### Taumata Arowai – Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: What is the Taumata Arowai Establishment Unit?**

A: The Taumata Arowai (Water Services Regulator) Establishment Unit has been set up within the Department of Internal Affairs to carry out preparatory work towards the establishment of Taumata Arowai – the new Water Services Regulator – to ensure it is able to operate as soon as possible after the relevant legislation is passed.

**Q: Why is Taumata Arowai being established?**

A: The Government has implemented the Inquiry into Havelock North Drinking Water’s recommendation for the creation of a dedicated, centralised drinking water regulator, which the Three Waters Review also endorsed. Taumata Arowai will have the basic aims of ensuring New Zealand communities have access to safe drinking water and will have an oversight role in improving environmental outcomes from our wastewater and stormwater systems.

**Q: What will Taumata Arowai do?**

A: Taumata Arowai will administer and enforce a new drinking water regulatory system. This will include assessing and reporting on the performance of drinking water suppliers, except domestic self-supplies, to ensure New Zealand communities have access to safe drinking water, and to help prevent adverse events such as the 2016 Havelock North campylobacter outbreak. It will also perform important complementary functions relating to improving the environmental performance of wastewater and stormwater networks.

**Q: What is the significance of the regulator’s name, Taumata Arowai?**

A: The name of the organisation, contained in the legislation *Taumata Arowai – Water Services Regulator Bill* that establishes it, conveys the weight, responsibility and authority of the regulator. Taumata is a term associated with a summit, symposium or congress. Taumata invokes a sense of protection and wisdom. Arowai is a compound word composed of ‘aro’ and ‘wai’. Aro means to give attention to, to focus on, or be in the presence of. Wai is water.

**Q: What institutional form will Taumata Arowai take?**

A: Taumata Arowai will be a standalone Crown agent with a dedicated focus on regulating drinking water, and with an oversight role relating to wastewater and stormwater. A Crown agent is a category of Crown entity with a Minister-appointed board. Crown entities are part of the state sector and are owned by the Crown. The Crown Entities Act 2004 provides the framework for establishing, governing and operating all categories of Crown entities, including the degree of independence and ministerial responsibility for a Crown agent such as Taumata Arowai.

**Q: What will be Taumata Arowai’s statutory objectives?**

A: The *Taumata Arowai – the Water Services Regulator Bill* sets out Taumata Arowai’s statutory objectives. These include:

* protecting and promoting public health outcomes and drinking water safety;
* administering the drinking water regulatory system;
* building capability among drinking water suppliers, and across the water industry;
* giving effect to Te Mana o Te Wai, to the extent that Te Mana o te Wai applies to the functions and duties of Taumata Arowai;
* providing oversight of, and advice on, the regulation, management, and environmental performance of wastewater and stormwater networks; and
* promoting public understanding of the environmental performance of wastewater and stormwater networks.

**Q: How can all parties in the water sector, including water consumers, have confidence in Taumata Arowai’s regulatory activities?**

A: Taumata Arowai’s statutory independence, the expertise it employs, its proactive engagement approach with the wider water sector, along with a firm but consistent approach to compliance, monitoring and enforcement, will help it to ensure that all New Zealanders have access to safe drinking water.

**Q: When will Taumata Arowai come into existence?**

A: Taumata Arowai will exist as a legal entity on the enactment of the *Taumata Arowai – Water Services Regulator Bill*. This is anticipated to occur by the end of July 2020.

Taumata Arowai will become fully operational when the complementary *Water Services Bill,* which contains its detailed responsibilities and powers, is enacted. This is anticipated to occur in the first half of 2021.

**Q: Who will be responsible for drinking water regulation until Taumata Arowai is fully operational?**

A: Until Taumata Arowai is fully functional with supporting legislation, drinking water regulation will continue to be the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and District Health Boards.

**Q: What steps have been taken to ensure ongoing engagement with and understanding of Iwi/Māori perspectives in relation to drinking water?**

A: Legislation will specify that the operating principles of Taumata Arowai will include the need to partner and engage early and meaningfully with Māori, to inform how Taumata Arowai can give effect to Te Mana o te Wai, and understand, support and enable the exercise of mātauranga Māori, tikanga Māori and kaitiakitanga. Taumata Arowai’s Māori Advisory Group will provide support and guidance to the board, the chief executive and the organisation to assist in this.

One of the duties of the board is to ensure that Taumata Arowai maintains the systems and processes to enable it to act consistently with these principles, and to engage with Māori and understand perspectives of Māori. The intent is to ensure that Māori interests and knowledge are embedded throughout Taumata Arowai.

**Q: Is Taumata Arowai going to make drinking water standards more difficult to comply with and compliance more costly for drinking water suppliers?**

A: At present, the current maximum acceptable values of contaminants in drinking water, as stipulated in the New Zealand Drinking Water Standards, are not expected to change. In terms of compliance, it is envisaged that Taumata Arowai will:

* adopt a consistent approach to holding suppliers to account for providing safe drinking water;
* provide more practical support and guidance to suppliers to provide safe drinking water; and
* adopt an extension of existing requirements to most schemes that provide water to others. Domestic self-suppliers will be exempted from this requirement.

**Q. What support is Taumata Arowai expected to give small suppliers to assist them in providing safe drinking water?**

A: Within the context of its statutory obligations, Taumata Arowai will work with small suppliers to develop technical and other guidance to ensure compliance requirements are pragmatic and user-friendly. This may include taking an approach that is appropriately proportionate to supply characteristics and arrangements. It will also include a role in working across suppliers to share good practice, practical solutions, and to support more consistent approaches to staff training and recognition of skilled and qualified operators.

**Q: How will Taumata Arowai work with councils to ensure communities in their districts or regions have access to safe drinking water?**

A: Taumata Arowai will work closely and collaboratively with councils on developing approaches to legislative requirements under the new regulatory regime.

**Q: Will councils be responsible for making sure the output of small rural water schemes in their districts meets the drinking water standards?**

A: No, this will be the role of the regulator. Councils will however work with their communities to ensure they have access to safe and quality drinking water.

**Q: Why will Taumata Arowai be concerning itself with rural community water supplies when they’ve always been managed locally?**

A: Evidence indicates that some small water supplies face difficulties in providing safe and acceptable drinking water to their communities. Taumata Arowai’s starting position is that rural communities should not be second-class citizens when it comes to the safety and quality of their drinking water. To this end, Taumata Arowa will work with rural drinking water schemes to ensure they are aware of their obligations to provide safe drinking water, and that they have practical technical advice on how to affordably do so.