

Resource Consent Processing

**A customer satisfaction
survey of resource consent
applicants, 2008-09**

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Executive summary

The Council aims to process and administer resource consents efficiently and effectively. Surveying consent applicants is one means of assessing of this has been achieved.

The Council carried out a customer satisfaction survey of applicants who had been granted consents between 1 July 2008 and 20 June 2009. This survey found that overall customer satisfaction with the consent process remains high, reinforcing results from a similar survey conducted in 2001.

Customers were generally satisfied with the level of assistance provided for them during the preparation of their application, with information requests being reasonable, easy to follow application forms and clear information provided by Council staff of what information was required.

Satisfaction levels remained high during the processing of the application, with most applicants agreeing that the time taken to process their application was reasonable, that they were adequately informed of progress and that Council staff were easily accessible, professional and helpful.

Most applicants agreed that the decisions made were reasonable and that they understood the consent conditions. Customers were less satisfied with the costs, but this is to be expected, and reflects findings other councils have encountered.

Overall customer satisfaction was strongly influenced by the type of consent being applied for. Those applying for consents where there is now a high level of community understanding of the requirement for such consents (e.g. agricultural discharges) and where the Council's systems for streamlining the processing of such applications, were the most satisfied customers overall. Applicants that had been required to obtain a consent through an abatement notice or were undertaking an activity that they felt did not require a consent (e.g. modifying streams for land improvement purposes) were generally less satisfied.

The survey provides an effective means for customers to provide the Council with valuable feedback about the service they receive. The results could also be of value in providing individual officers with feedback on their performance and in evaluating the effectiveness of policies and plans. Establishing an on-line survey form, and extending the survey to include not only consent applicants but also submitters and those reporting unauthorised incidents could be explored as a means of expanding on this survey for future monitoring and reporting requirements.

Given the results of this survey are reasonably consistent with those of 2001 and anecdotal feedback in intervening years was also generally positive, it is recommended that a full repeat of this survey need only occur in another six years. The low cost, efficient method of carrying out the survey and reporting in-house, rather than using an external consultant, is also recommended.

Table of contents

1	Introduction.....	5
1.1	Purpose.....	5
1.2	Context.....	5
1.3	Resource consent processing performance indicators.....	6
1.4	The use of customer surveys by local authorities.....	6
1.5	Streamlining and simplifying of the Resource Management Act.....	8
2	Method.....	9
3	Results.....	10
3.1	Customer satisfaction with Council service during the preparation of their application.....	10
3.2	Customer satisfaction with the processing of their application.....	11
3.3	Customer satisfaction with the decision.....	14
3.4	Customer satisfaction with the costs.....	14
3.5	Overall customer satisfaction.....	15
3.6	Customer satisfaction by consent type.....	16
4	Discussion.....	17
5	References.....	20
6	Appendix I: Resource Consent Applicants Survey.....	21
7	Appendix II: Survey results for 2008/09.....	23
8	Appendix III: Graphs of results.....	25

Table of figures

Figure 1:	Principal components of resource management.....	5
Figure 2:	Application forms easy to follow.....	10
Figure 3:	Average customer satisfaction with the application preparation in 2000/01 and 2008/9.....	11
Figure 4:	The resource consent process.....	12
Figure 5:	Results of question 13 (Council staff kept me adequately informed of progress) and question 14 (Council staff were easily accessible, professional and helpful) respectively.	12
Figure 6:	Average customer satisfaction with the application processing for 2000/01 and 2008/09.....	13
Figure 7:	Average customer satisfaction with the decision in 2000/01 and 2008/09.....	14
Figure 8:	Charge for application was consistent with expectations.....	14
Figure 10:	Overall level of service received.....	15

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to discuss findings from a customer satisfaction survey of resource consent applicants who had been granted consents between 1 July 2008 and 30 June 2009 (excluding reviewed consents). The survey was conducted to gauge the level of satisfaction with the service the Council had provided in the processing of their consents.

This was a repeat survey of one conducted in 2000-01 and this report summarises findings of comparing the results of the two surveys. No surveys were conducted in intervening years because anecdotal feedback was that consent processes were working well. However, it was important to verify this position with a formal survey.

1.2 Context

The processing of resource consents is a core component of the regulatory methods the Council has adopted to implement the statutory requirements of the Resource Management Act 1991 and the objectives and policies of the regional plans (the *Regional Air Quality Plan*, the *Regional Coastal Plan*, the *Regional Fresh Water Plan for Taranaki* and to a lesser extent, the *Regional Soil Plan*). These plans aim to deliver to the Taranaki community, efficient and effective management of the Council's functions and Taranaki's natural and physical resources (TRC, 2009).



The processing of consents, combined with consent compliance and enforcement is a key method of delivering on the Council's policy (Figure 1).

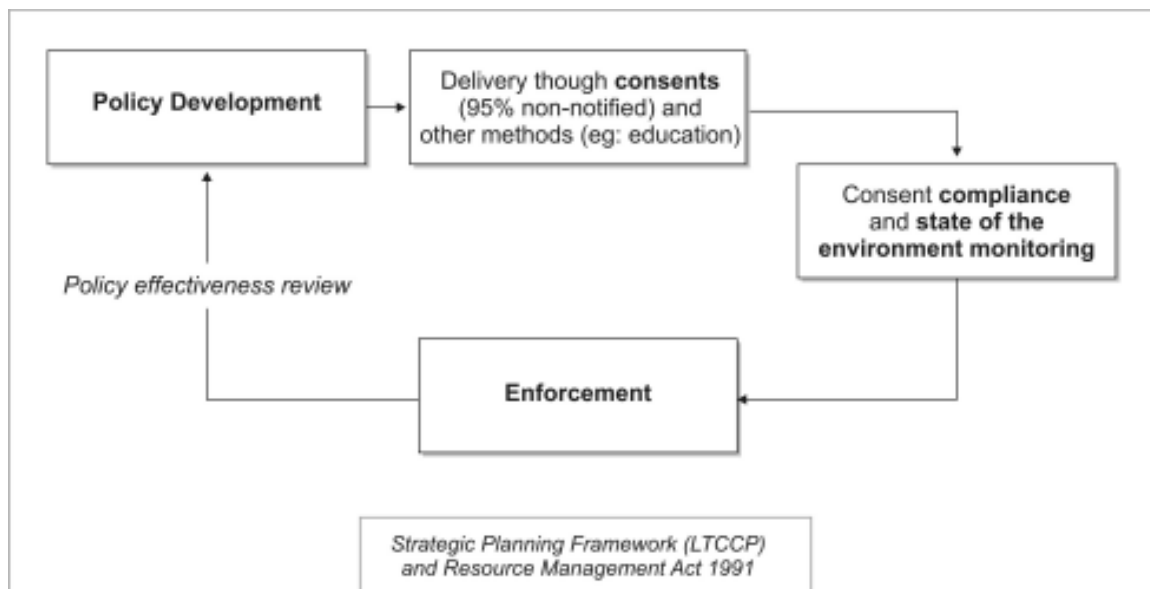


Figure 1: Principal components of resource management.

The Council's *Resource Consents Procedure Document* sets out the Council's guidelines in relation to the resource consent process and the procedures adopted by the Council.

1.3 Resource consent processing performance indicators

The Council aims to process and administer resource consents efficiently and effectively. The Council's Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) includes a 'levels of service' target of 100% compliance with the Resource Management Act 1991 requirements for the processing, administering and compliance monitoring of resource consents.

The LTCCP identifies the following targets for consent processing and administration:

- Provide appropriate and timely information in response to 100% of requests for assistance in undertaking or complying with the consents process under the Resource Management Act 1991.
- Process, issue and report upon 100% of accepted resource consent applications in compliance with the Resource Management Act 1991 and the Council's *Resource Consents Procedures* document (TRC 2007).
- Process and administer 100% of accepted resource consent applications in compliance with statutory timeframes prescribed in the Resource Management Act 1991 and the Council's *Resource Consents Procedures* document.



The Council processes approximately 400 consents per year.

Surveying applicants of resource consents is one means of measuring achievement of these targets.

1.4 The use of customer surveys by local authorities

While there is no statutory duty to do so, the Ministry for the Environment considers it good practice to obtain feedback on customer perceptions (MfE, 2009).

In a recent survey, local authorities were questioned regarding the practice and usefulness of satisfaction surveys for resource consent processes. Local authorities were asked whether they used satisfaction surveys to monitor their resource consent processes. In 2007/2008, 38 per cent (32 out of 84) of local authorities ran customer satisfaction surveys, up from 29 per cent (25 out of 85) in 2005/2006 (MfE, 2009). This included the following regional councils: Auckland Regional Council, Environment Canterbury, Horizons, Northland, Wellington, Otago, Hawkes Bay and Environment Waikato.

Several of these councils have key performance indicators (KPIs) that set targets for customer satisfaction, e.g. ARC – 'At least 75% of customers are satisfied with the resource consent process', Greater Wellington – '60% of recent applicants and existing consent holders rate level of satisfaction as excellent or very good'.

