

Report No. 99.593

12 October 1999

File No: B/1/3/7

Report to the Utility Services Committee
From Andrew Samuel, Marketing Analysis Manager

1999/2000 Summer Water Conservation Campaign

1. Purpose

To inform the committee of the Council's communication strategy for the water conservation campaign during the coming summer.

2. Background

Most of our Region's water supply comes directly from rivers – there is relatively little storage capacity in the supply system. During the summer, extended periods of low rainfall and warm weather can restrict the volume of water available to treat, while causing the amount of water used in the region to increase by almost 50 percent. The Regional Council's ability to treat and supply enough water to meet demand at these times can be tested. Reducing peak demand volumes will ease pressure on the Council's supply network and help minimise the need for additional infrastructure.

Efficient use of resources and a reducing cost of water supply are in the interests of all water users in our supply area and are therefore of significant interest to our City Council customers. The Regional Council has sought the co-operation and support of its customers in designing water conservation promotions for the last two years. They have been consulted and have given their support to the strategy outlined below.

The Regional Council commissioned market researchers to undertake a wide-ranging investigation of attitudes and behaviour relating to water use and water conservation in October 1997. The main findings were:

- Garden watering is the main cause of large increases in water use during summer.
- People did not identify the garden as an area where water could be saved.
- The public believed that, in general, water conservation is important.

Focus groups were used to test which messages would best motivate people to respond to a conservation message and what sorts of issues needed to be considered. Based on their feedback, campaign messages need to tackle the following responses to:

- **Cynicism** – there is no summer water problem – the region gets enough rain during the year.
- **Blame placing** – “other people” are the main water-use abusers.
- **Lack of credibility** – individuals want expert advice that they feel confident will not penalise them personally for the sake of water conservation.
- **Problem solving** – individuals need tangible, inexpensive solutions.
- **Lack of feedback** – individuals want to know how their efforts are working - saving water is seen as a thankless task.
- **Self-interest** – individuals would like to be seen as role models, there are feelings of guilt associated with excessive water use.
- **Immediate needs** – preference for solutions made available directly. Knowing how to get more information is desired, sending away for it is not.

This work, together with follow-up research and consumption statistics has guided our approach to water conservation for the last two years and is again central to our planning. The challenge is to make conservation measures personally relevant and palatable.

3. **1998/99 Campaign in Review**

Understanding the profile of garden water users and the reasons behind their summer watering activity is crucial for developing our communication strategy. The main conclusions drawn from the 1998 post-campaign research are highlighted below:

- Women are more likely to be responsible for watering decisions.
- Decisions about when to water are most likely to be determined by the weather.
- The largest proportion of the population claim to be ‘*quite keen*’ gardeners (40%). The most common watering frequency is 2-3 times weekly (53%).
- *Very keen* gardeners (17%) are most likely to use a lot more water during summer.
- People who water to a set routine tend to water very frequently – at least daily.

The main advertising messages from the 1998-99 campaign achieved a much higher level of recognition than that for the previous year. Despite this, over 40 percent of those surveyed reported greater summer water use year-on-year. This was probably due to a hot and dry summer – in terms of the length of periods between rainfall it was

the most severe since 1971. A significant proportion of respondents said that they tried to save water but it appears their efforts had relatively little impact on water use.

Although the public generally agrees with the aims of water conservation, the majority of gardeners are not strongly self-motivated to make conservation measures part of their gardening routine. There was some awareness that metropolitan Wellington *could* experience water shortages during summer, but little evidence of this knowledge affecting watering action.

Without a clear use/cost relationship or the threat of water shortages as realistic motivators, the best option open to us is to regularly prick gardeners' consciences about the 'worthiness' of water conservation and how easy it is to be 'a good citizen'.

4. **1999/2000 Campaign Strategy**

Our strategy for this year's campaign is to persuade gardeners who consider water conservation important to use less water on their garden. Our research shows this to be a large group and one that could be persuaded to change its behaviour. We have assumed that gardeners would put the health of their plants before water conservation so our message aims to persuade gardeners that it is possible to keep plants healthy and use less water in the garden. We will also explain why water conservation is important. The campaign will feature professional advice from a recognised gardening personality, to help gardeners achieve the results *they* want while using less water.

This approach is consistent with last year's campaign. The strategy used for 1998-99 was sound but, given our modest budget and the public's apparent lack of unprompted motivation to act, we have decided to be less ambitious with the amount of information we try to convey. Research suggests that we offered too many solutions for the average garden water user to easily remember. Reinforcing one or two conservation actions more strongly is likely to have been more effective.

Previous research identified a fair degree of guilt relating to water conservation. We must regularly remind 'conservation conscious' water users that water conservation is important and that it is possible to use less water and still maintain a healthy garden.

Specifically, the 1999/2000 campaign will:

- Target gardeners, particularly women over the age of 40.
- Build on the main message from last year - that it's possible both to look after your garden AND conserve water.
- Tackle frequency of watering
- Play on water conservation guilt
- Keep it simple – concentrate on fewer ideas, make it easy to do the right thing.
- Select an intrusive medium (or media) with good coverage of the target audience and repeat the conservation message frequently.

5. **Media**

Following discussions with our design and advertising agency, the following promotional activity is recommended.

5.1 **Television**

Unprompted advertising recall from our 1998 campaign showed relatively strong recall for a televised water conservation advertisement that was last screened three years ago. This result compares favourably with recall levels for the promotional material used last year.

Television has a status and authority with the general population that no other medium achieves. People tend to ascribe greater importance to things they have seen on television. It is an intrusive medium and is suitable for repetition of the relatively simple message proposed.

Advertising time is available on Television 1 and TV2 for the Wellington area only. Targeting information is available on a programme by programme basis so we can weight our advertising placement towards reaching a female audience. Historical viewing data suggests that we can expect to reach approximately 90 percent of our target audience and, on average, they would see the advertisement 13 times over a six-week period. Advertising will run from mid January until late February – historically the period of greatest demand for water.

To achieve the desired response from gardeners the message and the presenter must be credible. We are currently investigating the availability of two well-known personalities as possible spokespeople for the campaign - both have fronted television programmes with a gardening link. The advertisement would be written around the chosen presenter.

We will create an advertisement that should remain appropriate for two-three years. Creating and televising this advertisement will require \$60,000 of the total budget of \$70,000. The remaining sum will be held back as an advertising contingency reserve in case of extreme weather conditions. In years two and three we will have a sum equivalent to the advertisement production budget to commit to other promotional activities in addition to screening the TV commercial.

5.2 **Water Watch in Contact**

Weekly notices were placed in Contact newspaper last summer to inform people about regional water use and encourage them not to water when rain was forecast. These notices achieved 18 percent recall and were particularly well remembered by *very keen* gardeners. Production costs were minimal and there were no placement costs, making it a cost-effective method of communication. With Contact's agreement, we will repeat this element of last year's campaign.

6. **Following on From the Campaign**

The ultimate goal of our communication campaign is to reinforce the value of water conservation so that a large segment of the population are self motivated to use water wisely. This should result in reduced summer demand peaks and a reduced total demand. It is likely to take several years of consistent communication to achieve this.

Market research will be undertaken following the campaign to assess recall and acceptance of the campaign's message and to try and gauge whether this had a positive impact on watering behaviour. A further report will be prepared once this assessment process is completed.

7. Recommendation

That the report be received and its contents noted.

Report prepared by:

Approved for submission:

ANDREW SAMUEL
Marketing Analysis Manager

MURRAY KENNEDY
Strategy and Assets Manager

DAVID BENHAM
Divisional Manager, Utility Services