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Submission on Consultation Document for Environment Canterbury Long Term Plan 2015/2025

The TBfree Canterbury Committee appreciates the opportunity to submit on the Environment Canterbury Consultation Document for the Long Term Plan 2015/2025.

The committee operates as a volunteer stakeholder representative group for OSPRI New Zealand which oversees the TBfree New Zealand programme. Our members represent the mid and north Canterbury dairy, beef and deer sectors alongside Federated Farmers membership.

The committee as a representative group of significant ratepayers in the region would like to voice its strong concern at council's intention to end the collection on behalf of ratepayers to fund the regional contribution toward funding the bovine tuberculosis vector programme, during the transitional year of 2015/16 as requested by OSPRI New Zealand.

As shown in the consultation document, a review of funding for the TB programme has indicated a change in the way landowners contribute as beneficiaries of the TB plan by way of industry and crown shares. However, by carrying out the cessation of funding under the current funding method prior to the shares being agreed on by the other funder, this effectively leaves a \$925,000 deficit in the vector control budget. Dependent on the views of the other funding partners namely industry and the crown, this shortfall in funding could multiply significantly.

Canterbury as a region has benefitted immensely over the past 15 years, initially wild animal spread was rapid throughout north and south Canterbury and infected herds peaked at over 200. Today is a vastly different picture with four infected herds in the region and the disease has been eradicated from wildlife from over 300,000 hectares. Further reductions of the TB risk area are planned over the coming years following the significant investment that has been made into the programme.

As rate payers we see the following benefits by contributing to the Canterbury TB plan for the 2015/2016 year:

- Continued progress with TB eradication in the region and as such low infected herds
- Further TB testing reductions as a result of the progress of the local TB plan
- Funding formula benefitting a regional contribution
- Environment benefits to the region through the reduction of possums and ferrets

The funding review did recognise land owners as beneficiaries of the TB plan, although collection of this money will be undertaken in a different way.

Whatever the collection method, farmers now or in the future do not want to see a reduction in the investment directed to controlling TB until the risk of the disease has been eradicated. There is no chance an alternative source of funding will be implemented prior to the commencement of the 2015/16 financial year, so either the money is collected under the existing agreement or there is a short fall in the vector control budget for next year.

Conclusion

Farmers pay the majority of the regional share contribution via a targeted rate. As no reduction for any period is tenable for farmers who have seen the ravages of TB, farmers support the collection of the rate via Environment Canterbury for one further year.

We submit council should reconsider its position on collection of the regional contribution toward the TB plan for 2015/16 and ensure a complete programme is able to undertaken in the region.

We wish to be heard in support of this submission.

Malcolm Gilbert
Chairman, Canterbury TBfree Committee