Of the 32 local authorities that surveyed customer satisfaction in 2007/2008, 23 reported that customers were 'satisfied' while six reported 'very satisfied' customers. This equates to 91 per cent of these local authorities reporting that most customers were either 'satisfied' or

‘very satisfied’. None reported that most of their customers were ‘very dissatisfied’, one reported most customers were ‘dissatisfied’ and two reported most customers were ‘neutral’.

Table 1 summarises features of the customer surveys conducted by a number of other regional councils. This highlights that a range of approaches are adopted by Councils, from on-line surveys, post out surveys and the use of polling consultancy companies. The surveys ask generally the same types of questions, but each survey has been tailored to each council and there is little consistency in methodology

Table 1: Summary of customer satisfaction surveys undertaken by other regional councils¹

Council	How conducted	Survey	Results and actions
Auckland Regional Council	Carried out by Key Research Limited. Extensive analysis of results. The survey costs the council about \$25K.	An indepth survey of applicants (involving a 10-15minute survey) relating to general paperwork and dealings with the council, how they were dealt with by council staff, feedback and assistance provided and overall satisfaction.	Enabled review of consenting process and the identification of steps to make improvements. Have revised consultant contracting requirements and now have clear expectations spelled out about customer contact.
Greater Wellington	Carried out by Neilson. Have carried out surveys in 2000, 2002, 2004 and 2008. Extensive analysis of results. The survey costs the council about \$40K.	This is an indepth survey of recent applicants, existing consent holders. It includes a separate, shorter survey for submitters and one for those who recently made a compliant about an incident. The survey does not ask customer satisfaction with regard to costs.	Four out of ten of all Recent Applicants and Existing Consent holders have positive perceptions of the service they have received overall. Submitters and Complainants have less positive views. Existing consent holders who have not made a recent application tend to have more positive views on overall service as well as on the individual aspects of the service.
Environment Waikato		Ten short questions, not broken out into multi-levels. Reported to Council as set of 10 graphs and short memo.	Found reasonable level of satisfaction with the consent process aside from costs.
Otago Regional Council	Survey by mail conducted by the ORC between 1 July and 14 August 2009.	Twelve short questions which include reference to hearing process. Asks about awareness of costs.	No results available.
Environment Canterbury	An online survey for applicants, consultants, submitters, and complainants.	The questionnaires do not cover costs but do include pre-application meetings, asking if and from where applicants sought additional information and what was most useful, how information could be improved, awareness of the opportunity for a pre-application meeting.	No results available.
Horizons	Survey consent holders, submitters and members of hearing committees.	Asked range of questions, including expectation of timeframes and asked to list things that Horizons could do to make the process easier.	Interim results found general customer satisfaction, feedback included a number of practical measures that could be taken to make the process easier from applicant perspective.

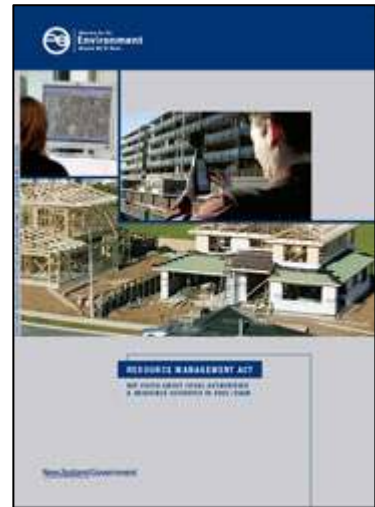
¹ Sourced from an ARC internal report by the Manager, Consents and Compliance Administration

1.5 Streamlining and simplifying of the Resource Management Act

The changes to the Resource Management Act will impact customer expectations of consent processing and the relationships of the Council with consent applicants. It will be important to start the customer relationship well and establish a common understanding of how the processing will work.

Customer surveys are likely to be an important means of the government reviewing the effectiveness of the amendments to the Act, although where customer satisfaction is already high the changes in the Act will not be reflected in customer survey results.

The Ministry for the Environment has already indicated that the next survey of local authorities will be delayed until 2010/2011 in order to capture the effects of the amendments.



The Ministry for the Environment regularly surveys local authorities.

2 Method

All applicants who had been granted consents between 1 July 2008 and 30 June 2009 (excluding reviewed consents) were sent survey forms (Appendix 1). In total survey forms were sent out to applicants for 329 consents. This included multiple consents on the one form where consents were related to the same activity.

The questionnaire included 18 questions covering four main topics:

1. *Service provided during the preparation of the application.*

Applicants were asked how easy it was to find out a consent from the Council was required, whether the process to be followed was made clear, whether the consent form was easy to follow, what information was required and whether it was reasonable.

2. *Service provided during the processing of the application.*

Applicants were asked how they found pre-hearing meetings (if held), the public hearing process, and how they were treated during any public hearing. Applicants were asked whether the time taken was reasonable, whether the RMA timeframes were understood, whether they were kept informed of progress and whether the Council staff were accessible, professional and helpful.

3. *The decision*

Applicants were asked whether the decision was clear, fair and reasonable, whether they understood the conditions of their consent and whether a good outcome was achieved at the end of the process.

4. *Costs*

Applicants were asked whether the charge for the application was reasonable whether it was consistent with expectations.

Finally, applicants were asked their view of the overall level of service received.

For each question, participants recorded how much they agreed with each statement, using a ranking scale from one to five with one meaning they 'Strongly Disagreed' and five meaning they 'Strongly Agreed'. A copy of the survey questionnaire is attached (Appendix I).

Consent administration staff sent out the surveys and collated the results (Appendix III). Further analysis of the data was undertaken by a Policy Officer in order to provide an element of independent examination of the data.



Consent staff are often the first point of contact for applicants.

3 Results

As of 14th October 2009, 95 survey forms had been returned, accounting for a total of 137 consents. This equates to a 42% return rate. This is a similar return rate encountered in the 2000-01 survey. The overall results of all responses to all questions is shown in Appendix II.

3.1 Customer satisfaction with Council service during the preparation of their application

The Council focuses significant effort on working with applicants in the ‘pre-application’ phase of the process. This is to ensure that the correct information is gathered, the appropriate consultation is carried out and that the right consents are applied for. Assessing customer satisfaction with this part of the process is particularly important.

Resource consent applications were surveyed for their satisfaction with the ability to find out information in the preparation stage of their application.

The majority of respondents (77%) agreed or strongly agreed that they knew, or found out easily, that they needed to contact the Taranaki Regional Council to obtain a resource consent for their activity. This compared to the 87% who agreed or strongly agreed to this statement in the 2001 survey.

Equally, 84% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, that it was made clear to them what consents were required and the process to be followed was made clear. This compared to 94% of respondents in 2001.

Resource consent applicants use application forms for their applications. Thus a key question in the survey was to determine if the Council’s forms were clear, well explained and easy to follow. 78% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the forms were clear and easy to follow. A greater proportion of respondents strongly agreed that the application forms were easy to follow in this survey than they had in 2001. This is valuable feedback as the application forms were reviewed this year.

An additional comment on one survey form highlighted the added value of Council staff assisting applicants interpret the information required on the form:

My application was for a renewal of consent to discharge. Some technical questions on application a little bit scientifically confusing but appreciated help from TRC officers.

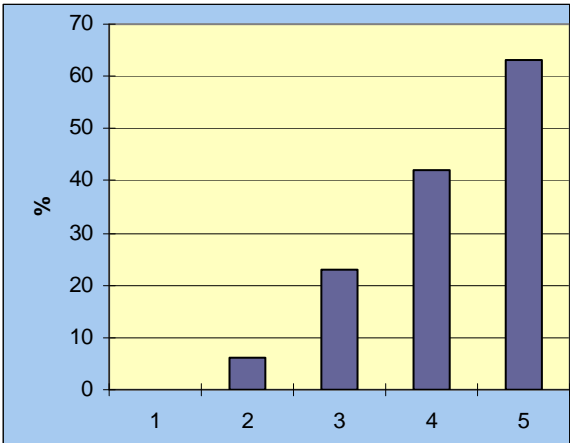


Figure 2: Application forms easy to follow. 1= Strongly disagree. 5= Strongly agree



Onsite meetings between Council staff and applicants help with the processing of the application.

The majority of respondents (80%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they were clearly informed of the information required to support their application, the best form to provide it in, and the reason it was required.

The helpful role of Council officers in assisting with the provision of information was particularly noted by one respondent:

TRC officer has been obliging in supplying information to assist in the consent application, as well as advice.

One respondent highlighted that not everyone is aware of the Council’s role and resource consent requirements:

The main problem I see is I have been in Taranaki all my life and don’t know the requirements of the Taranaki Regional Council. Maybe I haven’t read what I have been sent?



Application forms have recently been reviewed.

The average score for the survey undertaken in 2000/01 was compared with the average score for the 2008/09 survey. None of these averages were statistically different.

