

# WAITAKI TALKS. Water



Oamaru Reservoir upgrade

**Hi, I'm Gary Kircher, Mayor for Waitaki. This is the first in a series of articles which will look at what the Government's proposed 3 Waters reform might look like for Waitaki, so you get a picture of the decisions that our councillors will have to make, after we have had a chance to survey your thoughts on the matter.**

**Let's look at the 3 waters as they are delivered in Waitaki, and what any proposed changes could mean for us.**

## First, some background

After the Havelock North water contamination event where 4 people died, the Government is implementing new standards for drinking and wastewater in NZ and are proposing changes to the way the country's 3 waters (drinking water, wastewater and stormwater) services are delivered to the community. These proposed changes will affect councils and private water suppliers across the country.

Currently the 67 councils in NZ look after drinking water, wastewater and stormwater in their areas. Waitaki has 15 water supplies connected to 12,000 properties and 8 wastewater areas servicing over 8000 properties. Government is proposing that control is removed from individual councils and transferred to 4 main entities. Water services in Waitaki would be controlled by Entity D which covers most of the South Island, servicing the needs of around 900,000 people. The 3 waters proposal is based on the belief that having a larger entity deliver these services will result in more efficiency and resilience and enable the delivery of better standards at relatively little increased cost. We'll discuss the financial implications of this reform in another article.



## DRINKING WATER

**Across New Zealand there are various levels in the quality of drinking water and that is also the case in Waitaki.**

Our largest water treatment plant here in Oamaru is of a very high quality and that serves communities to the west and south as far as Moeraki. It's not quite the same everywhere in our district. Although all schemes have some form of treatment, there are still some supplies on either occasional or permanent boil water notices. Upgrades for those schemes are planned over the next 4 - 5 years.

There are a few drinking water supplies that we do not look after – private supplies, and these too will be affected by the proposed reforms. For any supplies delivering water to more than one household, they will have to meet the same standards for treatment and risk management as Council schemes.

### What changes are already here?

The new drinking water regulator, Taumata Arowai is here. The Water Services Bill is soon to become an Act of Parliament. These changes have already happened. When the Bill becomes an Act there will be tougher drinking water standards to comply with that will reach farther into the community and affect every council in New Zealand.

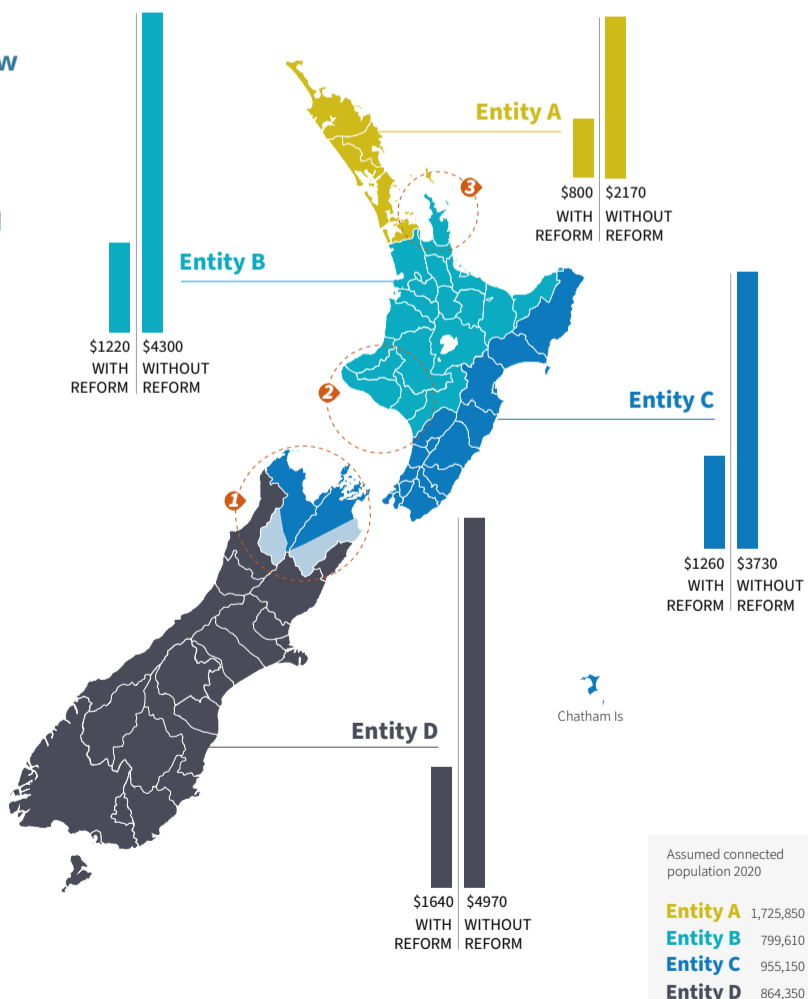
### How is Waitaki's drinking water delivered?

