

Report No.	19-179
Decision Required	

CLIMATE CHANGE OVERVIEW

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. This paper provides an overview of work underway in response to climate change, when further advice will be available, and the key decision points for Council through the first part of the triennium.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1. Ensuring our region remains a great place for future generations to live, work, and play demands that we plan for a changing climate. Extreme weather will present challenges for many of our communities over the coming century.
- 2.2. Pressure has been growing for local government to take an active lead on climate change: to reduce our environmental impact, to help communities adapt, and to ensure the things people value are looked after. Explicitly or implicitly, responding to climate change falls within many of our statutory responsibilities.
- 2.3. The region's mayors and chair signed a Memorandum of Understanding in September 2019 to work together in response to climate change. Horizons staff are working with counterparts at territorial authorities to develop a strategic plan of action.
- 2.4. Further advice will be available early in the new calendar year, including proposed objectives and policies, a stocktake of work already underway, and additional investment Council may wish to consider through the forthcoming Annual Plan and Long-Term Plan processes.

3. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council:

- a. receives the information contained in Report No. 19-179.
- b. notes work underway, in collaboration with territorial authorities, to respond to climate change in our region;
- c. notes that the region's local authorities have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to work together on climate change;
- d. supports inclusion of climate change in the Triennial Agreement, subject to the agreement of other councils in the region;
- e. notes that the forthcoming Annual Plan process will provide an initial opportunity to consider resourcing for this programme of work;
- f. agrees to continue to develop a strategy as outlined in this report.

4. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 4.1. The current Long-Term Plan (LTP) provides \$50,000 of funding each year for climate science. The work described in this report is being progressed as a project, staffed through the 'strategic policy' budget line. Additional resource will be required to complete a

vulnerability assessment, to undertake any additional actions to address vulnerabilities identified, and to coordinate effort across the organisation and with partner agencies.

- 4.2. Members may wish to consider resourcing a climate change programme through the forthcoming Annual Plan process and ensuing LTP. More specific advice can be provided in advance of deliberations.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1. Community engagement is a central part of any response to climate change. The form of community involvement appropriate at different stages of the process is discussed in section 9 below.
- 5.2. A base requirement for community engagement with our work is that relevant information be available. Content on our website is currently being updated. Once Council has had an opportunity to consider its approach in more detail, you may wish to consider more active communication early in the new year.

6. SIGNIFICANT BUSINESS RISK IMPACT

- 6.1. Climate change presents significant risks to our communities, and to Horizons' assets and operations. Individually, these are addressed through infrastructure strategies, emergency management plans, regional policy statements, etc. This paper provides an overview of the issue as a whole, and a strategic approach to tackling it.

7. THE CHALLENGE

- 7.1. Our organisation has a vision of making the region a great place to live, work, and play. We aspire to a healthy environment and resilient, thriving communities. Realising that vision means working to support changes that add up to a better future.
- 7.2. During the coming century, climate change will present challenges for this council and our region's communities. Sea-level rise and more intense storm events will exacerbate erosion, flooding, and coastal inundation. Higher temperatures may affect biodiversity, biosecurity, and agricultural production. Extreme weather events such as droughts and floods will put pressure on water availability, infrastructure and the transport network. Records show that New Zealand warmed by about a degree during the twentieth century. Sea levels rose by 17cm over the same period. NIWA states that warming of the climate is now "unequivocal".
- 7.3. More information on likely changes in our region is available at: [http://www. envirolink. gov. nz/Envirolink/1619-HZLC126-Climate-Change-and-Variability-Horizons-Region. pdf](http://www.envirolink.govt.nz/Envirolink/1619-HZLC126-Climate-Change-and-Variability-Horizons-Region.pdf).
- 7.4. Exactly which impacts will occur where and when remains uncertain: decisions now will influence the severity of those impacts and how well positioned future generations are to deal with them. Pressure has been growing for local government to take an active lead on climate change: to reduce our environmental impact, to help communities adapt, and to ensure the things people value are looked after. Many councils have declared emergencies and are developing climate action plans.

