

MEDIA RELEASE

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Environment Waikato wins \$1.6 million research grant

Environment Waikato has won \$1.6 million in research funding to provide New Zealand with an integrated system that can be used by central government agencies and local authorities for long-term sustainable planning.

The research programme, which will receive \$400,000 from the Government's Foundation of Research, Science & Technology annually for the next four years, will be used to develop sustainable planning tools based on a detailed study of future options for the Waikato region.

“The aim of the project is to build and integrate economic, population, health and environmental information and to develop a model of how our region works,” says Environment Waikato's Dr Beat Huser.

“Understanding the region as a complex and dynamic system of interactions between the economy, the environment, the people and communities will enable us to look into the future by using various scenarios so that we can better prepare today for where we want to be tomorrow”.

The project will:

- develop tools and knowledge support for integrated planning and decision-making
- link environmental planning to economic and social decision-making
- identify conflicting issues and trade-offs and develop practical solutions
- plug into future issues and set priorities for action
- enable us to make informed choices.

The research team will be headed by Dr Beat Huser of Environment Waikato and Dr Daniel Rutledge, a Landcare Research ecologist, and draws on expertise from the spectrum of crown research institutes (Landcare Research, Agresearch, NIWA and Scion), the University of Waikato and the New Zealand Centre for Ecological Economics. International research from the Netherlands and France will be used in developing the processes and tools.

Environment Waikato chair, Jenni Vernon welcomes the support from Government's research, science and technology funding body.

“ Environment Waikato's ability to win \$1.6 million worth of government funding reflects our reputation as a science and knowledge leader, and allows us to set the research agenda for the benefit of our region and its communities,” she said.

“This research will be a useful tool for exploring the Waikato region’s future - and to look ahead at scenarios, such as the potential impacts if our region evolves over time from a resource-based economy to a more knowledge-based, high income and export-led economy.

“While we cannot guarantee to predict the future, we can think about what it might bring, gather information and explore plausible futures so that we can avoid tomorrow’s problems by wise planning and decision-making today.”

Jenni Vernon noted that while the Waikato region will be used as a case study by the researchers, the tools will be applicable nationally, with the Auckland Regional Council and Environment Bay of Plenty already on board as end-user collaborators.

The research project starts in July this year and receives \$400,000 annually for the next four years.

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