



Komiti Ngā Wai Hangarua| Wellington Water Committee

12 December 2022

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Actions to Manage the Region's Water Supply

Purpose of Report

1. To formally receive the background material presented at the Wellington Water Committee workshop on 30 November 2022.

Recommendation

That the Committee receives the background material on the management of water leaks presented at the workshop held on 30 November 2022.

Background

2. Every year Wellington Water Limited (WWL) closely monitors metropolitan Wellington's water supply and usage risk and advises councils (as the asset owner and funder) of the increasing risk of water shortages and what intervention measures are needed. This activity is part of our Drought Management Plan (DMP), a copy of which can be found on our website. WWL runs a communications campaign each summer to inform the public of the situation and intervention measures and to manage demand.
3. At the 29 July 2022 Committee meeting, we advised councils that the metropolitan Wellington area has seen a sharp rise in leakage in both the councils' public network and on private properties.

The issues

4. Water use has continued to rise over the past seven years and is now at an all-time high due to population growth and water lost via leaks. This year we have seen a sharp and unexpected rise in water lost through leaks since mid-2022.

5. Current (2021/22 financial year) estimates show on average 40% of the total water supplied is lost through leaks across the public networks and on private property. Due to the drinking water networks not being fully metered, percentages quoted for water losses are an approximation and should be considered within confidence limits of $\pm 10\%$.
6. We acknowledge that we need to do all we can to reduce water loss before asking the public to restrict their water use beyond the current standard summer restrictions once we get to the summer months and the rivers drop to low levels and the storage lakes supplement supply.
7. WWL has completed the setup of leak detection and leak repair teams. The leak repair teams are as big as the market capacity allows and are fully funded by councils. The company is investing in ways to increase leak-fixing capacity, but this will be a slow and gradual process.
8. This dedicated response to finding and fixing leaks on the public network is already paying dividends as the sharp increase in total water losses observed in the middle of the year of a 7.2% increase has now reduced to a 5.4% increase.
9. However, due to capacity and funding issues not all leaks can be fixed so we have developed and implemented a prioritisation system to make the best use of the resources we have and focus on fixing the biggest leaks that have the most impact on water supply. Many of these are underground and not easy to spot. The most urgent leaks are those that cause a loss of water supply to customers, and they jump to the head of the queue. Leaks losing more than 10 litres or more per minute are next, followed by leaks that are detected in areas that already have high leak numbers or where supply may already be running low. This means small leaks such as a leaking toby will be deferred for attention later when resources allow. Communications now become crucial to manage the public's expectations and we have already begun ramping up our communications on this.
10. As private leaks on private property are also estimated to be an issue, we have increased our efforts to find private leaks and work with the owners to get those fixed. To increase the focus on private leaks we propose a campaign aimed at the public to find and fix private leaks. This will be supported by communication about the situation, what council and WWL are doing, and what the public can do before we reach the very dry summer months when residents could be called on to conserve water.

Workshop Outcomes

11. At the 30 November workshop, the discussion was that we will break our approach into two parts. Part 1 is to focus on leaks and Part 2 is to focus on consumer conservation beyond standard summer restrictions, but only on the latter when the weather is hot and dry and the situation is getting tough.

12. There was good alignment from councils and mayors wanting to own this issue and to front the work when we are ready to be more public about it.
13. It was agreed to take a regional approach including more use of te ao Māori perspectives and te reo Māori, while preserving individual councils' abilities to nuance the way it is done locally.

Next Steps

14. We will work with councils to refine the communications approach. There was a workshop on Wednesday 7 December 2022 to finalise the marketing campaign brief.
15. Collateral is being developed for education and transparency about the situation. This includes a weekly dashboard of water use; the prioritisation matrix; visibility of the queue of leaks waiting to be fixed; and the process for homeowners of how to fix their leaks.
16. We will provide regular updates to councils and the Committee on the progress of this work and report back to the Committee at the meeting to be held on 17 March 2023.

Climate Change Impact and Considerations

17. The decision to continue to focus efforts on reducing leakage will reduce greenhouse gas emissions. WWL is currently treating and pumping water around the region that is not getting to our customers. If WWL reduces the wastage of this precious taonga we also reduce related network emissions.
18. The decision will be affected by a changing climate, as summer months are likely to become drier, with less water available to take from the rivers.

Appendices

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