

APPENDIX - Further information

About Greater Wellington Regional Council

Located in our capital city and including the Wairarapa and Kāpiti Coast, Greater Wellington is one of the largest and most diverse regional councils in New Zealand. We have core roles across public transport provision, environmental protection, regional leadership, and co-ordination. We are the only regional council with an operational role in supplying bulk water to our community.

Greater Wellington has had an evolving formal relationship with six mana whenua partners for over three decades:

- Ngāti Kahungunu represented by Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa;
- Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga represented by Ngā Hapū o Otaki;
- Ngāti Toa Rangatira represented by Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira Inc.;
- Rangitāne represented by Rangitāne o Wairarapa Inc.
- Taranaki Whānui represented by the Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust.
- Te Ātiawa ki Whakarongotai represented by Ātiawa ki Whakarongotai Charitable Trust.

Like other regional and unitary councils, GW has a legislative responsibility to implement Government direction through the resource management system. Partnering with us helps shape a strong, clear, and efficient system to support Government's broad policy direction.

In the face of a changing climate and more frequent and intense weather events, our regional environment faces significant challenges to the quality and quantity of freshwater and to our indigenous biodiversity. GW has made significant progress, through both regulations and relationships, to embed change that will ensure water and land use is managed sustainably.

Issues of significance for us to partner on

1. Support and enable the strong connection between environmental protection and quality fit-for-purpose three waters infrastructure.

Greater Wellington is one of six council owners of Wellington Water, and the only regional council in New Zealand to be an owner of three waters infrastructure. All six councils know that the current water management model is not working, and that change is needed to enable us to renew and fix pipes, upgrade drinking and wastewater treatment plants, undertake other asset renewals, install water meters, and build long-term storage solutions. Only then will we make any meaningful progress towards addressing the poor state of our freshwater, especially the intractable issue of *e coli* in our urban and rural waterways.

We need more ability to borrow and significantly increased income to service the debt. Councils currently face balance sheet limitations and very limited options for raising funds outside rates. We need Government leadership to enable and direct a new water infrastructure funding and delivery model.

The Wellington region's Future Development Strategy (FDS) sets out how we plan to deliver well-functioning urban environments in our existing and future towns and cities over the next 30 years. It notes that our region's various Long-Term Plans identify the level of three waters infrastructure spend over the next ten years to support the expected levels of housing and business growth. While our FDS supports denser, more compact, and mixed-use development styles (which mitigate the need for new infrastructure), the projected budgets are often what the respective council can afford and less than what is needed to fully fund three waters requirements.

REQUEST

We ask that Government:

- a) seriously consider how local government may have sufficient access to funding to enable councils to address under-investment, compliance with robust standards for water quality and quantity, and meet growth expectations.

2. Retain key aspects of the Spatial Planning Act (SPA) 2023, and its drive for integration.

Spatial planning and strategies have merit, ensuring that we build and develop in the right place with the right infrastructure. Spatial plans ensure alignment with infrastructure development and upgrade priorities and investment, especially in relation to three waters, rail, roads, energy transmission, local power generation and importantly climate and flood resilience.

We support the need for a regional planning committee to develop and deliver a spatial plan, with our Wellington Regional Leadership Committee (WRLC) providing for this in our region, including Ministerial and mana whenua representation. Through the SPA we have a legislative mandate for the work and the partnership with Government. It underpins our broad direction and ensures that the more detailed provisions align with it and are best placed to reflect and deliver on key outcomes. From this perspective, the SPA is very valuable legislation.

The WRLC proposes where to prioritise housing and business development, as well as investment in infrastructure to support this development.

REQUEST

We ask that Government:

- b) Retains key principles of the Spatial Planning Act 2023 and uses them as the foundation for driving investment into regional integrated infrastructure.

3. Keep the existing national direction under the national planning framework; extend implementation timeframes.

Water is one of the most precious taonga in New Zealand, and Greater Wellington supports the Government intention to clean up and protect our freshwater. Our waterways provide drinking water and support for industries such as farming and tourism, and are also valued for mahinga kai, education, tourism, and ecological health.

In our region, GW has created Whaitua Committees to develop Whaitua Implementation Programmes (WIP), to describe community aspirations for freshwater and set a platform for collective effort to improve the health of waterways (Whaitua is the Māori word for space or catchment). The WIP is implemented through new regulations and actions on the ground.

GW has just notified Plan Change 1 for our Natural Resources Plan, implementing the requirements of the NPS-FM and the WIPs for Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington/Hutt Valley) and Te Awarua-o-Porirua (Porirua Harbour). We expect to finalise the Plan Change by mid-2025.

While we are making good progress, the Plan Change process is very time- and resource-intensive, and requires extensive collaboration with partners, stakeholders, and the community. The current deadline (end 2024) is not achievable for Greater Wellington. We support an extension to achieve implementation by the end of 2026, in line with your election commitments. This timeframe would be far more reasonable and realistic and would go a long way to support enduring relationships with our mana whenua partners, the community, key business sectors and local councils.

We note your intention to “consider ways to rebalance Te Mana o te Wai to better reflect the interests of all water users”. We take this to mean that the existing provisions will be retained in part and clarified and strengthened in other areas.

GW can help redesign this process, and we offer our assistance to develop a range of options for decision-makers.

REQUEST

We ask that Government:

- c) retains the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management, extends the implementation deadline to the end of 2026, and accepts Greater Wellington assistance to clarify and strengthen the provisions.

4. Complete the National Policy Statement on Natural Hazard Decision-making

We support the submission of Regional and Unitary Councils Aotearoa/ Te Uru Kahika on the National Policy Statement for Natural Hazard Decision-making. New Zealand communities need this NPS to provide clearer direction and certainty in a very complicated policy and regulatory environment.

REQUEST

We ask that Government

- d) Introduces the National Policy Statement for Natural Hazard Decision-making.

5. Replacement for the Natural and Built Environment Act (NBEA) 2023, future matters for consideration.

GW acknowledges your intent to repeal the NBEA and introduce a fast-track consenting regime. While the NBEA concerned us on several fronts, it proposed useful changes to consenting, compliance, and enforcement, providing a wider range of compliance and enforcement options for councils. It also addressed some problems and loopholes with the current system. We ask that any replacement legislation brings forward these changes, which give councils the teeth to achieve the outcomes.

Clearly there is a swathe of opportunities for Government to implement change that will improve outcomes for communities and create the conditions for local government to be more effective and efficient in fulfilling our responsibilities. GW seeks that any reform programme related to local government is well connected, and considers the broad implications of change, to avoid unintended consequences and conflicting messages, and to streamline implementation.

REQUEST

We ask that:

- a) any reform programme related to Resource Management Act is well connected, and considers the broad implications of change, to avoid unintended consequences and conflicting messages, and to streamline implementation.