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Ocean outfall consent means sewer savings for Timaru District

The granting of an ocean outfall discharge-for-treated-wastewater consent by Environment Canterbury allowing the Timaru District to discharge wastewater to the sea for the next 35 years has offered long-term financial sustainability to industry and residents.

Without the discharge consent, the district faced having to fund up to \$50 million in new treatment plants for its domestic and industrial needs.

However, the discharge consent, announced last month, will now allow the Timaru District Council to choose an oxidation pond treatment of domestic wastewater. Industrial wastewater will not need a centralised treatment plant, although tougher conditions will be imposed on industry.

Council district services manager Ashley Harper will ask the council at its meeting on March 15 to adopt oxidation ponds, maturation ponds and wetlands as the treatment method for the district's domestic wastewater and to adjust long term budgets to reflect the elimination of enhanced industrial and commercial treatment capital expenditure that could have cost the district up to \$50 million over the next decade if the outfall consent had not been granted.

The oxidation pond work would begin on the council's Aorangi Road property, purchased several years ago for the purpose, in the next financial year subject to a satisfactory design report presently nearing completion.

In his report to council Mr Harper says physical works to date to upgrade the district's wastewater facilities have cost just over \$28 million since 2001 when a long-term wastewater treatment and disposal enhancement strategy was developed after consultation with the community over the previous four years. That work included a new trunk sewer connecting Geraldine, Temuka and Pleasant Point to the ocean outfall completed in 2004, and a four-stage main trunk sewer renewal programme in Timaru.

Still to be completed under the ongoing wastewater strategy are trunk sewer work at Washdyke and new sewer connecting mains, to be undertaken in the next financial year, and a domestic separation and treatment upgrade, scheduled for completion at the end of 2013.

"This work will cost \$24 million, the balance of the overall allocated budget," Mr Harper said.

“These costs will be funded by loan and the operating costs of the upgrade, including interest and depreciation costs will add \$172 to the existing \$254 sewer uniform annual charge over the next four years,” Mr Harper said in his report to councillors.

The charge is paid by all properties connected to the sewer system.

Mr Harper said the new outfall consent represented substantial savings to industry.

“Final tradewaste charges to industrial wastewater dischargers will be significantly reduced. Previously, these charges had been estimated to rise by more than 400 per cent.”

However, he warned that enforcement of tradewaste discharge limits would become a council focus and compliance monitoring would be comprehensive.

“The dischargers will be required to improve their own wastewater treatment processes and facilities,” Mr Harper says in his report to the council.

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