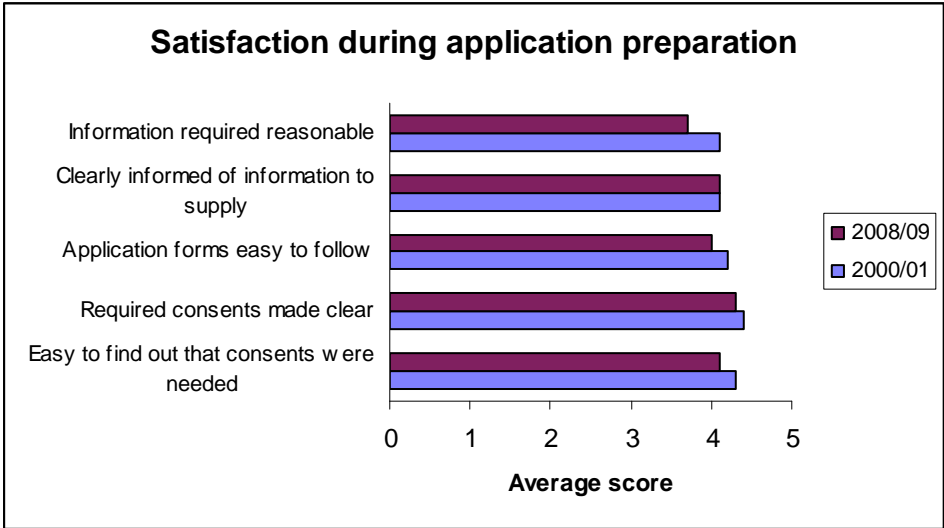


Figure 3: Average customer satisfaction with the application preparation in 2000/01 and 2008/9 (1= strongly disagreed, 5= strongly agreed).

3.2 Customer satisfaction with the processing of their application

The processing of a consent once received by the Council involves a number of steps depending on whether the consent is processed as notified or non-notified (Figure 4). The Council’s LTCCP target for processing consents is to achieve 100% compliance with the RMA requirements. The Council annually achieves 100% compliance with the RMA timeframes, but customer satisfaction surveys provide a means of evaluating if this has satisfied the

expectations of consent applicants. The time taken to process applicants is one measure of the efficiency of the Council’s resource management.

Over 42% and 40% of applicants agreed or strongly agreed respectively that the time taken by the Council to process their application was reasonable. Some comments from respondents were as follows:

I found the process was efficient staff were pleasant and helpful and the time frame was very reasonable.

I found the staff I dealt with to be very helpful and assisted me fully. The consents manager was flexible regarding timeframes and at no time did it feel like I was battling bureaucracy.

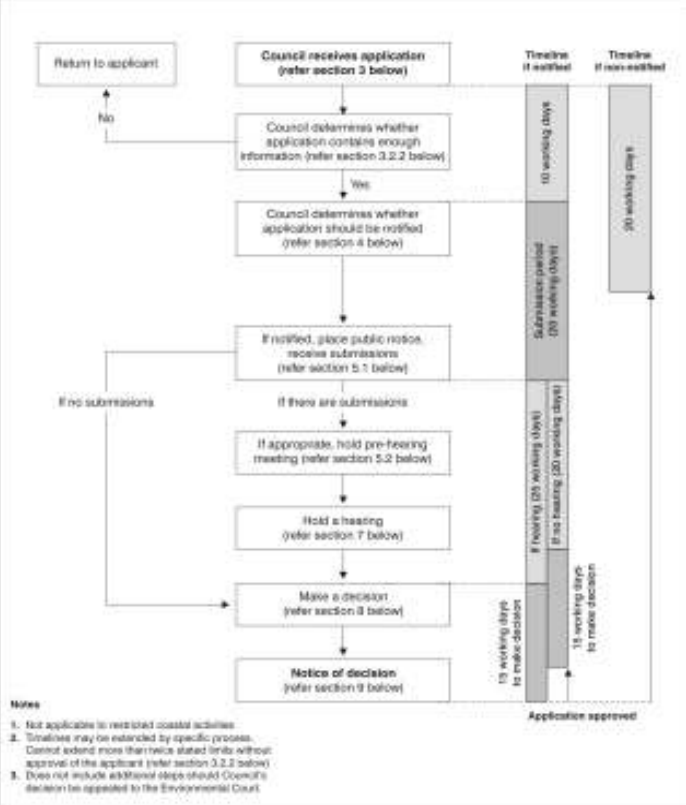


Figure 4: The resource consent process can be daunting to applicants without information and support from Council Officers.

For many applicants, the process of applying for resource consent is one that they only have to undertake occasionally, therefore, the approach and support provided for them by Council staff is a highly significant contributor to their overall satisfaction with the process.

Questions 13 and 14 of the survey specifically sought feedback on the role of Council staff in keeping the applicant adequately informed of progress throughout the application process, and the ease with which staff were accessible, professional and helpful at all times.

The results showed that overall applicants experienced professional and helpful staff (Figure 5).

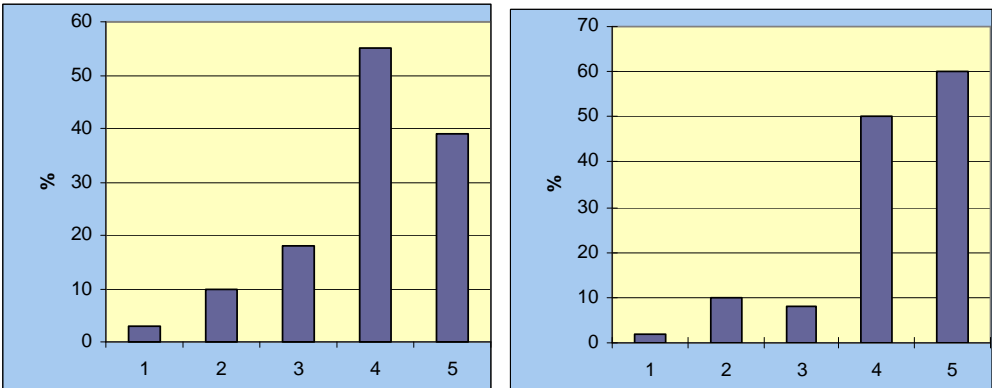


Figure 5: Results of question 13 (Council staff kept me adequately informed of progress) and question 14 (Council staff were easily accessible, professional and helpful) respectively. 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.

This was further reiterated by some specific feedback from applicants:

Todd Energy is very appreciative of the straightforward pragmatic approach adopted by TRC to consent applications. This contrasts with the approach adopted by some councils. Also appreciated the professionalism of TRC staff.

TRC staff were very helpful during consent preparation (explaining what was needed) and after the consents was granted (explaining what was needed in terms of a spill plan). The time taken to process the consents and review and approve the spill plan was well within my expectations.

One respondent expressed concern with some timeframes:

Everything is good except the communication was a bit light. After agreeing to a deferment of the renewal for monitoring purposes, I enquired 6 months later for an update on progress. This was not responded to for two weeks, so I put a request through to (the Consents Administration Officer) which activated a response. The monitoring was completed some 3 weeks after this followed by a draft officers report.

The number of respondents who replied to the question relating to their experiences with prehearing meetings was low (just five) and with the hearings (just 3 for question 7 and 8 for question 9). This reflects the low number of notified applications processed in 2008/09.

The Council undertakes pre-hearings for all notified consent applications on which submissions are received. The results suggested that applicants neither strongly agreed nor disagreed with the statement that a pre-hearing meeting for a publically notified consent was helpful, with the majority of respondents scoring this question as a three. This might be expected, as pre-hearing meetings perhaps provide more benefit for submitters and Consent Officers to clarify issues ahead of a hearing, than for applicants.

Again, the average score for the answers for the 2000/01 and 2008/09 surveys were compared (Figure 6).

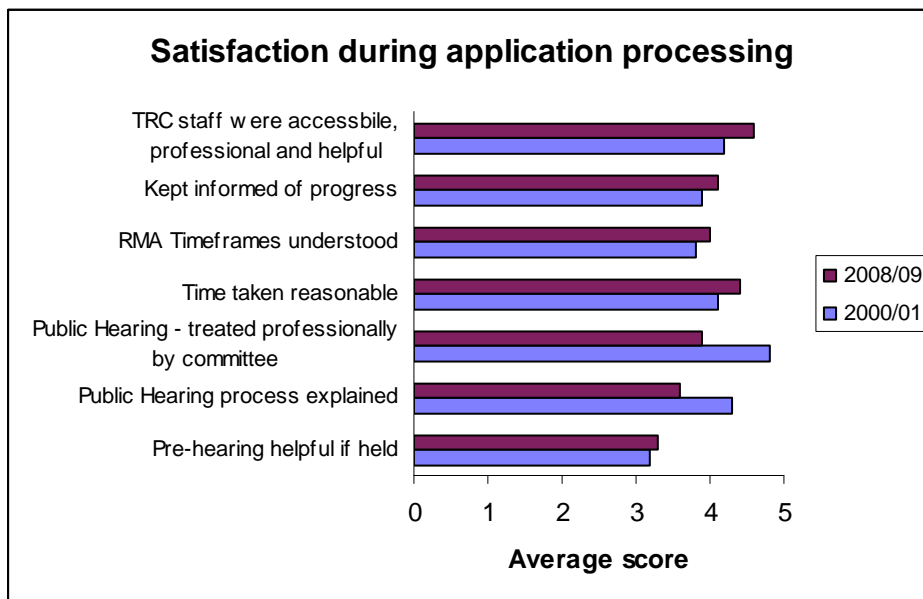


Figure 6: Average customer satisfaction with the application processing for 2000/01 and 2008/09

Analysis of these results suggested that some could have been statistically significant. However, the data was not 'normally distributed' and so did not satisfy the requirements for the statistical significant test. Furthermore, the differences in scores were not that significant or were for the question relating to the hearing process which had low numbers of respondents as there were very few hearings in the 2008/09 year.

