

MEDIA RELEASE – 8 June 2022

Westport Rating District Joint Committee Flood protection options – TAG Recommendation

The Westport Rating District Joint Committee (Joint Committee) received a report from the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for the mitigation of the effects of Westport flood risks at their meeting on 8 June.

The TAG commissioned extensive climate change scenario, option and risk-assessment analysis by expert flood risk modelling and flood risk mitigation engineers and consultants. Using the findings of this work, the TAG has recommended a preferred structural and nature-based solution with estimated costs, design considerations, funding implications and related process matters.

The Joint Committee accepted the recommendations of the TAG.

Joint Committee Chair, Hugh McMillan, says the situation is complex but also longstanding; “There has been a lot of work over a long period of time to find the optimal solution to manage the Buller River and the proposed solution we have in front of us now is supported by strong evidence.

“The Joint Committee acknowledges the significant work load the TAG have accomplished over such a short period of time. The engineering solution proposed will provide significant risk mitigation in the short, medium and long term for those who live in the township.”

A new recommendation was included by the Joint Committee *‘the Buller District Council and West Coast Regional Council continue to advocate for climate change adaptation options for people not protected as part of the non-structural actions included in the Westport flood risk mitigation business case.’*

“While the potential flood mitigation can not protect every household, for those that are not included within the ring embankment, every effort will be made to support them through other potential pathways,” said Chair McMillan.

From here the proposal will be presented to the West Coast Regional Council on 14 June. The Council will consider the TAG’s proposal for inclusion in the business case seeking co-investment to build Westport’s resilience against flood risks.

Heather Mabin, Chief Executive of the West Coast Regional Council, said that until co-investment funding had been secured from central government the flood protection project should be viewed simply as a ‘proposal’.

“We know there is considerable concern amongst the community on how much the proposal will cost, its alignment and how it will be built. It’s a very challenging process working through how to talk to property owners when we do not have certainty for co-investment funding. However, please be assured that we will be starting preliminary discussions with potentially affected landowners soon.”

The business case is being developed by the Westport Flood Recovery Steering Group, which will report back to the West Coast Regional Council and Buller District Council by the end of June with an integrated package of long-term measures.

“The Councils are seeking central government financial support to reduce the financial burden on the Westport community. We need to take action as without a solution, there will potentially be further significant damage to homes, infrastructure and our community’s wellbeing. A lot of time and effort has been put into finding the appropriate solution for the future.”

Ms Mabin said that the wellbeing of the Community is the highest priority for both Councils.

“As we progress with this proposal we will keep the Community up to date on what is happening as well as answering the many questions landowners may have. Answers to the most frequently asked questions will be available on our website shortly – www.wcrc.govt.nz and follow the *Joint Committee* link from the home page.”

Ends

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