

Council Decision – Consultation

Context

The Long-term Plan Consultation Document and supporting information was adopted by Council on 27 March 2024 and consulted on from 28 March to 13 May 2024. The relevant documents can be accessed from the links below:

Consultation Document: [Investing in Southland Whakangao Ki Murihiku](#)

Supporting information: [Supporting documents](#)

Submission themes

Many submitters criticised the consultation process, indicating they felt there should have been better communication and a longer consultation period.

Council response

Environment Southland's consultation and engagement process for the 2024-34 Long-term Plan commenced last year and continued through until the official consultation period commenced on 28 March 2024. A variety of events were attended across Southland and people were asked if they were willing to pay to improve the current level of flood protection. These events included A&P shows, the Southern Field Days, On the Fly Maitara River Festival, Rotary Water Day and we also joined the Invercargill City Council LTP talk with businesses at the Chamber of Commerce. In addition, ratepayers with the most significant impacts in terms of dollar increases were identified and briefed. Everyone with an increase over a set dollar value was written to, and meetings were held with the organisations most impacted where there was interest in doing this.

A summary of the feedback from the community events can be accessed from [LTP 2024-34 Pre-consultation Feedback - Summary](#). The proposals that were included in the Consultation Document were influenced by the feedback received from the community as this showed support for an increased investment in flood protection infrastructure. The majority of respondents indicating they would be willing to pay \$1-5 per week for an improved level of protection.

The formal consultation period ran from 28 March to 13 May 2024 (six and a half weeks), over two weeks longer than the one month minimum set out in the Local Government Act 2002. Originally the consultation period was to close on 6 May 2024 but was extended for a further week in response to community feedback.

In addition to Council's EnviroSouth newsletter that is delivered to all mailboxes across the region, the consultation was promoted through the following channels:

- newspaper and radio advertising;
- online and social media;
- emails to partners, stakeholder and community groups, and relevant council databases (e.g. consent holders);
- Catchment Liaison Committee meetings;
- circulation of documents and brochures to Council libraries and offices;
- direct engagement with stakeholders.

Much of the communications directed people to an online engagement portal, which contained information about the consultation, rates impact scenarios and encouraged people to make a

submission via the online form. Information about the consultation and a downloadable submission form were also available on Environment Southland's main website. Printed copies of the relevant documents were provided on request.

During the consultation period, there were 6222 views of the rates calculator page on the website, and 3362 views of the Long-term Plan page. There was strong engagement on Long-term Plan posts on Environment Southland's Facebook page, which resulted in a number of follow-up information requests.

Environment Southland has previously distributed a postcard to every mailbox when consulting on its Long-term Plan. This was not done this time as the EnviroSouth newsletter was due to go out and it was felt this would be a duplication. Instead, a brochure was developed for public events and to accompany the material at Council libraries and offices.

During the formal consultation period, staff and councillors attended 15 public events and drop-in sessions across the region. These were promoted using digital (online), newspaper and radio. Leaflet delivery was also used to promote the Te Anau drop-in session. Numbers attending the drop-in sessions run as Environment Southland events were low with the largest number attending the Te Anau session on Saturday, 27 April (15 people). More people attended public events such as the Southern Farmers Market, Murihiku Marae community event and Autumn Festival, and events initiated by the community such as the Western Southland Groundswell meeting at Otautau and public meeting in Waimahaka.

Learnings

Low attendance at drop-in sessions run by Environment Southland reinforced previous experience that attendance at community events generates more engagement. There were fewer community events being held during the consultation period than there had been during the summer, which was why drop-in sessions were pursued. Community members spoke favourably about the drop-in sessions held on Saturdays, but were less favourable about those held during the middle of the day on weekdays, suggesting later in the day or evenings would be preferable.

Some submitters spoke at the hearing of their own approaches to community engagement, including being present at sports grounds during Saturday sports, and the use of community Facebook pages and newsletters. While Environment Southland, as a public organisation, is not always able to post directly onto community Facebook pages, going forward there is potential for increased postings onto these pages by Councillors. Attendance at sports grounds and greater use of community newsletters are also potential options for Environment Southland in future.

Some submitters felt that there should have been a letter sent to every ratepayer regarding the consultation. Environment Southland is not aware of any councils who do this due to the significant costs that are involved.

The combination of the proposed investment in flood protection, along with proposed rating changes, was complex and confusing for many people. With the benefit of hindsight, it would have been preferable to consult on the proposed rating changes separately in advance of the consultation about the proposed investment in flood protection. The Council's decision to transition the rating changes and undertake further consultation on how river management is funded will help address this issue.