3.3 Customer satisfaction with the decision

In relation to the consent decision and consent conditions (question 9), responses indicated that applicants strongly agreed (average 4.3) that the decisions made were reasonable and also strongly agreed (average 4.4) that they understood the consent conditions (question 10).

Similar results were recorded in 2001 (Figure 7):

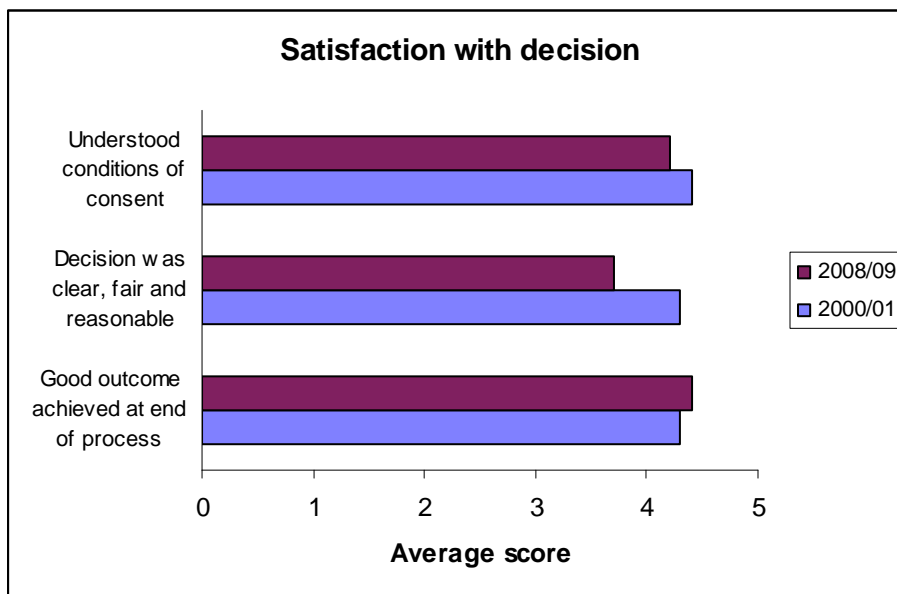


Figure 7: Average customer satisfaction with the decision in 2000/01 and 2008/09. 1=strongly disagreed, 5 = strongly agreed.

3.4 Customer satisfaction with the costs

The Ministry for Environment has recently conducted a nationwide survey into consent processing costs (MfE, 2009). The Council's charges are generally lower than other councils. For the type of consent issued most often by the Council, the charge is much lower than for other Councils. For non-notified discharge consents, the Council's median charge was \$350, compared to the national average of \$778, a significant 55% difference. This has been attributed to the Council's regional plans, processing systems, use of technology (tablets) and lower overheads.

Understandably however, when applicants

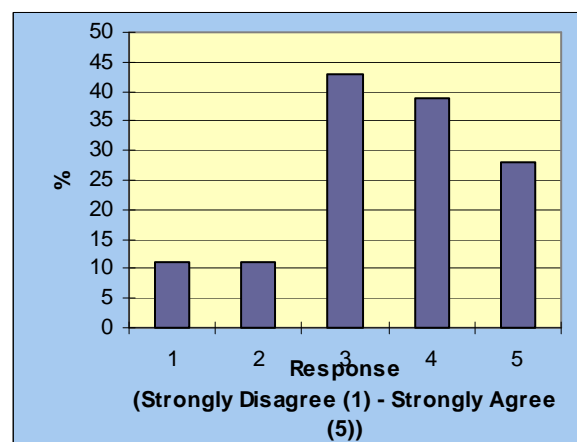


Figure 8: Charge for application was consistent with expectations

were asked to consider whether the charge for the application was reasonable (question 16), 16% of applicants disagreed or strongly disagreed, 31% were neutral and 52% either agreed or strongly agreed. The average score when responding to this question was 3.5.

When considering whether the costs of a consent application were consistent with expectations (Figure 8), the response from applicants as payers, mainly agreed (average 3.5).

However some of the respondents to the survey were less satisfied with the final bill, or requested a breakdown of costs:

.... Council staff inspected job for 10 minutes only, therefore applicant considers \$970 excessive charges. We have contacted the Council three times regarding the account but no one has the courtesy to return our calls.

Prepared to pay a fee but feel a little bit too much.

Quoted \$350 - \$400 for consent, total price was \$765 and no itemised account.

Would like to see the cost breakdown if it is not a standard charge

All survey respondents paid the consent processing invoices, and where accounts were questioned, Council Officers were able to discuss them with the applicants to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

3.5 Overall customer satisfaction

When asked about the overall level of service they had received (question 18), most applicants agreed (average 4.1) that the level of service was very good to excellent. 75% of respondents agreed that the level of service was very good or excellent.

A number of comments specifically referred to individual Council officers by name, particularly Inspectorate Officers who process dairy discharge consents. This highlights the Council's long held belief of the importance of face to face dealings with people, and the importance of open communication.

The following comments show the type of feedback provided in the survey:

I was highly impressed with the speed of processing this application, every aspect of communication, the lack of bureaucracy and the attitudes and working styles of all TRC staff involved. Thank you all and keep up the great work.

Key staff need a backup person to cover for their tasks when on leave or away for extended periods. Found the process to be a little too "bureaucratic". Could have used a little more commonsense to the changes in our application.

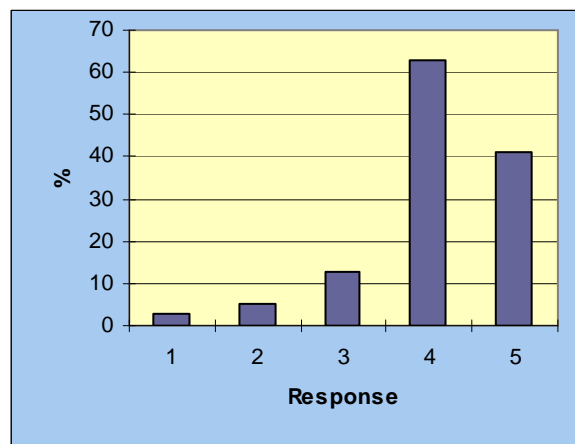


Figure 9: Overall level of service received. 1 – Poor, 2- Fair, 3- Good, 4- V.good, 5- Excellent

The average answer to this question in 2000/01 was exactly that found in 2008/09 (average of 4.1).

3.6 Customer satisfaction by consent type

The level of customer satisfaction is likely to depend on a number of matters over and above the service actually delivered. For example, applicants who were originally unaware of the requirement for a consent, or who were 'motivated' to acquire a resource consent through being issued with an abatement notice may report a less than favourable experience in the resource consent process, purely because they were unwilling applicants. Equally, those who were applying for standard or routine consents, such as agricultural discharges from farm dairies, would be expected to have had a more satisfactory experience with the resource consenting process, as the systems for processing routine consents are relatively streamlined and straightforward (TRC, 2007).

To examine this, the number of surveys returned per consent type were examined (Table 1), along with an indication of the number who had averaged a score of 3 or less (indicating that across the survey, the applicant had generally disagreed with the statements on the survey form, or had neither agreed or disagreed). The remaining number of surveys per consent type were those that averaged greater than 3, i.e. the applicant had either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements on the survey form.

This showed that not surprisingly, the greatest number of respondents were those with agricultural discharge consents. This is the consent type with the greatest number of consents granted per year. Agricultural consents are processed according to a set of standardised resource consent procedures (TRC, 2007a). Generally most applications are processed as controlled activities under the *Regional Fresh Water Plan* on a non-notified basis with few affected party approvals required. This gives the applicant certainty. The resulting customer satisfaction that this provides can be seen by the fact that 93% of respondents with an agricultural discharge responded with an average over three, indicating overall customer satisfaction with the process. A similar level of satisfaction was shown with those with non agricultural discharges.

Table 2: Number of respondents by consent type

Consent type	Number responded	Number with an average less than or equal to 3	Number with an average greater than 3
Ag discharge	41	3	38
Non ag discharge	30	5	25
Various wellsites	19	0	19
Coastal - protection	9	0	9
Culvert	8	2	6
Piping	6	2	4
Structure other	4	0	4
Dam/weir	4	1	3
Structure - bridge	2	0	2
Coastal - disturb	2	0	2
Groundwater	2	0	2
Water take	3	1	2
Coastal - bridge	1	0	1
Coastal - wharf	1	0	1
Realignment / divert	4	2	2
TOTAL	136	16	120

The high levels of customer satisfaction experienced by applicants of these type of consents could also be attributed to a general acceptance of the requirement for consents for these activities. It is worth noting anecdotally that when landowners were first required to obtain a dairy discharge that there was much opposition and certainly there would have been considerably less level of acceptance than there is today.