8. OUR ROLE

- 8.1. Local government's role is to enable local democratic decision making and to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of communities in the present and for the future (section 10 of the Local Government Act 2002). To the extent that climate change impacts on community wellbeing — now, or in the foreseeable future — we should consider it in decision making. In principle, this encompasses both efforts to mitigate the

severity of climate change (by reducing greenhouse-gas emissions) and supporting communities to adapt to its effects.

8.2. Regional councils also have responsibilities under other legislation. The Resource Management Act 1991, for example, requires that we weigh up the effects of climate change and the benefits of renewable energy in decisions — but precludes us from considering the effects of greenhouse gas emissions. National instruments including the NZ Coastal Policy Statement and National Policy Statements for Freshwater Management require us to plan for the effects of climate change on the environment and on communities. That is to say, adaptation is built into core council functions.

9. OUR RESPONSE

9.1. Staff are developing a strategic response to climate change in our region. This will help to ensure our actions match the outcomes we aim to achieve and improve our ability to communicate what we are doing and coordinate with others. We anticipate that it will include both region-wide policies and targeted interventions to address localised issues. By developing a climate strategy, we aim to provide:

- A vision for Horizons' role, within the wider system, in helping communities to respond to climate change;
- Direction on what action Horizons should proactively take;
- A basis for responding to disruptions (and opportunities) as they arise; and
- Better integration of climate change into our existing work programme.

9.2. We are developing a climate change strategy in two phases. The first phase is to agree objectives and policies; the second is to work with the region's territorial authorities to identify local issues and develop an action plan to tackle them. This approach was endorsed by the previous Council in February 2019 and is illustrated in Figure 1.

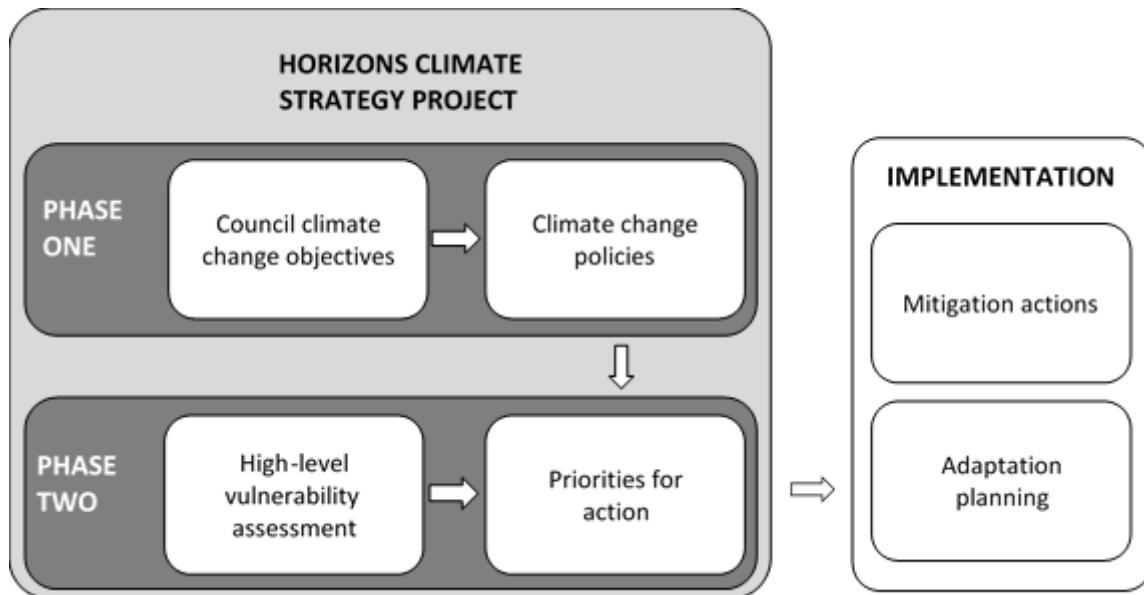


Figure 1: Approach to climate strategy development.

9.3. The region's mayors and chair signed a Memorandum of Understanding in September 2019, undertaking to work together in response to climate change. Staff from the various councils have been meeting bimonthly since July to develop a coordinated approach that will inform advice to our respective Members.

