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Havelock North water contamination inquiry wraps with 16 draft recommendations

Nicki Harper of Hawke's Bay Today ([/author/?Author=Nicki Harper of Hawke's Bay Today](/author/?Author=Nicki%20Harper%20of%20Hawke's%20Bay%20Today)),
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Hastings Mayor Lawrence Yule spoke to Larry Williams about the recommendations
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A Government inquiry into contamination of a Hawke's Bay water supply has made 16 draft recommendations.

LISTEN ABOVE: Hastings mayor Lawrence Yule spoke to Larry Williams

The inquiry into the Hastings District Council's request to re-activate a Brookvale Road bore to augment Havelock North's peak summer water supply retired today with a set of draft recommendations.

Before wrapping up proceedings, inquiry panel chair Lyn Stevens QC thanked the Hawke's Bay Regional Council (HBRC) and Hastings District Council (HDC) for the efforts they made that resulted in the regional council dropping its prosecution of the Hastings council.

This agreement came after the first day of hearings on Monday, when pressure was applied by the panel to re-consider the charges.

After extensive questioning on Monday, the regional council agreed to withdraw the charges relating to breaches of the Hastings District Council's resource consent conditions for taking water from Brookvale bores 1 and 2 - opting to instead consider issuing infringement notices.

Mr Stevens said the panel was grateful to all who contributed to the resolution.

"In particular, we acknowledge Mr Newman's (Hawke's Bay Regional Council chief executive Andrew Newman) role, and the chance to discuss the issue."

Mr Stevens also noted Hawke's Bay District Health Board chief executive Dr Kevin Snee's leadership in brokering the water safety Joint Working Group (JWG), the formation of which Mr Stevens described as a "breakthrough".

He said he hoped such co-operation could continue.

"The panel has noted a level of defensiveness in some of the evidence filed to date.

"I'm not being critical of any organisation or witness but wish to emphasise the overriding interest with this inquiry is the public interest, while we look to fulfil the terms of reference to determine the possible causes of contamination."

A set of 16 draft recommendations were issued and Mr Stevens said the joint working group would be an important conduit to implement them.

The aim was to have the bore re-opened at the end of January before Havelock North water use reached peak demand in February.

Among the recommendations was a directive that the working group - comprising representation from HDC, HBRC, the DHB and drinking water assessors - meet regularly and share information of any potential drinking water safety risk.

Following inspection and any necessary maintenance or repair work on Brookvale Bore 3, the working group would be charged with approving its use prior to it being switched on.

For at least 12 months from December 12, the bore would receive cartridge filtration, UV and chlorine treatment), and a regime of regular monitoring be implemented.

It was also recommended that the HDC draft an Emergency Response Plan before Bore 3 was brought on line.