On the other hand, activities such as putting structures within waterways or for realigning or piping streams there is not the same level of understanding in the community of the need to obtain a resource consent. Therefore those required to obtain consents for such activities will generally have a lower level of satisfaction with the resource consent process. This is illustrated in the feedback on the survey form from the following applicants who had piped sections of stream for land improvement purposes:

I feel there was no need for the council to be involved at all. It has cost me a lot of money for nothing. I have got 1 hectare of land out which could have been in crop. I have been farming for 30 years always improving my properties and keeping the environment neat and tidy. This was a matter of getting cows out of a waterway the Council has slowed the whole job down.

Minor consent or no need for consent at all.

Just a load of rubbish and red tape and unnecessary.

This potentially highlights a need for increased landowner information about consent requirements for land improvement purposes or a reluctance to accept the need for a resource consent.

4 Discussion

The survey shows that most applicants responding considered that Council was providing a high quality consent service. This was particularly evident in the pre-application phase where Council Officers work closely with applicants to ensure the correct information is included in their application. Applicants were satisfied with how well they were kept informed of the process and with the accessibility, professionalism and helpfulness of Council staff. Equally, levels of customer satisfaction with the decision, the conditions of the consent and the time taken were all high.

While there was less satisfaction with the charges imposed on the processing this is not too surprising, and is consistent with the findings of other councils. Not all councils enquire about satisfaction with costs (Table 1) and some are starting to question the value of including in their customer satisfaction surveys questions relating to matters that are beyond the direct control of the council and focus instead on matters relating to communication with applicants.



Council Officers work alongside applicants during the preparation of their application.

The results were not statistically different from the survey carried out in 2000/01. This is reassuring in that it indicates that the level of satisfaction with the Council's resource consenting service is generally high.

Feedback from individuals highlights that having an avenue for feedback from applicants is valuable, and enabled the Council to follow up where applicants were not satisfied (e.g. feedback from one applicant led to Inspectorate staff re-sending his inspection information as it was apparent he had either not received it or had mislaid it).

The feedback on the forms highlights certain types of consents for which the level of understanding in the community of the requirements for a consent is not high (for example the piping or realignment of streams). It is recommended that guidelines for applicants be prepared for activities such as culverting, piping and realignment of streams to ensure that landowners are familiar with resource consenting requirements.

The feedback from applicants (and indeed if extended to submitters and consultants) not only satisfies a need to monitor customer satisfaction with the service the Council provides, but could also provide feedback on the effectiveness or efficiency of regional plans and then input into policy development. For example, one applicant made the following comment in relation to the use of riparian planting as mitigation for a stream piping which could be valuable input into future policy reviews on this issue:

The linkage to drainage-piping and riparian plantings, fencing, I feel is contamination. Each, in other words, should stand on their own and the assumed trade off can cloud the issues.

Another potential use of customer feedback information would be in providing that feedback to individual Council Officers. Some of the feedback in this survey specifically highlighted good communication skills by specific individual Officers.

The feedback was only sought from applicants. However, the Council undertakes its resource management function in a manner that 'includes and encourages participation by the regional community and takes account of the Treaty of Waitangi' (TRC, 2009). In order to assess the level of satisfaction experienced by the community when participating in the resource consent process, the feasibility of assessing the level of satisfaction of the consent process from the submitters perspective could be explored. This information too could be of value for policy reviews and would be a tool to monitor effectiveness of policy relating to the involvement of Tānata whenua in resource consenting processes. If undertaken through on-line web based feedback forms it would be a cost effective means of seeking and obtaining feedback.

Customer satisfaction in terms of ongoing management of consents, such as monitoring or inspections could also be surveyed in future surveys.

The survey was undertaken through post-back survey forms, and administered by Council Officers rather than an expensive external consultant. Carrying out the data gathering and reporting inhouse is a cost effective method of carrying out this type of customer satisfaction survey.

Environment Canterbury has an on-line feedback form on its website designed specifically to elicit feedback from consultants, applicants of notified consents, applicants of non-notified consents and submitters. Establishing such a system might provide a system for regular

feedback and a method for applicants or submitters to be able to provide immediate feedback that could then be followed up on. While applicants are welcome to contact the Council directly through phoning or writing a letter, having as another option a web-based survey form may facilitate communication with the Council. It is recommended that establishing an on-line web based system for all consent applications be explored.

Given the results of the survey are reasonably consistent with those of 2001, and anecdotal feedback in intervening years is also generally positive, it is recommended the next survey occur in about six years.

5 References


Ministry for the Environment. 2009. *Resource Management Act: Two-yearly Survey of Local Authorities 2007/2008*.

Taranaki Regional Council. 2007. *Resource Consents Procedure Document*.

Taranaki Regional Council. 2007a. *Farm Dairy Discharge Monitoring Programme*.

Taranaki Regional Council. 2009. *Long Term Council Community Plan 2009/2019*.

6 Appendix I: Resource Consent Applicants Survey

	RESOURCE CONSENT APPLICANTS SURVEY											
 <p>1) This survey relates to the application [s] described below. Where it relates to more than one application please answer the questions with respect to all the applications collectively.</p>												
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr style="background-color: #e0e0e0;"> <th style="width: 20%;">Consent No</th> <th style="width: 20%;">Application No</th> <th style="width: 60%;">Purpose</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">«Consent»</td> <td style="text-align: center;">«Application»</td> <td style="text-align: center;">«Purpose»</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Consent No	Application No	Purpose	«Consent»	«Application»	«Purpose»						
Consent No	Application No	Purpose										
«Consent»	«Application»	«Purpose»										
<p>Instructions Please circle the number that indicates how much you agree with the corresponding statement. If the statement is not applicable to the processing of your consent then circle N/A. If you wish to make specific comments relating to the statement on any aspect of the processing of the consent, do so at the bottom of the questionnaire. Please note the number of the statement if making a comment about the Council's service in that regard.</p>												
Statement	Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree		N/A							
1) I was aware, or I found out easily, that I needed to contact the Taranaki Regional Council to obtain a resource consent for my activity.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A						
2) After explaining my activity to the Taranaki Regional Council, it was made clear to me what consents I required, and the process to be followed was made clear to me.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A						
3) The consent application form was clear, well explained and easy to follow.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A						
4) I was clearly informed of the information required to support my application, the best form to provide it in, and the reason it was required.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A						
5) The information required to support my application was reasonable, including any requests for further information.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A						
6) If there was a pre-hearing meeting [for a publicly notified consent application], I found it helpful.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A						
7) If there was a public hearing, the hearing process was explained to me.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A						

Statement	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	N/A	
8) If there was a public hearing, I was treated courteously and professionally by the hearing committee or commissioner.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
9) The decision made regarding my application was clear, fair and reasonable.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
10) I understand what I am required to do under the conditions of my consent.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
11) The time taken by the Taranaki Regional Council to process my application was reasonable.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
12) I understood the Resource Management Act timeframes that were involved.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
13) The Taranaki Regional Council staff kept me adequately informed of progress throughout the application process.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
14) Taranaki Regional Council staff were easily accessible, professional and helpful at all times.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
15) A good outcome was achieved at the end of the process.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
16) The charge made by the Taranaki Regional Council for processing the application[s] was reasonable.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
17) The charge made was consistent with my expectations.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
18) The overall level of service I received was:	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	
Please feel free to make additional comments about the processing of your application						
<hr/>						
<hr/>						
<hr/>						
<hr/>						
<hr/>						

7 Appendix II: Survey results for 2008/09

		Easy to find out that consents were needed	Required consents made clear	Application forms easy to follow	Clearly informed of information to supply	Information required reasonable	Pre-hearing helpful if held	Public Hearing process explained	Public Hearing - treated professionally by committee	Decision was clear, fair and reasonable	Understood conditions of consent	Time taken reasonable	RMA Timeframes understood	Kept informed of progress	TRC staff were accessible, professional and helpful	Good outcome achieved at end of process	Charge for application reasonable	Charge for application was consistent with expectations	Overall level of service received
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Disagree	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	5	3	2	2	11	11	3
	2	14	5	6	13	7	0	0	0	4	3	7	9	10	10	3	10	11	5
	3	11	13	23	13	16	4	0	0	11	14	15	39	18	8	10	40	43	13
Agree	4	31	32	42	53	60	1	2	2	47	43	56	23	55	50	55	41	39	63
	5	72	66	63	54	46	0	1	6	53	71	53	48	39	60	60	27	28	41
	Count	133	116	134	133	129	5	3	8	116	131	133	124	125	130	130	129	132	125
	Median	5	5	4	4	4	3	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
	Average	4.1	4.4	4.2	4.1	4.1	3.2	4.3	4.8	4.3	4.4	4.1	3.8	3.9	4.2	4.3	3.5	3.5	4.1

Code:

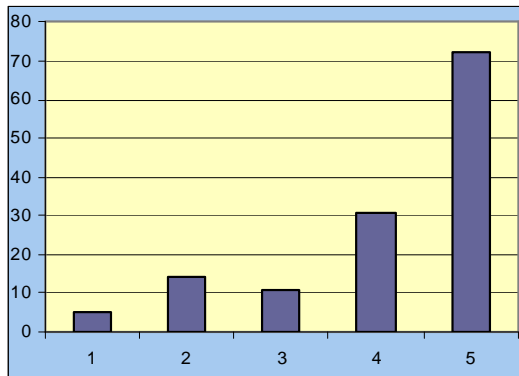
<10	
11-20	
21-30	
31-40	
>41	

8 Appendix III: Graphs of results

Results from the 2008/09 Survey:

