

Media Release

Rationalisation of water services supported

Rationalising water services and placing them at arms-length from local political control, as recommended in a new report is supported by industry body Water New Zealand.

However, the real concern Water New Zealand has is whether the reforms proposed by the expert group looking at local government infrastructure will be implemented.

“The need for reform has been known for a long time, but to date little progress has been made,” Water New Zealand’s Chief Executive, Murray Gibb said.

“Ratepayers and taxpayers will get improved services and better value for their money if the reforms are implemented. The proposals accord with industry best practice and should be supported,” he said.

Two other recommendations supported by Water New Zealand, are;

1. that a Minister with responsibilities for management of all water related issues is appointed, and,
2. where economically justified, metering and volumetric charging for water are implemented.

“Having a Minister would be a real step forward, if accompanied by the assignment of one lead Ministry with responsibility for all water policy because it would bring a more co-ordinated approach,” said Mr Gibb.

New Zealand has seven ministries, eleven regionally based regulators and 67 suppliers with responsibilities for water.

“Having 85 businesses providing water governance for a population of 4.4 million is plainly inefficient, and doesn’t allow for a coordinated or strategic approach. By contrast, Scotland with a larger population has just four businesses doing the same job. Just one business delivers water services across the whole country,” he said.

“Metering and volumetric charging has generally proven to be the most equitable way of funding water services, as has been found in Tauranga and Auckland.”

“The expert group has made nine other recommendations on water infrastructure and a number of others that touch it. Many suggest tweaking the system to help improve it. The delivery of good quality infrastructure services is dependent on good quality policy and regulation. The expert group recognised that both need closer attention in order to deliver customers improved services.”

“Water New Zealand policy supports continued public ownership of water infrastructure.”

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Water New Zealand is an independent, not for profit, association of water professionals and organisations. It is the country's largest water industry body, providing leadership and support in the water sector through advocacy, collaboration and professional development. Members are drawn from all areas of the water management industry including regional councils and territorial authorities, consultants, suppliers, government agencies and scientists. See www.waternz.org.nz for more information.