


THREE WATERS 101.

The Government is proposing major reform of New Zealand’s drinking water, wastewater and stormwater system. Here LGNZ synthesises the issues, the opportunities and what it means for local government.


1. What’s the problem?

Councils currently own and operate three waters services, which cover drinking water, wastewater and stormwater. More investment is needed in water infrastructure to meet the environmental and public health aspirations of our communities. The Government has estimated that dealing with 30 years of systemic failure will require an investment of more than \$185b over the next 30 years.


This scale of investment would be extremely challenging for councils to fund on their own. Climate change will only exacerbate this challenge.



Significant investment needed in water infrastructure



Councils can’t carry future costs




The current system lacks:

- Economic regulation
- Consistent data collection
- Enforcement of standards


2. Government’s proposed solution

The Government has told us it wants to deliver water services more cost effectively. It also wants to deliver them in an equitable and sustainable way.


It proposes changing the whole system:




A new water regulator called Taumata Arowai




A smaller number of large, specialist water service entities




Water services are delivered on a significantly larger scale



Water entites remain publicly owned



Water services providers meet standards or face significant penalties for noncompliance




Entities have strong strategic links to councils and mana whenua


3. Impact on councils

The Government’s proposal would mean significant change to the delivery of water services. For a start, councils would shift their focus from delivery to kaitiakitanga of water services. Requirements on local authorities to ensure safe drinking water for private and community supplies would transfer to new entities.


For most councils, removing water-related debt from their balance sheets would improve their financial position. It would potentially create more opportunity to focus on delivering wellbeing to their communities.



Three waters kaitiakitanga focus



Water-related debt removed from balance sheet



Increased capacity to borrow to fund community services

We know there’s not universal agreement on the case for change. But to meet councils’ own RFI projections, spending across New Zealand as a whole would need to increase by 50 percent annually for the next 10 years. With strong regulatory enforcement, the picture would be very different for councils, creating difficult trade offs if large investments are required to meet water standards.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAN HELP SHAPE THREE WATERS REFORM.

What’s important to the sector in this reform?







-  Everyone has access to safe drinking water and the same level of three waters service.
-  Infrastructure and systems are resilient and well-funded.
-  Three waters are delivered in partnership with iwi.
-  Delivery is responsive to climate change.
-  Catchments are managed from the mountain to the sea.
-  Districts retain high-paying, skilled jobs.
-  Any transition is well-managed and people are looked after.
-  Local voices are heard and local priorities are responded to.

LGNZ is working for councils

Our work on Three Waters is guided by the principle that we need to seize any opportunity to create the best possible outcome for local government.

We’re using our influence to work with the Government on a model that better includes the perspective of our communities. Representatives from local government are helping to steer this work and pose the hard questions. We are also actively working with government on what a package to go with reforms might look like. We’ll work to optimise this package before decisions are made.

What the sector needs from central government

-  Transparency about the process and what’s on the table.
-  A robust transition plan that makes sure the benefits of reform are delivered.
-  Government to support councils so they can keep delivering. This means makes sure councils are economically sustainable without water.
-  A fair deal, including that councils are not financially worse off, and that communities are better off.
-  To support and grow effective local democracy.
-  That any new system reflects the relationship with mana whenua under Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Find out more

We encourage you to stay informed and up to date of the reforms as they evolve. We’ll be with you every step of the way. Here’s where you can start:

Read what DIA has published: www.dia.govt.nz/Three-waters-review

Check out the info on our website: www.lgnz.co.nz
Get in touch if you have questions: feedback@lgnz.co.nz