Question 1

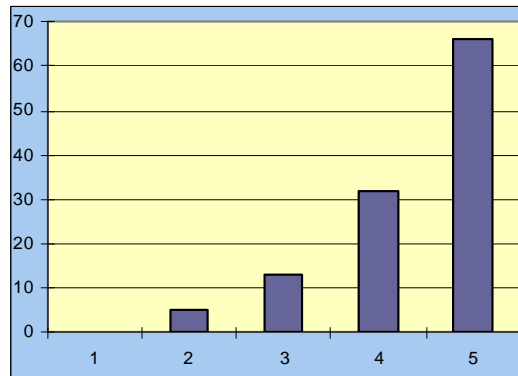
Easy to find out that consents were needed



Count: 133 Median: 5 Average: 4.1

Question 2

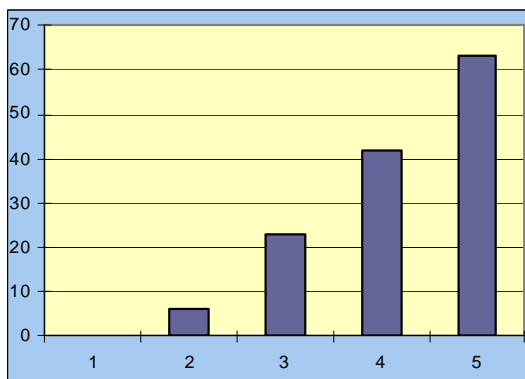
Required consents made clear



Count: 116 Median: 5 Average: 4.4

Question 3

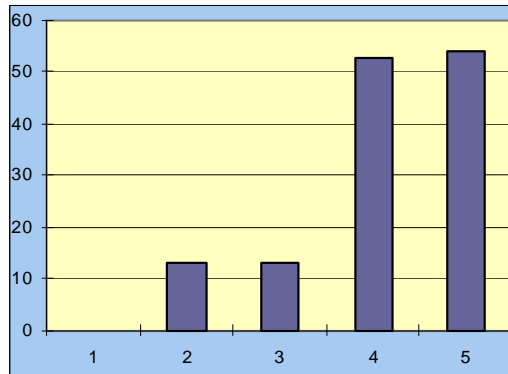
Application forms easy to follow



Count: 134 Median: 4 Average: 4.2

Question 4

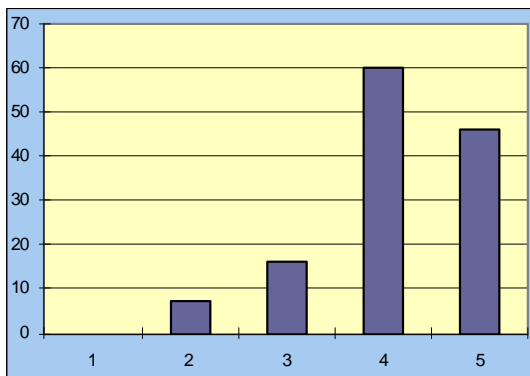
Clearly informed of information to supply



Count: 133 Median: 4 Average: 4.1

Question 5

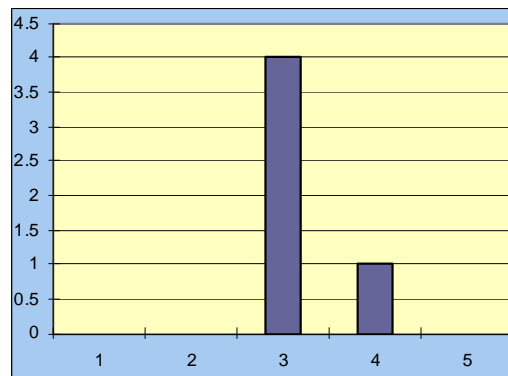
Information required reasonable



Count: 129 Median: 4 Average: 4.1

Question 6

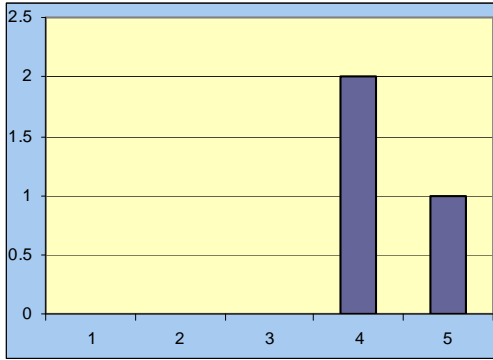
Pre-hearing helpful if held



Count: 5 Median: 3 Average: 3.2

Question 7

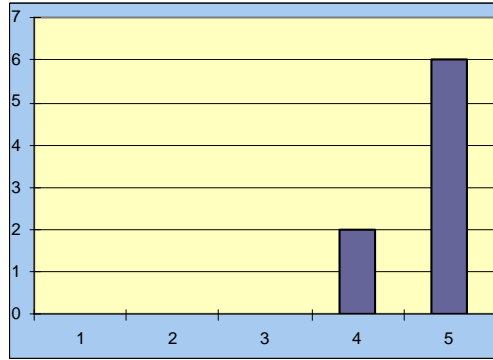
Public Hearing process explained



Count: 3 Median: 4 Average: 4.3

Question 8

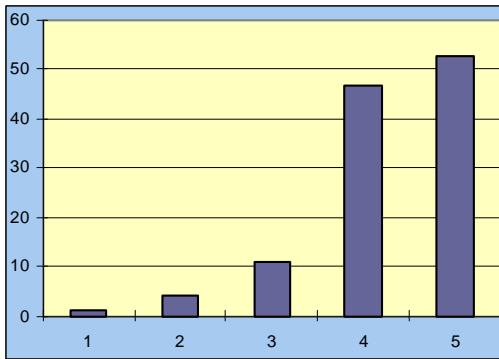
Public Hearing - treated professionally by committee



Count: 8 Median: 5 Average: 4.8

Question 9

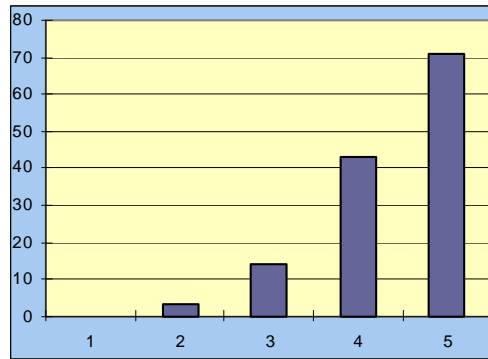
Decision was clear, fair and reasonable



Count: 116 Median: 4 Average: 4.3

Question 10

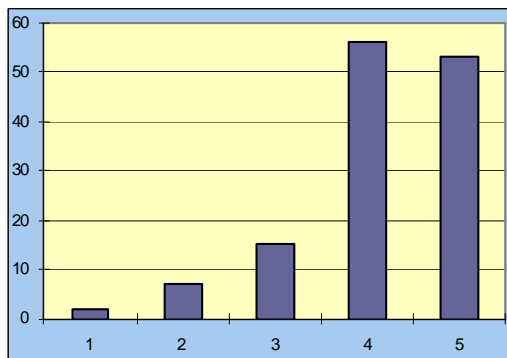
Understood conditions of consent



Count: 131 Median: 5 Average: 4.4

Question 11

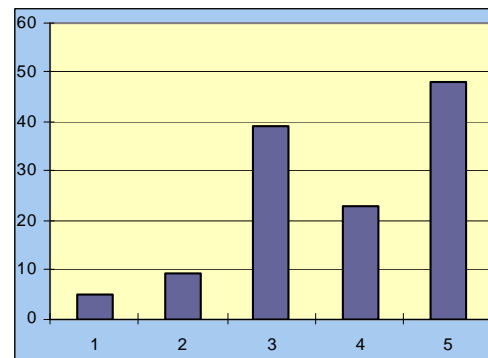
Time taken reasonable



Count: 133 Median: 4 Average: 4.1

Question 12

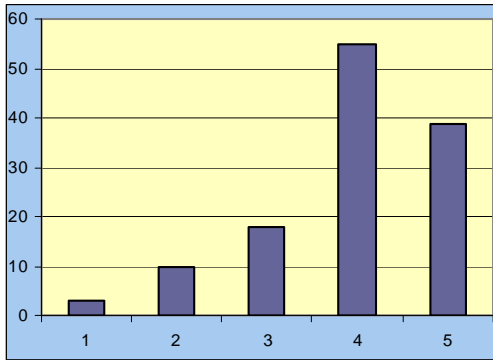
RMA Timeframes understood



Count: 124 Median: 4 Average: 3.8

Question 13

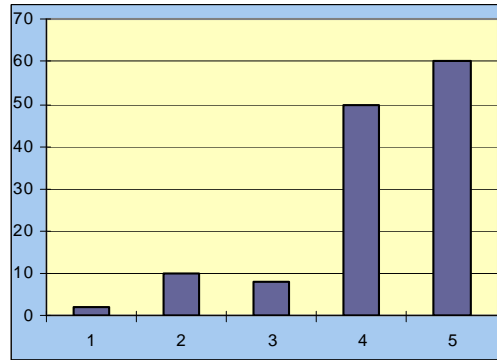
Kept informed of progress



Count: 125 Median: 4 Average: 3.9

Question 14

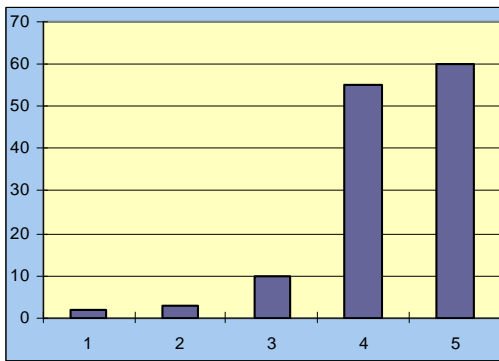
TRC staff were accessible, professional and helpful



