



Waikato District Council gives wastewater plan the go-ahead

There have been several high-profile wastewater spills into the harbour at Raglan.

Community reaction to sewage spills into Raglan harbour has seen Waikato District Council opt for a targeted rate to go towards the first phase in upgrading its sewerage network.

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The recommendation will see \$1.7 million spent for the first phase. Funding for the second phase will be part of the long-term plan discussion next year.

But it's going to take a decade to bring the number of wastewater overflows down to acceptable levels. And it will cost, say independent consultant Jacobs New Zealand, between \$74 million for medium-range improvements and \$134m for a top-notch system. Jacobs also found the district council to be the worst-performing council in the country on the measure of sewage spills.

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The first phase will look at condition assessment work, data collection and an education programme aimed at advising residents what not to flush.

This will drive a further increase in the targeted rate of \$68 per property in the district from the 2017 to 2018 financial year.

But there was apprehension over not consulting with ratepayers before increasing the targeted rate.

During the meeting, Councillor Jacqui Church questioned how it got to this point.

"I'm curious as to how the council gets into this situation when it's a core business?

"After three years, yes, we are probably really good at advising when we have spillages ... but comparatively, with the rest of New Zealand, we are not in a good space in terms of our performance."

Service delivery general manager Tim Harty said the trigger was the high-profile spills and not that council had under-invested in sewerage.

He said public perception over such spills was changing.

Waikato District Council has been marred by effluent spills at Tuakau, Te Kauwhata, Huntly and, most notably, Raglan.

In the last five financial years, there have been an average of 39 spills per year, across the district – or 4.3 spills for every 1000 sewerage connections.

On March 25, at the height of the Easter break, a failed pipe saw 38,000 litres of untreated wastewater pour into the Raglan Harbour, closing the harbour for recreation and fishing and infuriating locals.

Council received a formal warning in July from the Waikato Regional Council, but there have been two spills since then at the Whitley Street pump station and the Greenslade Road pump station.

Jacobs, in its Wastewater Overflow and Continual Improvement Report, found the Waikato council is the poorest-performing provincial district council in the country, according to the National Performance Review.

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