

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Economic and environmental issues top new Waikato list**

Job and business opportunities, financial and economic matters, and environmental concerns have topped a new list of issues Waikato people are concerned about, says a report prepared for Environment Waikato and local councils.

The findings are contained in the results of the second Monitoring and Reporting of Community Outcomes (MARCO) survey undertaken by Environment Waikato and nine local councils. These results help councils respond to community expectations.

The survey covers people's views on their quality of life, availability and proximity to schools and other educational and recreational facilities, feelings of safety, sense of pride in their communities, respect for different cultures and engagement in local council processes.

Broadly speaking, the results of the survey were similar to the first MARCO survey in 2007 with, for example, 88 per cent of respondents being happy with their quality of life.

However, this year's survey asked two new questions about what people thought were the three biggest issues in their area and what were the three main issues their local councils should be looking at.

The highest scoring local issue (37.6 per cent of respondents) was the availability of business and job opportunities, while the second equal highest at 18.8 per cent were environmental concerns and financial/economy issues.

When it came to issues local councils should be looking out, the highest score was roading (20.6 per cent). The next biggest category was environmental concerns (13.8 per cent), followed by a category of "other council services and facilities" (12.3 per cent).

Results in individual districts vary. Data at a local level will help relevant councils in their forward planning processes to address specific issues while the regional results provide a broader perspective.

EW's sustainability projects programme manager Beat Huser said it was not surprising that issues to do with people's material well-being and local council services had featured prominently in answers to the two issues questions.

"It's not hard to understand that people want economic security in tougher times and efficient council services, and this comes through clearly. These results give EW and local councils a clear sense of what the community is concerned about in these areas and how we need to respond.

“But it is also interesting to note just how strongly concerns about the environment are coming through. These include such issues as water quality, mining on the Coromandel, pest control and the impacts of agriculture.”

Dr Huser said EW and local councils would be looking at what further research was needed to help assess community concerns about the issues raised, including the environment.

“The answers to the new questions we’ve asked could be very useful for councils in identifying even more clearly where community priorities lie when it comes to such things as economic matters, council services and the environment.

“The answers to the survey will certainly help councils frame their discussions with their communities about the future.”

Dr Huser said that as the issues questions were new to the survey it was difficult to say exactly why the environment had ranked so high as an issue or whether the level of concern about it had been increasing.

“My view is that the quality of the natural environment can obviously have a direct bearing on how people perceive their quality of life. People seem to realise more and more that our economy relies on a healthy environment, especially in the Waikato where our ongoing prosperity is directly linked to natural resources.”

Dr Huser said he would be discussing the need for further regional research on the survey’s results with colleagues at local councils.

The full MARCO report is available at <http://www.choosingfutures.co.nz/Publications/>.

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## **What is Environment Waikato?**

Environment Waikato is the regional council for the Waikato region.

The council's area extends from the Bombay Hills in the north to Mt Ruapehu in the south, and from the mouth of the Waikato River to Mokau on the west coast, across to the Coromandel Peninsula on the east.

The region contains nationally important electricity generation facilities and an internationally significant dairy sector. It is also home to iconic natural features which are key tourist attractions.

Environment Waikato's responsibilities include:

- sustainable management of natural and physical resources, including pest control.
- planning regional growth and transport, and providing bus services.
- civil defence, emergency response, navigation safety, dam safety, flood management, erosion control and road safety.

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