

6 December 2017

EMBARGOED UNTIL 2.00 PM

Major reform urgently needed in drinking water supply

Water New Zealand is urging the Government to implement the recommendations of the Havelock North Drinking Water Inquiry without delay.

“Safe drinking water for all consumers has to be our key priority and our system needs to be able to deliver that.

Chief executive John Pfahlert says that while many councils do a good job providing safe drinking water, the Inquiry has clearly identified systemic problems in the regulation and supply of safe drinking water, and the need for major reform.

He says unless there are significant changes to the way drinking water is regulated, there is a serious risk of another contamination outbreak on the scale of Havelock North.

“This report provides a blue print for the Government to move forward to ensure that our drinking water meets the needs of what New Zealanders and visitors should expect from a modern 21st century developed world water supply.”

In particular, he says the report highlights an urgent need for an **independent water regulator** be established with the power and ability to enforce drinking water standards.

“We support the Inquiry recommendation that the Government **create an establishment unit** to oversee the creation of a new drinking water regulator.

“The report also recommends that all public water supplies have **mandatory treatment of drinking water, including the use of a residual disinfectant.**

He says the report accurately identifies the lack of competence and training in the sector – something that the industry has known about for some time. It calls for a **mandatory training and qualification regime** to be established for all operators, supervisors and managers working in the sector. This is an initiative Water New Zealand is already acting on.

The Association notes that the Inquiry has included recommendations in relation to the **aggregation of water suppliers.** Given that the Inquiry has observed this would lead to improved compliance, competence and accountability, Water New Zealand calls on the Government to further investigate this recommendation with some urgency.

Mr Pfahlert said that this would enable the broad range of recommendations outlined in the Inquiry report to be implemented more effectively and efficiently.

“We simply cannot afford to have another water contamination event such as occurred in Havelock North. The outbreak resulted in many unnecessary cases of illness including loss of life, which has been tragic for those affected and their families. It has also tarnished our international reputation. Experts from around the world are now watching very closely to see how we respond to these findings.

“The inquiry has addressed all the key issues that have been concerning many in the sector for some time.

“It has produced a very thorough and well considered report. The inquiry asked the right questions and has come up with the right answers. We would urge that the Government implement the recommendations without delay because, if it does not, there is a serious risk of another similar contamination outbreak.”

ENDS

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