

## 9. Issues of public consultation

A recent literature review of institutional drivers and barriers to public participation indicates that there are seven key areas of influence on the quantity and quality of participation (Lake, 2005). These are:

- Attitudinal influences of agency staff
- Community attitudes and knowledge systems
- Impact of systemic factors such as access to information and resources
- Stakeholder analysis and management
- Participatory planning and methods

Recent changes to the Local Government Act 2002 requiring councils to develop Long Term Council Community Plans (LTCCP) is a significant driver of increased community involvement, but legislative drivers are not sufficient in themselves. Taking the above factors into account, the ESR research team explored people's perceptions of their needs in relation to participation in the Feasibility Study, and more broadly they observed institutional factors likely to impact on participation experiences, and formally evaluated the workshops (see Appendix 4).

A number of tensions relating to the key areas of influence on participation (listed above) were identified during the course of ESR's involvement.

### **Timing of participation and information available.**

Throughout this project there has been a tension between asking people to participate when the Feasibility Study is just beginning with very little specific information available, and getting people's views and experiences documented early. Waiting until there is more information available is likely to result in claims that involvement is too little too late.

A number of people interviewed talked about the need for access to ongoing information, and both the Wairoa and Lee Valley focus group participants were specifically asked about this, with the following responses.

- We need access to information with time to think in order to have a sensible discussion.
- People need information about water systems and to know how knowledge is connected to water use.
- We would like six monthly meetings or e-mails and summaries of progress of the Feasibility Study
- We want to be told what is intended, what stage things are at – don't sneak up on us!
- What does the project mean in terms of our properties – how will this affect our resale values or how will we be compensated?

## **Recommendation Four**

Residents of the Lee and/or Wairoa Valleys need to be provided with timely information about the progress of the Feasibility Study, and the possible implications of outcomes. This could be done via a widely distributed newsletter and/or membership on a community reference group with identified mechanisms for dissemination of information to other Lee and/or Wairoa Valley residents. The costs of widespread dissemination needs to be weighed against the possibility of much higher costs that could stem from community groups distrusting the Feasibility Study, and challenging the implementation of its recommendations and the RMA consent stage.

### **Historical situations impacting on current perceptions.**

In the focus group discussions and in some interviews there was the perception that, regardless of the timing of consultation and/or the provision of information, a decision had already been made so community input will have little or no effect.

*Decisions are pre-made (focus group participant)*

*There are pre-determined outcomes (focus group participant)*

Apart from one person, this perception did not appear prevalent in the combined workshops, indicating that both historical situations and the focus group or interview methods may intensify or consolidate current perceptions. In the workshops, participants were explicitly asked to explore options, which arguably demonstrated that their input was valued.

### **Issues of representation using participative methods**

One interviewee was concerned that insufficient people were included in the participatory processes used by the ESR research team, pointing to a trade-off that the research team consciously made when designing the research. Focusing on the relevance of the potential outcomes of the Feasibility Study for stakeholders rather than trying to get a 'representative sample' of Waimea plain residents meant that values, activities and water management options could be explored in more depth than could emerge from a postal or telephone survey that would have been required to canvas a larger sample of people. Breadth of participation was therefore traded for depth of participation and analysis.

The ESR team also asked workshop participants to fill out evaluation forms at the end of the workshops. The data from these has been partially analysed with the preliminary results provided in Appendix Four.