Asset Manager Kitty Waghorn sees the bins offering some significant benefits in terms of diverting recyclables away from landfill and quotes the Selwyn experience; "Selwyn's diversion figures since October last year through until March this year have shown an increase of almost 30% over the same period last year."

"There are also the other advantages associated with the use of wheelie bins", she said. "They will be collected fortnightly instead of the current weekly collection, so the follow on benefits include fewer trucks on the road, less fuel used, less pollution and less traffic congestion".

The distribution of the bins is expected to take place early in 2011 with the regular collection beginning in March. An education and information campaign, planned for January and February next year, will keep Waimakariri residents informed on progress and advise how to use the wheelie bins.