Count: 130 Median: 4 Average: 4.2

Question 15

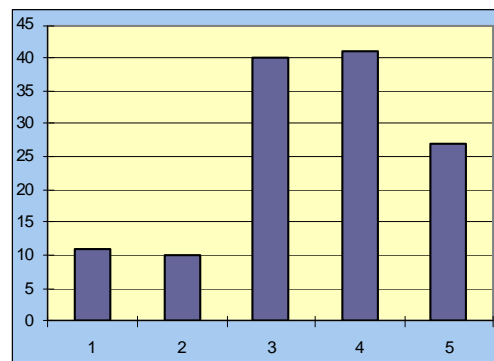
Good outcome achieved at end of process



Count: 130 Median: 4 Average: 4.3

Question 16

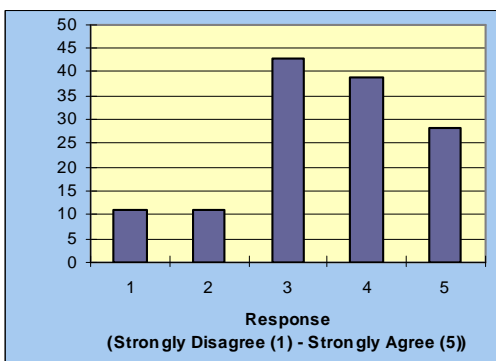
Charge for application reasonable



Count: 129 Median: 4 Average: 3.5

Question 17

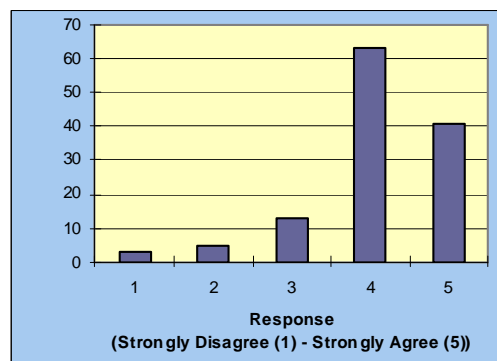
Charge for application was consistent with expectations



Count: 132 Median: 4 Average: 3.5

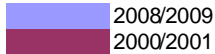
Question 18

Overall level of service received



Count: 125 Median: 4 Average: 4.1

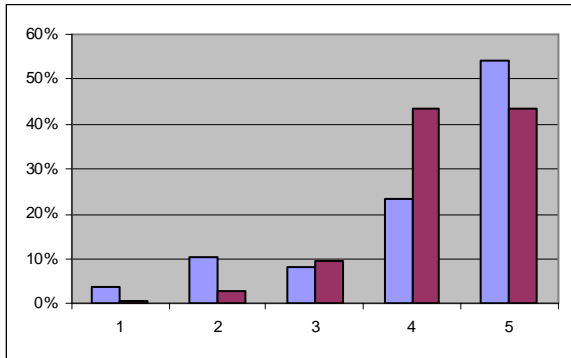
Key



APPLICANTS SURVEY COMPARISON OF RESULTS 2001 V 2009

Question 1

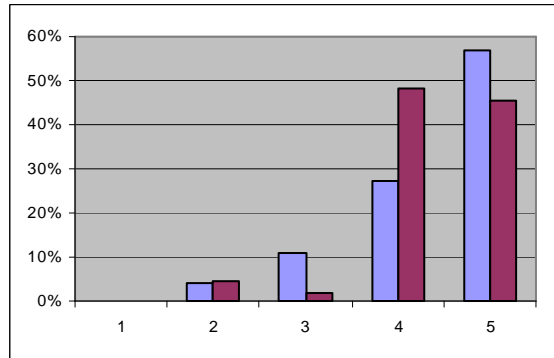
Easy to find out that consents were needed



2009 Count: 133 Median: 5 Average: 4.1
2001 Count: 156 Median: 4 Average: 4.3

Question 2

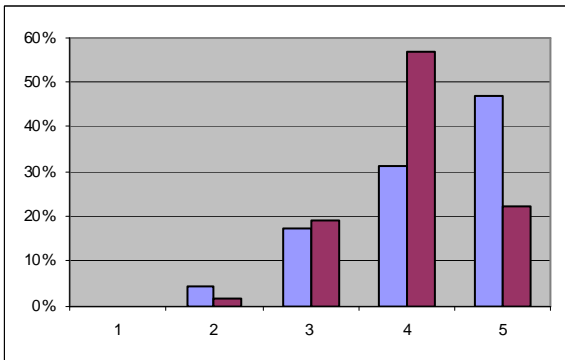
Required consents made clear



2009 Count: 116 Median: 5 Average: 4.4
2001 Count: 154 Median: 4 Average: 4.3

Question 3

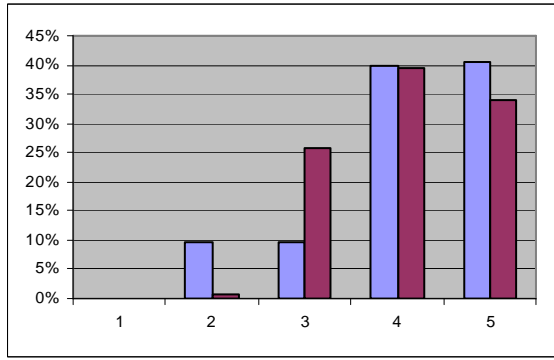
Application forms easy to follow



2009 Count: 134 Median: 4 Average: 4.2
2001 Count: 161 Median: 4 Average: 4

Question 4

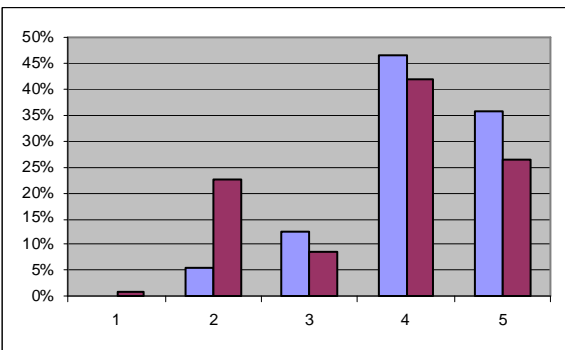
Clearly informed of information to supply



2009 Count: 133 Median: 4 Average: 4.1
2001 Count: 159 Median: 4 Average: 4.1

Question 5

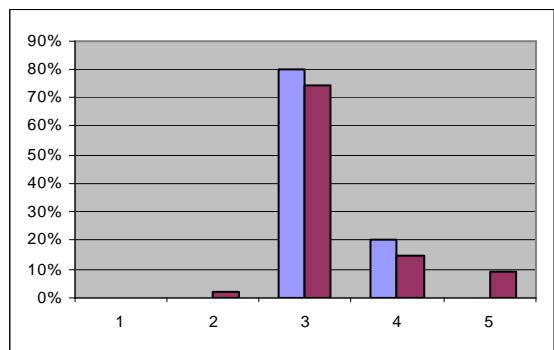
Information required reasonable



2009 Count: 129 Median: 4 Average: 4.1
2001 Count: 152 Median: 4 Average: 3.7

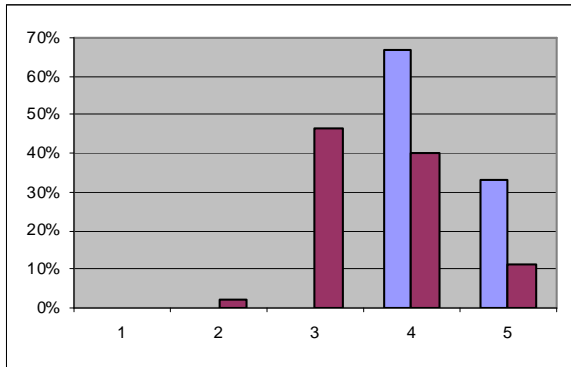
Question 6

Pre-hearing helpful if held



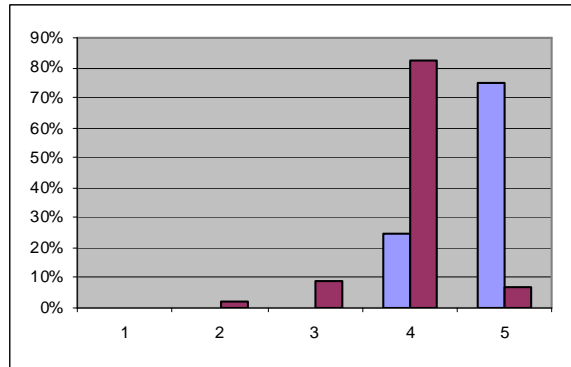
2009 Count: 5 Median: 3 Average: 3.2
2001 Count: 55 Median: 3 Average: 3.3

