

Dougherty backs staff

Law sees lines drawn

By JOEL MAXWELL

Councillors were treated like sheep over a coastal erosion report that affects 1800 homes, a councillor says.

Councillor K Gurunathan levelled the accusation at Kapiti Coast District Council staff handling of a letter on the council's report by Waikanae man Graeme Yager.

The letter raised concerns about the science behind the report's findings, now included in the LIMs of 1800 coastal properties.

Mr Gurunathan said staff should have passed on the letter to councillors before they met at the latest regulatory management committee meeting.

Instead councillors found out about the letter in the weekly elected members' bulletin, after the meeting where the report was discussed.

"Elected members should not be treated like sheep to be conveniently corralled in a pen. Elected representatives cannot make good decisions without being fully informed. Council staff have generally been good at keeping us informed but in this instance I feel let down," he said.

Council chief executive Pat Dougherty said the letter did not raise any issues that challenge the science behind the report.

"It certainly did not merit trying to undo all the arrangements we had made to send letters to affected residents and brief the media," he said.

Mr Dougherty said staff are expected

to provide professional, impartial advice and if there was anything in the letter that raised concerns the committee would have been advised.

Last week the council said it would include report information in LIMs.

The report found 1000 beach front properties were at risk from erosion within 50 years – another 800 within a century. The council was obliged by government policy to undertake the assessment and forced by legislation to include it in LIMs.

Mr Yager's letter supported a group of Waikanae Beach property owners disputing the report findings. The group is considering legal action.

Mr Dougherty said people can challenge erosion lines relating to specific properties through the district plan hearing process.

"But they will require expert evidence to challenge the location of the lines. There would then be a caucus process and hopefully agreement reached between the coastal experts. If justified, the lines on the report relating to the specific property would be amended and the information on LIMs would be adjusted accordingly," he said.

If people were still not happy they could appeal to the Environment Court, Mr Dougherty said.

He added it was standard practice to include letters to all councillors in the weekly bulletin. "This has been a system that has worked well for the past four years. It was not an attempt to conceal information."