

BUSINESS

Water crisis damages New Zealand's clean green image

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Chlorination is something regions around the country should expect as NZ becomes more urban. Photo / 123RF

By: Ruby Harfield

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New Zealand's clean, green brand may have taken a hit internationally after the Havelock North water crisis last year.

Marketing experts have highlighted how most international consumers generalise and how this could be detrimental to the country's pure image.

University of Auckland senior lecturer of marketing Dr Michael Lee said when people overseas buy New Zealand goods they think of pristine, clean and green.

However, when a crisis like this happens it is not good for the international brand.

People are not going to distinguish the place or region when they hear of issues such as contaminated water and will most likely generalise it to the entire country.

"One rotten apple will spoil the whole cart, it will taint the overall New Zealand brand."

It does not matter that it was a year ago because the association does not go away quickly, he said.

For the international brand, pristine water is ideal but because this is no longer possible, safe and sterile water through chlorination needs to be promoted.

This does not play to the country's unique selling point but the most important thing for consumers is safe water, Dr Lee said.

AUT senior business lecturer Sommer Kapitan, who has extensively researched consumer behaviour, agreed.

"Being able to emphasize that it is now safe. That clean, sterile image is much better than the association with poo water."

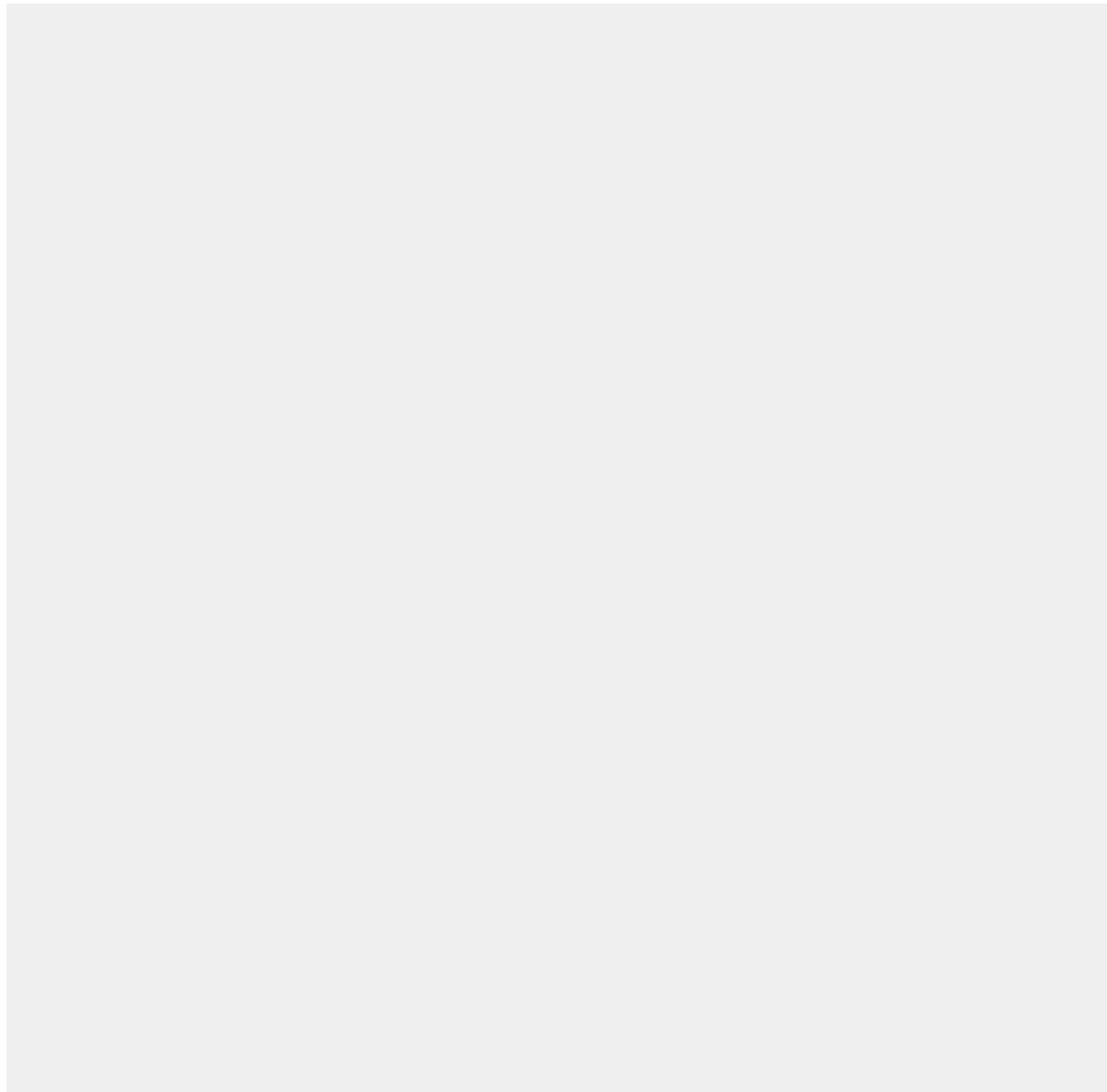
Chlorination is something regions around the country should expect as New Zealand becomes more urban, she said.

"Part of growth is chlorinating water. Pristine is a lovely idea but if it's not pristine it's got to be safe."

Hawke's Bay needs to rebrand away from pristine water and focus on the many other excellent aspects of the region, she said.

At the moment the emphasis needs to be that it is safe in order to reduce the connotation with contaminated water.

Origin Earth owner Joanie Williams is disappointed the pristine water brand has been tainted because that is one of the reasons she and her husband, Richard, set up their dairy business seven years ago.



AUT senior business lecturer Sommer Kapitan says chlorination is something regions around the country should expect as NZ becomes more urban.

Because of the contamination and subsequent chlorination of the water, the company has put in UV treatment and chlorine filters.

Cheese cannot be made with chlorinated water so this has added extra steps, costs more and has taken away from their pristine image, she said.

"We've ended up \$50,000 in debt through losses and treatment."

Thanks to their loyal customer-base the company and brand does not seem to have taken too much of a hit otherwise, Mrs Williams said.

"If I didn't have a plan to deal with the situation our brand would be under threat."

Mrs Williams will no longer be taking her water supply for granted but having UV treatment now means they are protected from future events.

Giant Brewing director and brewer Chris Ormond, who operates out of the Origin Earth factory, said he has fielded several questions about the water used in his beer because the bottles have Havelock North on the label.

Most people who knew a bit about the beer-making process would be aware that any water used to make beer is completely sterilised through boiling for at least 60 minutes, he said.

However, it was very concerning when chlorine was put in the water because beer cannot be made from chlorinated water, he said.

"We should be able to trust that the water is pure, I just don't take for granted anymore that the council water supply is 100 per cent pure.

"I never used to give the water source any sort of thought."

He was lucky that he used Origin Earth's water supply but the company was in the early stages of moving so would have to consider whether there was pristine water at the new site.

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