

WAIKATO REGIONAL FRESHWATER DISCUSSION

MATAPAKI WAI MĀORI KI WAIKATO



FRESHWATER: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Feedback on how Waikato's fresh water should be managed into the future will be the platform to kick-start planning for a 30-50 year strategy.

At the end of June, Waikato regional councillors endorsed an issues and opportunities paper which looks at a wide range of water quality and allocation issues, but does not advocate any particular approach at present.

The paper covers a wide range of subjects and ideas about future approaches, which will be the basis for a detailed freshwater strategy.

Development of the strategy will begin following the local body elections in October.

BY THE NUMBERS

We sent our *Let's talk water | Me kōrero e tātou mō te wai* document to more than 400 stakeholders in March to ensure a full range of voices, views and informed opinions contributed to discussion around freshwater management.

We subsequently met with iwi Māori, industry, local government and other stakeholders in the region, with their feedback informing the final issues and opportunities paper.



17 organisations provided written feedback



9 individuals wrote to us



48 meetings were held with regional stakeholders

WHAT YOU SAID

Waikato water is critical to the interests of the regional community, both urban and rural, and the nation as a whole.

It's been of little surprise to us, therefore, that we received such considered feedback from regional and national organisations, as well as individuals from the Waikato.

Here's a snapshot of what you told us.

SUPPORT FOR THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

There has been unanimous support from meetings and in the form of feedback for this project to consider the future allocation of water well into this current century.

ADDITIONAL POLICY INSTRUMENTS

The call for a wider suite of policy options has widespread support. It is recognised that the regulatory tools have served well and point source discharges have either been eliminated or substantially cleaned up. But the current management framework has reached the limit of its effectiveness and new tools are needed to change the behaviour of urban and rural land managers.

We need to acknowledge that new mechanisms were seen as an addition to, not replacement for, regulations.

There was also a perception that economic uses of fresh water were the focus of the *Let's talk water | Me kōrero e tātou mō te wai* work and caution was expressed that ecological functioning was important.

THE FUTURE OF WATER

Assumptions on future trends for the state and use of water were accepted. This included recognition that information and bio-technology advances will alter the demand and the capacity to respond to future freshwater allocation. There was also wide support for the inclusion of changing climate influences on both supply and demand for freshwater.

‘FIRST IN FIRST SERVED’

The first in first served allocation method was seen as an impediment to the flexible and responsive use of freshwater, however caution was frequently expressed in regard to the need for an orderly transition to a new regime.

WATER QUANTITY AND WATER QUALITY CONNECT

There was wide-spread recognition that water quality and water quantity can't be separated. When limits to water quality are expressed as concentrations of contaminants, the size of the receiving water body and the concentration of the contaminant already in that water body determines the resulting quality. This then determines the resulting use of the waterbody.

WATER STORAGE

Water storage was seen by many as an opportunity that should be given more attention but should not be limited to just large scale opportunities, but urban and property scale storage too. This could include farm scale dams with associated wetland areas, and domestic rainwater tanks to enable demand to be shifted from times of low rainfall.

PRICING THE AVAILABILITY OF WATER, INCENTIVISING SMARTER WATER USE

Clear support was given for a volumetric charge on water supply in all urban areas so that individuals could gain benefit from their own awareness and behaviour changes. The idea of incentives for reduced water use was positively accepted at meetings. This extended beyond the pricing of volume extracted from a water body, but also to the volume required to assimilate a change on the strength of discharge contaminants.

THE NEXT STEPS

Blocks of work will be needed to inform the development of a Waikato regional freshwater strategy, to be completed by June next year.

This work will begin after the local body elections in October. It will look at:

- better information on the supply and demand balance and allocation pressures, water usage, freshwater climate science, measurement technologies data management and modelling opportunities
- smarter methods including analysis of options and access to allocation methods and economic instruments; and use of potential engineering options to shift demand and/or reduce intensity and/or reduce impact
- focused advocacy for legislative reform and ongoing decision making, and for funding of projects.

