

# CENTRAL OTAGO ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIETY INC.

## Providing for Otago's Future

### Introduction

The Central Otago Environmental Society (COES) is an incorporated body with charitable status and a membership reflecting a wide cross-section of the central Otago community. In essence, Society members consider that we all share the responsibility for good stewardship of our environment including our landscapes, our natural resources and our heritage.

COES welcomes this opportunity to participate in a timely discussion regarding the future of Otago. Timely, because we are only just beginning to perceive, as if through a fog, the outline shape of a new age to which we will be forced to adjust by reason of three factors beyond our control:

- a. the depletion of important resources including fossil fuels and minerals;
- b. the proliferation of adverse environmental impacts arising from our extraction and use of resources and the consequential costs of our efforts to avert those affects ; and
- c. the inability of our present monetary, banking and investment systems to cope with resource scarcity, soaring environmental costs and servicing the mountain of accumulating debt.

Together, these realities reveal that our prevailing assumption and expectation of perpetual economic growth is a fallacy, and that our collective future will be constrained by the finite limits of the natural resources on which we depend.

At present we can only guess what the shapes and forms of this new world might look like but it is almost inevitable that the transition from a fossil fueled, debt and growth based industrial civilization towards a sustainable steady-state society will be characterized by resistance and crises. Indeed persistent unemployment, the aggregation of wealth by the few at the expense of the majority and the increasing frequency of environmental crises, are symptoms of a society already under extreme stress.

Achieving a steady-state society in the near future requires that we begin now to imagine and plan for the contraction which will enable our grandchildren to live within a budget of renewable resources and recycled minerals and metals.

The failure of our government to recognize, let alone provide any leadership with regard to this transition, is no excuse for inaction at a regional or district level. COES considers that this RPS review could make immediate, significant changes, by-passing statutory planning processes which otherwise effectively limit such opportunities to once every generation. With public support, the RPS could establish policies and strategies requiring district authorities to establish processes capable of anticipating necessary changes or at least responding rapidly and decisively to changing circumstances.

## **Considerations**

With this opportunity to anticipate and provide for the future in mind, COES proposes that the following principles, policies and strategies be considered for inclusion in the revised RPS:

### **Ethical Policy-making**

- a. quantify environmental, social and cultural values
- b. account for incommensurable values
- c. responsibility of public officials to establish policies and make decisions on the basis of ethics and morality ie:
  - (i) What benefits and what harms will a policy/decision produce? (ii)
  - (ii) Which alternative will lead to the best overall consequences?
  - (iii) Which course of action treats everyone the same and does not show favouritism or discrimination?

### **Interconnections**

COES considers the non-human world to be of value and that all living creatures are both interdependent and reliant on a complex natural environment for their well-being. By reason of our intelligence and development, we humans have assumed (if only out of self-interest) a responsibility to exercise wise stewardship of this environment. The issues of concern to us (water quality, land use, loss of species, bio-diversity and amenity values), are part of a wider picture of learning to live within responsible limits which need to be established by way of policies and strategies.

For example, the RPS should include as guiding principles, the following statements:

- a. Environmental considerations (biodiversity and significant landscapes), the security, quality and supply of water to communities and individual properties for domestic consumption and stock water are considered to be first order priorities.
- b. Recreation and Amenity values (natural or physical qualities and characteristics that contribute to people's appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes) are considered as second order priority considerations equal to the provision of irrigation and renewable electricity generation.
- c. Land use, industry and business practices (horticultural, agricultural and industrial) do not adversely impact on water quality or biodiversity, either directly or cumulatively.
- d. The natural form and character of lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands will be protected and enhanced.
- e. Ecological habitats will be restored and reclaimed;
- f. The reliable supply of water, electricity and the provision of telecommunication services to Otago residents should be considered as necessities of life to be supplied at actual cost (not for profit).

### **Status of Resources**

- a. Coordinate and maintain an electronic inventory of Otago's resources for use as a planning tool by organisations, farmers, businesses, and individuals.
- b. Monitor, update and report regularly on the use and condition of Otago's resources

## Land use

While the triennial agreement between the ORC and Otago's district councils is undoubtedly a useful way of ensuring coordination and avoiding duplication of effort, inadvertently, it may also be the cause of disconnections between the two policy levels, thereby leaving black holes which can result in no appropriate action being taken at the district level. For example, the ORC has agreed to leave matters of land use to district councils; regrettably this agreement is not reflected in any overarching policy requiring district councils to exercise prudent management of land use activities. Consequently lacking any regional encouragement to do so, the CODC has no policies allowing them to exercise management discretion over the effects of intensive land use likely to have consequential impacts on the Central Otago environment.

COES considers that the RPS must include policies which address all resource matters, if only by way of broad directives that certain matters be addressed by district councils as may be appropriate.

Accordingly, COES proposes that the RPS address the following land use matters:

- a. Require district councils to exercise discretion with regard to proposals to change from traditional farming practices to intensive land use systems. (Perhaps by requiring development proposals to include a farm management plan approved by a competent authority);
- b. Facilitate development of a farm management data base recording each property's soil types, water catchment and aquifer details and any environmental considerations;
- c. Encourage development of strategies which provide land-owners with up-to-date, science based advice with regard to soil, water and nutrient management matters;
- d. Encourage/incentivise best practices - 'farming within limits' to meet both production and environmental goals.

## Local food production

- a. Encourage local production of healthy, affordable food;
- b. Make unused public land available to community groups for use as communal gardens.

## Energy Production & Supply

- a. Based on the principle that Otago residents should derive direct benefit from its resources, require Otago's energy producers to pay a regional surcharge on energy 'exported' from the region to be used for initiatives designed to reduce net energy consumption in Otago;
- b. Encourage / facilitate development of independent, small scale energy production close to where it is required

## Transport

- a. Rails are more efficient than highways – consider long-term development of the Central Otago Rail Trail as an alternative communication/supply link using light rail.
- b. Encourage electrification of land transport (encourage battery charging stations at strategic points along major Otago highways);
- c. Encourage grid-tied transport (trains, trams & trolleys)

## Urban improvement

- a. Where appropriate, encourage public transport options to reduce dependence on fossil fuels;
- b. Require future residential subdivisions to provide the infrastructure necessary for public transport;
- c. Sub-divisions to provide space for communal gardens;
- d. Residential development to provide wildlife corridors;
- e. Encourage development of bio-diversity parks;
- f. Encourage / incentivise design and building of smaller, low-energy homes;
- g. Encourage / incentivise installation of solar hot water and solar electricity.

## Conclusion

In closing, the Central Otago Environmental Society reiterates its belief that this review represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to introduce principles, policies and strategies which might soften the impact of external realities which, inevitably, will require us to develop resilient, largely self-sustaining communities throughout Otago.

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