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BOPLASS initiative reduces costs to ratepayers, improves GIS service provision



Tauranga City



"The BoP Local Authority Shared Services (BOPLASS) uses economies of scale to purchase data and have saved over \$1 million by working together. By buying an enterprise licence for GIS software they have saved another \$60,000. There are so many opportunities for this type of collaboration."

- *The Hon Maurice Williamson, Minister of Land Information, in a speech to The Local Government NZ Annual Conference, 27 July 2010*

Tighter collaboration amongst local governments is an idea whose time has come. Most local governments perform many similar tasks. By pooling resources and expertise, local authorities can realise significant savings by reducing expenditures and streamlining service delivery. Nowhere has this been more pronounced than in the Bay of Plenty with BOPLASS* and their GIS (geographic information system) initiative.

This initiative, which takes advantage of Eagle Technology's ELA (Enterprise License Agreement) programme, has two key benefits: it significantly lowers the cost of purchasing and maintaining ArcGIS software and it standardises Esri's ArcGIS as the GIS platform of choice for participating agencies.

"Much of a Council's work revolves around land- and location-based activities," says Ross Carter, Executive Officer of BOPLASS. "So having well-developed GIS capabilities is fundamental to Council operations. Areas such as managing infrastructure, land information, resource consents, emergency response and more all have a major location component. The Eagle / BOPLASS initiative will provide a standard GIS platform to foster cooperation amongst the constituent BOPLASS shareholders."

"We are looking forward to building a GIS community amongst the BOPLASS agencies," says Stephen O'Leary, GIS Manager at Whakatane District Council. "Shared services is more than just sharing hardware...it's about sharing data, sharing resources and most importantly sharing ideas. Already we have collaborated with other agencies on a joint procurement of aerial photography and have shared the costs of planning and data capture.

"We are also excited about migrating our GIS platform to Esri's ArcGIS," continues O'Leary. "We were not satisfied with the way our older system managed metadata nor with the difficulties in respect to sharing data with our neighbours. Right now we are in the process of moving our data to ArcGIS and creating some cartographic routines. Because so many of our GIS functions were people-based and platform-neutral, we have been able to start fresh and create applications that were just not possible before."

"Standardising the GIS operations across all the BOPLASS shareholders to Esri's ArcGIS platform, the defacto standard for GIS in New Zealand, makes good

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More Information:

For more information regarding Geographic Information Systems and Esri products contact :

Greg Dillon-Price
Phone: +64 9 639 0695
Mob: 021 979 845
email: gjp@eagle.co.nz

For more information regarding Eagle Technology's products and services go to:

www.eagle.co.nz
or phone +64 9 639 0600 (Head Office)

sense," says Greg Dillon-Price, Account Manager at Eagle. "Tauranga and Rotorua, among others, have been long-time users of ArcGIS. This agreement gives them and smaller Councils such as Whakatane, Opotoki and Kawerau the opportunity to tap into the latest generation technology, well-developed support mechanisms, regional systems and local expertise. They can get further, faster for a lower total cost of ownership. It is a win/win situation for both Council and ratepayers."

"Already all of the BOPLASS GIS community has had a chance to introduce themselves to each other and talk about their GIS initiatives and aspirations," says Greg Bennett, Land Information Services Manager at Rotorua District Council. "We expect to have more regular get togethers so that we can share skillsets and ideas. One of the other main benefits we see of the initiative is that, with the common ArcGIS platform, it will be much easier to share data with the other agencies. We had a certain amount of interaction with our neighbours before but now, with BOPLASS, we have a clear mandate to be more collaborative."

The GIS agreement follows closely BOPLASS' successful sponsorship of a 1Gbps fibre network linking the major councils in the region. "GIS is a bandwidth intensive initiative," notes Carter, "and the new fibre optic network provides a scalable and flexible infrastructure to support any future shared GIS services undertakings that result from the standardised GIS framework."

"Saving money on software licenses was the key driver behind the BOPLASS initiative," says Mark Thompson, Business Leader: GIS at Tauranga City Council, "and those savings have been significant for the smaller authorities. But we will also be able to save by reducing duplication of efforts within the various councils. Plus, with the new fibre backbone, we can share database hosting with other councils with virtually no degradation of service. BOPLASS has given us the opportunity to work together and share resources for the benefit of all."

* BOPLASS Councils include Western Bay of Plenty District, Gisborne District, Kawerau District, Rotorua District, Opotoki District, Taupo District, Tauranga City, Whakatane District and Bay of Plenty Regional.