

Three Waters Review: overview

What is the Three Waters Review?

The Three Waters Review was established in mid-2017 by government, alongside the Havelock North Drinking Water Inquiry, as a cross-agency initiative led by the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) to look into the challenges facing our three waters system; and to develop recommendations for system-wide performance improvements.

What do we mean by the “three waters”?

- The term “three waters” refers to drinking water, wastewater and stormwater.
- The regulation, ownership and governance of related assets and their management and service delivery make up a complex interconnected three waters system.

What major outcomes are we seeking?

- Safe, acceptable (taste, colour and smell) and reliable drinking water.
- Better environmental performance from our water services.
- Efficient, sustainable, resilient and accountable water services.
- Achieving these aims in ways our communities can afford.

What are some of the main challenges for our water systems and communities?

- Meeting community expectations for water quality, treatment and management e.g. issues such as storm and wastewater discharge onto mahinga kai.
- Meeting regulatory requirements for water quality, treatment and management.
- The ability to replace ageing infrastructure or fund and manage new infrastructure (by local authorities but also for rural communities including marae and papakāinga).
- Declining rating bases in some areas, high growth in others.
- High seasonal demand in small tourism centres.
- Adapting for climate change (including water shortages) and adverse natural events.

What is happening now and what are the next steps?

- The Government has recently agreed a roadmap for reform of the Three Waters system.
- The Government is advancing work towards new regulatory arrangements to ensure drinking water safety and improved environmental performance of wastewater and stormwater. It is expecting policy advice on these arrangements in mid-2019.
- It is also investigating high-level options for service delivery as part of a longer conversation.
- Ongoing policy work is being undertaken within a broader context of community well-being, financing and funding of local government, and how central and local government can work together to promote and enhance this.
- The Minister and the Three Waters cross-agency project will continue to engage with the local government and water industry sectors in particular on the nature and form of future water regulation.
- Iwi and Māori are critical to the Three Waters Review as Treaty partners, given their expertise in water matters, and their experience of three waters issues.
- Engagement with iwi and Māori is at an early stage and will take place in 2019 and beyond. The government is aware that Māori communities receive many requests for engagement and so it plans to use existing fora and mechanisms where-ever possible.

What is the relationship between the Three Waters Review and the Essential Freshwater programme?

- The Three Waters Review is a separate but related to the Ministry for the Environment's Essential Freshwater programme.
- Essential Freshwater is focused on establishing an integrated freshwater management system that ensures all discharges and water users are contributing to the achievement of agreed catchment and regional-level freshwater outcomes.
- Three waters questions relate to how best to achieve safety and improved environmental outcomes in relation to largely, but not exclusively, council-controlled drinking water, wastewater and stormwater systems.
- Emerging three waters regulatory proposals will be designed to be consistent with Essential Freshwater policy options. However, immediate concerns about the safety of drinking water and insufficient oversight of the *three waters* regulatory system require some proposals to be progressed as part of the *Three Waters Review*, as agreed by Cabinet.

Where can we find more information about the review?

Background papers, Cabinet papers and the latest research, presentations and updates are posted on the DIA website at: www.dia.govt.nz/three-waters-review.