Question 7
Public Hearing process explained



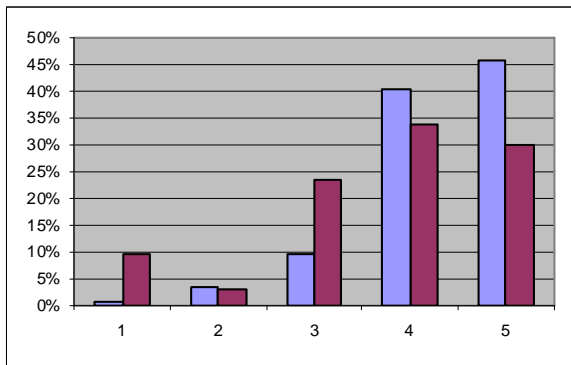
2009 Count: 3 Median: 4 Average: 4.3
2001 Count: 45 Median: 4 Average: 3.6

Question 8
Public Hearing - treated professionally by committee



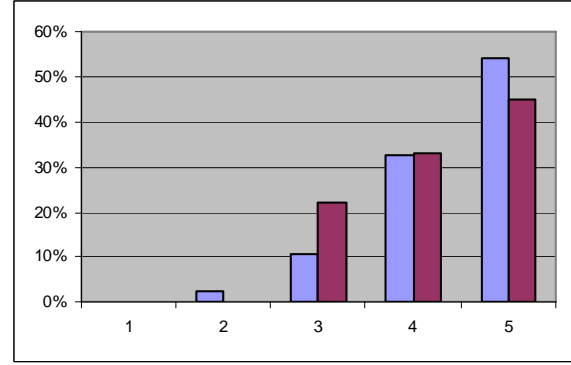
2009 Count: 8 Median: 5 Average: 4.8
2001 Count: 45 Median: 4 Average: 3.9

Question 9
Decision was clear, fair and reasonable



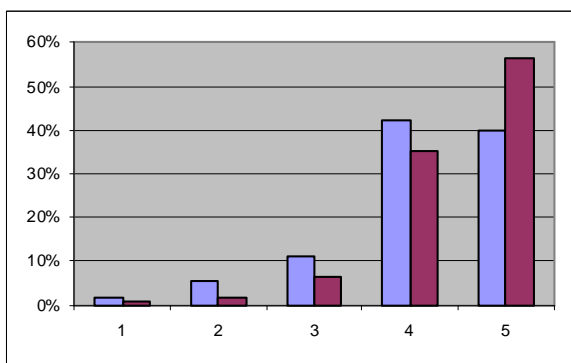
2009 Count: 116 Median: 4 Average: 4.3
2001 Count: 136 Median: 4 Average: 3.7

Question 10
Understood conditions of consent



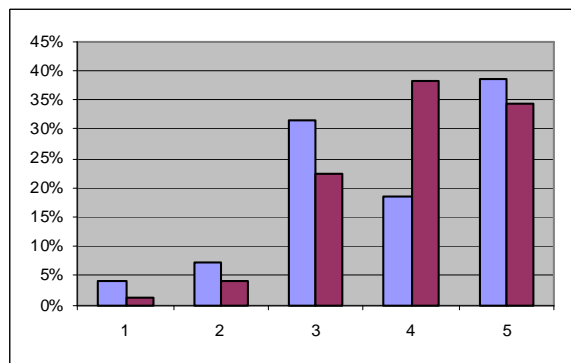
2009 Count: 131 Median: 5 Average: 4.4
2001 Count: 160 Median: 4 Average: 4.2

Question 11
Time taken reasonable



2009 Count: 133 Median: 4 Average: 4.1
2001 Count: 160 Median: 5 Average: 4.4

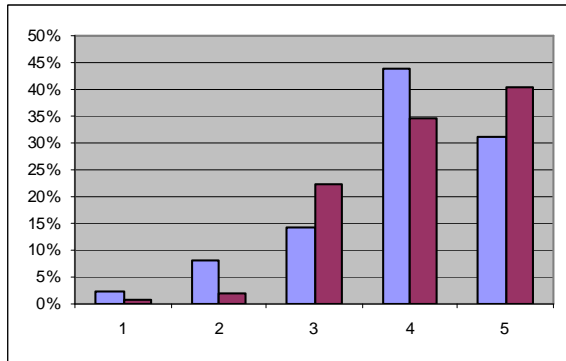
Question 12
RMA Timeframes understood



2009 Count: 124 Median: 4 Average: 3.8
2001 Count: 152 Median: 4 Average: 4

Question 13

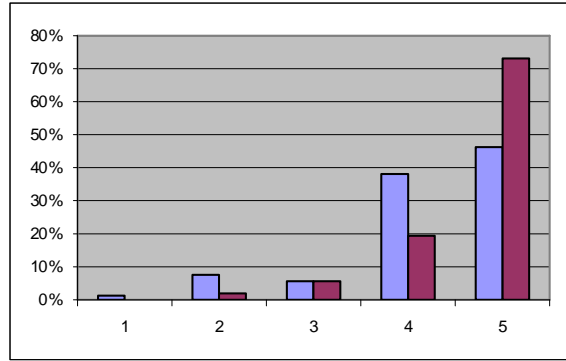
Kept informed of progress



2009 Count: 125 Median: 4 Average: 3.9
2001 Count: 153 Median: 4 Average: 4.1

Question 14

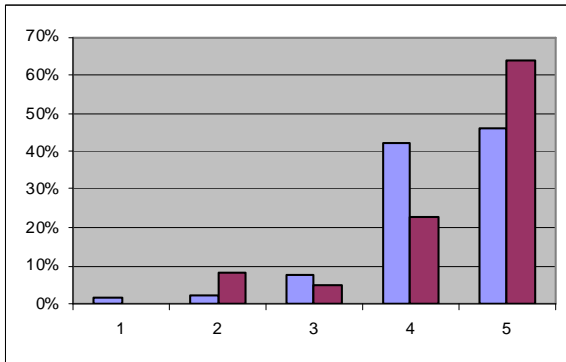
TRC staff were accessible, professional and helpful



2009 Count: 130 Median: 4 Average: 4.2
2001 Count: 158 Median: 5 Average: 4.6

Question 15

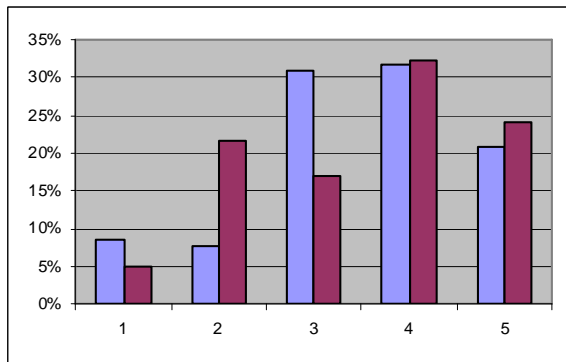
Good outcome achieved at end of process



2009 Count: 130 Median: 4 Average: 4.3
2001 Count: 155 Median: 5 Average: 4.4

Question 16

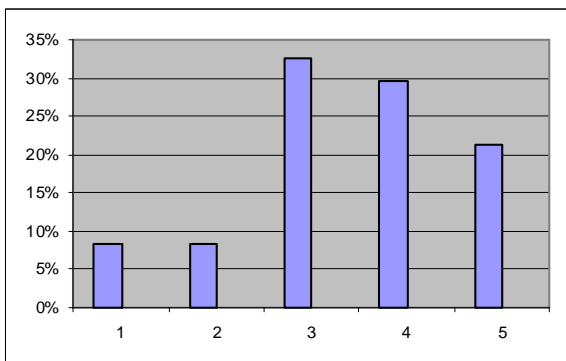
Charge for application reasonable



2009 Count: 129 Median: 4 Average: 3.5
2001 Count: 158 Median: 4 Average: 3.5

Question 17

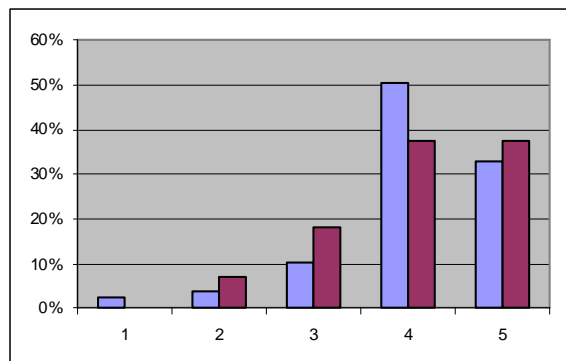
Charge for application was consistent with expectations



2009 Count: 132 Median: 4 Average: 3.5
2001 N/A

Question 18

Overall level of service received



2009 Count: 125 Median: 4 Average: 4.1
2001 Count: 160 Median: 4 Average: 4.1