All Council supplied water is either on-demand or restricted, with some consumers (especially larger commercial ones, on meters. In addition to the Oamaru Water Treatment plant, we have 14 other schemes. The Waihemo Water supply feeds the Palmerston township, Goodwood and Dunback areas. And then most other areas have separate water supplies, throughout the Corriedale and Ahuriri Wards.

### What else is coming?

Stricter environmental standards, economic regulation, and possibly a change in the way water services are delivered, all of which means more cost and in Waitaki's case, that likely cost will be significant.

### Proposed new entities and government projected household costs by 2051



[www.waitaki.govt.nz](http://www.waitaki.govt.nz)



# Waitaki

DISTRICT COUNCIL  
TE KAUNIHERA Ā ROHE O WAITAKI




## WATER SERVICES IN WAITAKI:

**87%** of our population have access to a  **PUBLIC WATER SUPPLY**

individual **WATER SUPPLIES**



[10 restricted water supplies and 5 on-demand water supplies]

**63%** of our population have access to a  **PUBLIC RETICULATED WASTE WATER SYSTEM**



**8 WASTE WATER SYSTEMS** at

Duntroon, Kurow, Lake Ōhau, Moeraki, Ōamaru, Ōmārama, Otematata & Palmerston.



## WASTEWATER

*Most of us don't think too long or hard about wastewater; you flush your toilet and the problem goes away!*

### Here's some background on how the system works in Waitaki

There are a total of 200km of sewer pipes with 29 sewer pumping stations transporting the sewage away from all of the connected properties. From your place, it goes to one of eight treatment plants throughout the district. In total, they treat the effluent from approximately 7500 properties. The bulk of these plants treat the effluent by using oxidation ponds and discharge to land by either soakage trenches or irrigation.

### New regulations are coming

Under current regulations we're in good shape, but this is about to change as new, higher standards are coming which will alter

how and where waste water is discharged. These changes may not be that far away, so we need to start thinking about them now.

Ōamaru's wastewater treatment plant treats about 85% of the district's wastewater, with the treated effluent discharging to land, before going into a stream and from there into the sea just 50m away. At the moment that meets the current resource consent standards but it's not going to be acceptable in the future. We are going to have to make major changes to our plant to increase the treatment of water, and then it will be clean enough to be discharged to soak into the land. The reality is that the new standards will require all plants to

have the discharged waste water treated to a higher level than it is now. And that's going to be expensive. However, in Waitaki we have updated a number of our treatment plants recently to discharge to land, so we are in a relatively good spot right now compared to many Councils.

What may be an even greater cost is the potential reduction in the number of septic tanks in more remote communities, with wastewater instead being piped to existing or new wastewater treatment plants. If this is caused by the higher standards, we won't have any choice on whether we comply or not – it will be a case of how we make that happen at an affordable cost to our community.



## STORMWATER

*In Waitaki not many of our towns have stormwater systems, and for those which do, the systems are very small.*

### What do we provide?

Ōhau, Ōmārama, Weston, Kurow and Moeraki have small systems and Palmerston has a few manholes and pipes taking stormwater away from some streets. Otematata and Ōamaru are the two towns that have more substantial systems. In other places we use mud tanks (where water is able to soak into the surrounding ground) and culverts to get the water away from the towns. These are looked after predominantly by the Council's roading team rather than our water team, due to them generally being part of the roading system.

### So what's the proposal?

Under the 3 waters reform proposals, not a lot is known yet about the changes to stormwater. Very little stormwater is currently treated in New Zealand before it is released to the environment, so the risk to land, and wildlife including fish is higher than it should be. This is often due to contaminants and heavy metals washing off properties and roads and into waterways.

Added to this there is climate change and the heavier rainfalls this is bringing, meaning more water in catchments,

when a good number of our systems are already struggling.

These are aspects where we know change is needed. We need to build stormwater systems where we currently don't have any, we need to increase the capacity of our stormwater systems in a number of places, and we will likely need to treat at least some of that water to remove pollutants before it can be discharged to a water body, be it a creek, stream, river, and even just a gully.



Ōamaru Water Treatment Plant upgrade



Laying the Ōamaru to Hampden pipeline

*In the next article we will look at the proposed governance structure of the reforms, the financial implications and what new standards could mean for septic tank users and small suppliers.*

For more information on the Government's proposed 3 Waters reform: [threewaters.govt.nz](http://threewaters.govt.nz)