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Hawke's Bay
TODAY

Water inquiry focus on outbreak facts, adequacy of responses and adequacy of contingency planning when it resumes today

By Nicki Harper



The inquiry into the Havelock North water contamination continues today. Photo / Warren Buckland

The Havelock North Water Inquiry resumes today following an intensive first week of investigation to uncover the cause of the campylobacter outbreak in August last year.

By the end of the week it had been confirmed that the outbreak was caused by sheep faeces entering Brookvale Bore 1 via the Mangateretere surface pond about 90m away, washed in by heavy rain.

The Mangateretere Stream was a focus of the inquiry from day 1 when Hastings District Council water services manager Brett Chapman faced a day and a half of questioning about bore security and maintenance, a lack of record keeping and information sharing between the Hawkes' Bay Regional Council and Hastings District Council and delays in reporting.

Questions remained over whether the contaminated water got in via a defect in the casing of bore 1, and whether that indicated an overall issue with bore design and asset management in municipal water supplies - an issue that would be looked at in the second stage of the inquiry.

There was some talk of conducting further pressure testing on the bore casing to determine whether the water came in through a defect, although inquiry panel chair Lyn Stevens questioned whether that was a necessary cost considering bore 1 was set to be decommissioned when its 10-year consent expired in 2018.

This week, the inquiry is scheduled to look at the outbreak facts, adequacy of outbreak responses and adequacy of contingency planning.

Hastings District Council staff may be recalled, as could witnesses from the Hawke's Bay District Health Board, including Drinking Water Assessors.

At the conclusion of last week's hearing, attention began to turn to the efficacy and appropriateness of chlorine to treat drinking water.

Wellington city engineer Anthony Wilson said up until this event the only barrier to contamination of the water was a geological one, and as a result the community was carrying a higher risk than if there were multiple barriers.

In response Hawke's Bay DHB medical officer of health Nick Jones said to be properly informed it would be necessary to look at the risk of disease in an unchlorinated supply.

"It would be useful to see if there's more of a risk in large unchlorinated supplies. August was an example but we need to bear in mind that for small supplies UV and filtration can be more practical."

He said that from a public health point of view the big advantage to chlorinating was the ability to capture residual contamination in the reticulation, which travelled a long way and had the risk of breakages.

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When asked a similar question Drinking Water Assessor Peter Wood said that managing risks in municipal water supplies was a lot harder without chlorine.

On the other hand, chlorination could hide what was happening in the source water, and lead to an overconfidence in the infrastructure.

The inquiry panel is due to report back on March 31, but in the meantime the costs of the outbreak have amounted to about \$2.7 million.

The Hastings District Council has revealed it has spent nearly \$900,000 in investigations and legal fees, the regional council had spent just more than \$1 million and it had cost the Hawke's Bay District Health Board \$766,000.

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