9.4. Table 1 provides an overview of the work streams within our climate change strategy. More detailed description follows.

Work stream	Purpose	Owner	Community involvement	Completion	Resourcing
Objectives & policies	To provide direction to Horizons' activities	Horizons	Consultation possible	FY19/20	Funded through existing LTP
Vulnerability assessment	To identify and prioritise local vulnerabilities	Horizons & TLAs	Consultation	FY20/21	Consider through Annual Plan 2020/21
Action plan	To communicate and track our response	Horizons & TLAs	Involve at a local scale	Iterative	Consider through LTP 2021-31

Table 1: Elements of our climate change strategy.

9.5. Objectives and Policies

- 9.5.1. To respond effectively to climate change, we must be clear about what we are trying to achieve. It is plain that, as a regional council, we have a role to play; it is equally plain that much of the problem is beyond our influence. Explicit objectives, backed up with a realistic plan of action, will also be important in meeting and managing public expectations.
- 9.5.2. The views of the previous Council were canvassed in May 2019. These have informed a draft set of objectives and policies, presented in Table 2 below:

Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapt and build resilience to the effects of a changing climate Support the transition to a sustainable regional economy Connect responses to climate change across our region
Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build a sound, accessible evidence base to support future decision making Share knowledge, communicate about the challenges, and remain open to new information Involve local communities in decisions that affect them; empower people to make a difference Work in concert with territorial authorities and other agencies to respond to the changing needs of communities Consider the anticipated effects of climate change, including long-term costs and resilience, as an integral part of Council decision making Progress climate resilience and sustainability through existing work programmes Develop and maintain a regional action plan Prioritise efforts on the basis of community and ecological vulnerabilities Prepare for future changes by using adaptive planning tools and techniques Engage with central government to develop a coherent, effective policy toolbox Encourage renewable energy provision and use Reduce emissions from the regional transport system Track and report on emissions across our corporate activities and investments

Table 2: Draft objectives and policies

- 9.5.3. We propose to discuss with you early in the new year, before seeking your formal endorsement. There has been no explicit community consultation on the proposed

objectives or policies to date. Councillors may wish to provide an opportunity for engagement with iwi and the wider public before adopting a course of action.

9.6. Vulnerability Assessment

9.6.1. The second phase of the project is to develop and resource an action plan. Some of those actions will be a natural extension of existing activities; others are likely to be new initiatives. We propose to conduct a vulnerability assessment to identify and prioritise climate-related impacts across the region.

9.6.2. Vulnerability relates closely to community wellbeing. It combines the potential impact of hazards on people and the things they care about, and their ability to adapt. This is illustrated in Figure 2. Our focus to date has been to develop a robust methodology, informed by best practice and the experience of other regions. To the extent possible, we are aligning our approach with national frameworks.

