



# THE WEST COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL

**MEDIA RELEASE – 11 April 2024**

## **It's time to have your say – Long-Term Plan consultation begins**

- **Total rate requirement increase of 20.8% for 2024-25 proposed**

The Regional Council has voted 5-1 to adopt the Long-term Plan Consultation Document and is now seeking the community's views to help it decide the best way to plan for the next 10 years. The issues and proposals are outlined in the Council's Consultation Document which is out for public consultation from 12 April 2024 until 10 May 2024.

A key issue Council is seeking feedback on is how to balance the budget. Regional Council Chair Peter Haddock acknowledged that like many people and organisations out there, Council has also been grappling with the cost-of-living crisis.

"Demands on our services keep growing and under-investment in Council systems and processes means that we are unable to carry out basic functions and services to meet community expectations, particularly in the back office financial area. This is now starting to seriously affect all ratepayers."

Over the past two years, Council has been relying on debt to cover day-to-day operational costs.

"Using debt like this is not sustainable. We have a big programme of work ahead of us so we have tried to lessen and smooth the load by spreading the increase over several years where we can, funding some activities through borrowing initially, and then getting Council back to a stage where that debt can be paid off."

Council's total rate requirement for 2024-25 is an increase of 20.8% on 2023-24. The preferred option to fund this is by:

- Increasing the General Rate by 27% in year 1, followed by 12% in year 2 and then increases of no more than 7.5% per year; and
- Increasing the Targeted Rate by 10% in year 1, 20% in years 2 and 3, followed by increases of no more than 7.5% from year four for the remainder of the Long-term Plan.

"We know that this is not an ideal scenario but with rates being kept artificially low for many years we have no option but to take this approach to catch up. An alternative option is to increase the rate by 44% in year 1 which we believe is unacceptable for our community."

A second consultation topic is the future funding of Predator Free Te Kinga. Funding for the eradication of possums, and the reduction in other pests, has been provided externally from Predator Free 2050 since the start of this project in May 2020.

"Monitoring and trapping of pests has resulted in some excellent outcomes for this area," said Chair Haddock. "External funding has kick-started this project and now we have discovered great spotted kiwi on the mountain, rare fernbirds seen towards the summit and regular sightings of NZ falcon, kea and kaka."

External funding through Predator Free 2050 will continue for year 1 and 2 of the Long-term Plan but alternative funding of \$87,470 will need to be sourced for year 3 and onwards.

“We believe that this is a special project for the region. The hard work, and much of the major expense, has now been completed and the project is moving into a maintenance phase. Not funding this project into the future is likely to lead to the decline in these species again as pest animals become re-established.”

As part of the Long-term Plan process, a review of Council’s user fees and charges has been undertaken.

“The fairest approach is for those who use our services should pay for them,” said Chair Haddock. “If you hold a resource consent, or use or other services, changes to our user fees and charges will apply to you.”

Council is also proposing to take ownership of the Grey Floodwall flood protection assets and the Havill Wall (Franz Josef).

“The management of flood and erosion protection assets on behalf of the 23 rating districts across the West Coast is a core function of Council. Transferring ownership of these assets, provided a suitable condition assessment to verify their service level has been completed, is a logical one as they can then be managed seamlessly with the other protection assets for these communities.”

Other increases to targeted rates and Council’s Uniform Annual General Charge (UAGC) are also proposed.

“Depending on the location of your property, other targeted rates relating to flood and erosion protection will also apply. Approximately 75% of all properties on the West Coast receive some benefit from these Rating District assets. Many of the rating district assets need investment and work to maintain them, or to potentially increase their standard of protection which will drive targeted rate increases.

As construction commences for the Westport Flood Protection project targeted rates for this rating district will be increasing significantly over the coming three years.”

Consultation on construction of the flood protection for Westport was undertaken in LTP21.

“The UAGC will also increase from \$155.69 in 2023/24 to \$192.59 in 2024/25. This is a fixed charge per property meaning whether you own a farm, house in town, lifestyle block or empty section, you pay the same amount.”

“We know the increase proposed will be challenging for some ratepayers, but if we don’t make these changes now, we are just kicking the can down the road and will likely be in a worse situation when we review the Long-term Plan in three years time.

“Anyone experiencing issues with paying rates now, or potentially in the future, should consider Council’s Rates Remissions and Postponement Policy available to view on our website or speak to our Rates Officer.”

Auditors, Ernst & Young, raised three matters on the Long-term Plan Consultation Document.

“These weren’t a surprise to us,” said Chair Haddock. “It just reinforces our proposal to invest in our capability and capacity as an organisation to have the systems, processes and databases needed to deliver the required levels of service to our community.”

For more information on these matters, the Auditor’s opinion can be found in the Long-term Plan Consultation Document.

“We will be working closely with the Auditors over the coming months as we progress through the submissions, hearings and completion of the final document ready for adoption in June.”

The Consultation Document and supporting information can be found on Council’s website at [www.wcrc.govt.nz](http://www.wcrc.govt.nz) from 12 April. Alternatively, copies will also be available to view at the public libraries in Westport, Greymouth and Hokitika, as well as the Service Centre in Reefton from Monday 15 April.

Submissions close 4.00pm Friday, 10 May 2024, with the Council to hold a hearing on 21 May for those wishing to present their views in person. “Nothing is finalised yet,” said Chair Haddock. “We want your thoughts and feedback to help us confirm the right pathway for the future.”

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