FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS 1 OF 2

What does the Council propose?
The Council intends to designate 14 hectares, to be known as the Water Supply and Protection Area, around Cooper’s Wells. Land within this area is owned by the Council and the Crown (7.6ha), the defunct New Zealand Agricultural Co (3ha), and the Sharp Trust (3.4ha).

There is also a four metre wide strip from the wells to the Mataura River. This is the route for cables and pipes to allow for emergency water takes from the river. The strip crosses land owned by the Trust and a private landowner Margaret Palmer McKenzie.

Why a designation?
The aim is to minimise the risk to water quality because the wells are our main water source. Formal recognition of the importance and sensitivity of the site gives surety to future adjoining landowners and means the Council does not have to renegotiate each time the land changes ownership. The emergency water take route to be designated is to enable permanent pipes and cables to run from the river to the wells. The new infrastructure will make it easier for the Council to top up the wells during periods of drought, which are expected to be more common in the future.

What is a designation?
Designation is like ‘spot zoning’ over a site or route in a district plan. It allows a council to carry out work on the designated area without requiring land use consent. Restrictions can also be placed on what can be done in the area.

A Notice of Requirement outlines a council’s intention to put a designation in its district plan. It can go through a public notification and submission process, which is the option the Council has chosen so it can get feedback from those affected and the public. Detailed information about the designation process is available on the Ministry for the Environment’s website http://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/rma/everyday/designations/

Are there other designated areas in the Gore District at present?
Yes, there are areas in the District Plan that are designated. These relate to land owned by the Crown.

How will the Council look after the land?
The Council plans to fence the area and exclude any farming activities, such as grazing stock or applying fertiliser. Pasture growth will be managed, and grass cut and removed from the site. Eventually it is hoped to return the land to its natural state. The Council will look to acquire an interest in the land, either by leasing or buying it.

Why protect Cooper’s Wells?
Cooper’s Wells is a critical strategic asset as it is the Council’s main source of water. It has been in use since 1979 and each day we pump, on average, 2,850 cubic metres of water from the wells. The Council has consents allowing up to 5,000 cubic metres a day to be extracted and is looking at ways of obtaining more water from the site. We have a legal obligation to ensure the water is clean and meets national drinking water standards. We have consistently flagged a commitment to water quality and in the last resident survey, the issue most people wanted the Council to focus on was water quality and quantity.

Why this specific area?
The 14ha to be designated has been identified as the 30 day time-of-travel zone. This means the groundwater, be it pristine or contaminated, can take 30 days to make its way from the surface to the pumping wells. Land around the wells was designated by the former Gore Borough Council but the designation lapsed when the Gore District Plan became operative.
**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS 2 OF 2**

**Why move to designate the area now?**
Since the wells were established in 1979, the Council has worked with the property’s various owners to protect the integrity of water in the area. We raised concerns about water quality and the possibility of establishing a protection zone with the present landowner – the Sharp Trust – after it bought the property. However, we have been unable to negotiate a successful outcome. As already noted, the creation of a designated area provides future owners of the adjoining land with clear guidelines about farming near a municipal water supply source. It also gives the Council an enduring mechanism to look after water quality in the area.

**Is water quality of concern in this area?**
Yes. The Council and Environment Southland have been concerned with water quality in the Cooper’s Wells catchment for some time. The Council has been annually sampling water from the wells since 2008.

The Knapdale aquifer has been identified as having the highest median nitrate levels in Southland. At Cooper’s Wells the nitrate level fluctuates around half of the maximum acceptable value allowed by the New Zealand Drinking Water Standards. At this level the Council is required to take steps to protect the resource.

**Why is nitrate in water an issue?**
Long term exposure to nitrate can cause health issues, particularly in infants. The New Zealand Drinking Water Standards (NZDWS) sets the maximum acceptable level as 50mg/L. However, when levels reach 50 percent of this (25mg/L) it is considered potentially significant to public health. Water samples from Cooper’s Wells, in recent months, have returned levels of between 20.68mg/L and 25.24mg/L. Treating water containing nitrate can be technical and expensive.

**How does nitrate get into water?**
Nitrate is an essential plant nutrient and occurs naturally in the soil. It is an important source of nitrogen for plant growth. However, if the soil contains more nitrate than plants can use, then the excess nitrate can be leached from the soil and contaminate groundwater.

Most nitrate leaching occurs over the winter months, when plant growth is slow, soils are wet and rainfall is plentiful. Typical sources of nitrate include fertilisers and animal wastes (particularly in areas of intensive farming), unreticulated sewage disposal systems and industrial waste.

**What about other properties in this area?**
The 30 day TOT zone has been identified as being the most sensitive to the supply of water. The risk to water quality from activities carried out on the land decreases the further away properties are from Cooper’s Wells. At this time, the Council believes a collaborative approach is needed to better understand and manage any potential risks. There have been steps to form a Knapdale Landcare Group. The Council sees this group as a conduit to discuss and implement best practice to ensure the risks to water quality are managed.

**Can people make a submission to the Notice of Requirement?**
The Notice of Requirement is open for public submissions in support, opposition or neutral, until Tuesday 12 November. Submission forms can be obtained from the Council's website www.goredc.govt.nz, the Civic Administration Building, in Gore, the Mataura service centre or Gore Library. Depending on the submissions received, the Council will hold a pre-hearing meeting. There will be a hearing and the hearing commissioners appointed by the Council – Colin Weatherall, of Dunedin, and David Pullar, of Kaiwera, – have been delegated authority to make a decision on the Notice of Requirement and submissions to it.

For further information please contact District Assets General Manager Paul Withers or Consultant Planner Keith Hovell, phone 2090330.