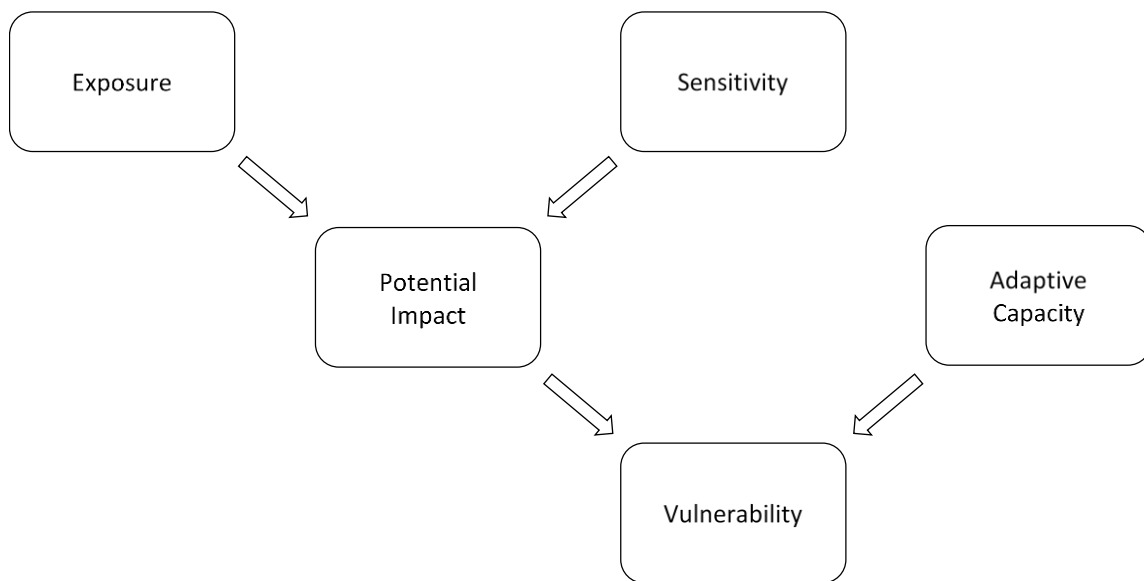


Figure 2: Vulnerability and its components

9.6.3. We propose that the vulnerability assessment be undertaken largely as a desktop exercise, in partnership with territorial authorities. It will draw on a range of data sources and expertise from both regional and territorial authorities as well as advice from external agencies. Because the purpose of this exercise is to identify and prioritise vulnerabilities, targeted engagement with communities (including tangata whenua) will be important to ensure that vulnerable taonga are properly reflected in the assessment. It will not be possible to engage extensively with local communities throughout the region during this phase; subsequent initiatives to address local issues (identified through the vulnerability assessment) will require the close involvement of affected communities.

9.6.4. We are currently working with territorial authority staff to develop the scope and resource requirements of the vulnerability assessment, and anticipate being in a position to offer advice early in the new year.

9.7. Action Planning

9.7.1. In parallel, we have started to work with territorial authorities to produce a joint action plan. In the first instance, this will reflect existing activities that provide a foundation for our climate change response. For example, both the One Plan and Horizons' Thirty-Year Infrastructure Strategy identify climate change as an issue for the region. The Regional Public Transport Plan and Regional Land Transport Plan include policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Flood protection, hill-country erosion control, and emergency

management are core functions that help to build resilience to climate change. Although a useful starting point, these interventions (for which climate change has not been the primary driver) are unlikely to be sufficient in themselves.

- 9.7.2. While each district faces different pressures, some common themes are emerging from territorial authorities' current and committed actions. These include: identification of natural hazards and emergency preparedness; urban design and green space development; and an internal business focus on waste minimisation and carbon inventories. Palmerston North City Council has produced an Eco City Strategy 2019 and a Low Carbon Roadmap; Whanganui District Council is developing a Climate Change Outcomes Strategy.
- 9.7.3. As we develop our strategy, we will add to our action plan: relevant regional policies can be included as they are agreed; priority local initiatives can be incorporated once the vulnerability assessment has been completed. Like much of our work, the action plan will be iterative. It will be important to acknowledge that early versions are not a full response to the issue, and that further investment is likely to be required. How much investment will depend on the objectives and policies Council adopts.

10. CONSULTATION

- 10.1. Horizons' staff are working closely with counterparts at the region's territorial authorities to ensure a consistent approach, and to prepare advice on joint action including the regional vulnerability assessment described above.

11. TIMELINE / NEXT STEPS

- 11.1. We propose to schedule a workshop early in the new calendar year to discuss prospective objectives and policies and to take Members' views on testing these with the community. We also anticipate being in a position to present an initial action plan at that time.
- 11.2. Advice on the scope and resource requirements of a regional vulnerability assessment, and the respective roles of regional and territorial authorities, will follow before the end of the financial year.
- 11.3. The Triennial Agreement, to be renewed by 1 March 2020, sets out how we will coordinate with territorial authorities and which governance arrangements are appropriate to oversee work across councils. Members may wish to consider how best to reflect collaboration on climate change in the Agreement.

12. SIGNIFICANCE

- 12.1. This is not a significant decision according to the Council's Policy on Significance and Engagement.

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ANNEXES

There are no attachments for this report.