

Joint Environment Canterbury press conference on 22 April – proposed questions and answers

Will the Commissioners operate behind closed doors?

No. Ministers are committed to ensuring that the commissioners operate transparently, in the same way that the elected council would operate, and that through the Local Government Act 2002 they are accountable to the Canterbury people for their actions. For example, the commissioners will be required to hold meetings and consult with the public in the same way an elected council would.

How will this year's rates be set?

This will be one of the first and most important tasks for the commissioners. ECan's annual plan and budget process is well underway, and the commissioners will be required to hear submissions and make final decisions on the plan and budget, and set rates. They will do this in the same way and according to the same timeframes and procedures as the elected council.

Do the commissioners have the right mix of skills to get the job done?

The Government has selected a group of highly experienced and capable people with track records of achievements in public and community service, the judiciary, and business. The commissioners collectively have a range of skills and expertise in organisational change, freshwater management, Tikanga Māori, local government and knowledge of the Canterbury region.

Are the commissioners going to have enough time to do the work effectively?

Yes. The commissioners will have until October 2013 (over three and a half years) to tackle the issues confronting ECan. The commissioners have a big workload and significant responsibilities and their task will not be easy. That is why we have engaged the full number of commissioners (seven) as allowed under the Environment Canterbury (Temporary Commissioners and Improved Water Management) Act 2010. The commissioners will be supported in their work by ECan's Chief Executive and his staff.

Is this intervention going to cost the people of Canterbury a lot of money?

The Government is committed to making sure that remuneration for the commissioners does not exceed the current level of remuneration for the elected council. Commissioners are taking over as the elected council and will be required to operate within the budget set for ECan.

Will there be job losses as a result of the Government's intervention?

Employment is the responsibility of the Chief Executive, not the commissioners. But the commissioners are tasked with reviewing ECan's institutional arrangements to make sure that these work effectively, in particular, supporting the implementation of the Natural Resources Regional Plan.

What is the process for ensuring that the commissioners are doing their job?

The commissioners will be required to report quarterly to Ministers on progress towards meeting specified outcomes and milestones. The Act gives Ministers the power to replace commissioners if they are not meeting the requirements of their job.

Is there a requirement for the commissioners to consult with the Canterbury people?

Yes. As the governing body of ECan, the commissioners are required to consult with the public in the same way that an elected council would do. In addition, the commissioners will be required to consult regularly with the Mayors of Canterbury's territorial authorities and seek their advice on relevant issues.

What will be the outcomes for this intervention?

The Government will specify outcomes and goals with measurable milestones for the commission to achieve. We will be discussing these with the commissioners shortly. One of the key outcomes that the Government wants to see is an operative framework for managing natural resources in Canterbury, and that this framework is integrated, effective, transparent and supports robust decision-making. The Government also wants to see significant improvement in Canterbury's freshwater management. Another key outcome is that the commissioners improve relations with Canterbury's territorial authorities.