Three Waters Reform

Overview

From July 2024, New Zealand's three waters services, which are drinking water, stormwater and wastewater, will be provided by four multi-regional publicly owned water service entities. This will ensure all New Zealanders have safe, clean and affordable water services that meet their expectations now, and into the future.

Currently 67 different councils own and operate the majority of the drinking water, wastewater and stormwater services across New Zealand on behalf of their communities. These councils are facing significant challenges in the provision of these services including: funding infrastructure deficits, complying with safety standards and environmental expectations, climate change and supporting growth.

Changing the delivery of three waters services will achieve vital lasting benefits for ratepayers and residents. This will allow councils to focus on those services that help make our communities great places to live.

Structure of new entities

All four of the new regional entities will:

- Be collectively owned by councils, with mechanisms to protect against future privatisation. This includes a requirement to put future privatisation decisions to a referendum in the communities that receive these services.

- Be financially independent from local authorities, which will allow for both the entities and councils to invest more to meet growing community needs.

- Have highly skilled, competency-based boards to govern the entities professionally and independently. This will include a collective requirement for the board to have competence in the delivery of infrastructure and have an understanding of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, mātauranga Māori, tikanga Māori, and te ao Māori.

- Have joint, and equal, local government and mana whenua strategic influence and oversight of the entities and their operation.

- Have strong inputs for communities to directly influence the levels of services they receive. Including regular community engagement on planning, pricing and accountabilities. Each entity will create a public forum to influence its service delivery and will report on how public feedback was incorporated into planning and decision making.

- Be required to deliver services that support council planning and local aspirations for growth and placemaking.

In addition to these features, the Government intends to introduce an economic regulation regime and consumer protections to hold the entities to account. This will drive quality services at the right price for consumers. the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment will consult on these protections towards the end of 2021.

Find out more

For further information, visit Three Waters Reform Programme - dia.govt.nz