



Land and freshwater



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What do we know?

Hawke's Bay has seven major river systems of mostly fast-flowing, clean, gravel rivers. There are four major lakes, with many smaller rivers, streams, lakes and wetland systems. Droughts are common and infrequent but intense localised rainfall events can have immense impacts on Hawke's Bay's land and water systems.

Groundwater has historically been relied on as a dependable and safe water supply for domestic, irrigation and industrial purposes across much of the populated areas of the region. Two major groundwater systems sit under the Heretaunga Plains and the Ruataniwha Plains. These aquifers are characterised by complex connections between the underground and surface waters.

Land and freshwater management has always been a core focus of the Regional Council's work. The Regional Resource Management and Regional Coastal Environment

Plans are the lead documents for the Council to exercise its responsibilities under the Resource Management Act 1991.

Central Government's 2020 Essential Freshwater programme directs a range of reforms to turn back from the continuing degradation of New Zealand's freshwater resources and the risks posed by human activities. It aims to initiate positive change to land and water management, so water quality improves within five years, and to reverse past damage to bring our waterways and ecosystems to a healthy state within a generation.



Known issues

In 2010, the Regional Council prepared Hawke's Bay Land and Water Management Strategy, listing the critical factors to be addressed, including:

- Increasing local, national and global concern for environmental and social (ie. cultural and recreational) values and standards
- Changing Government policy, regulations and directions in relation to land and water
- Declining water quality in some catchments due to both direct and diffuse discharges
- Water demand sometimes outstripping water supply, with peak demand usually at low flow periods
- Desire for community participation and collaboration to determine sustainable land and water management
- Values-based information and new scientific information including Mātauranga Māori and cultural monitoring tools has indicated inadequate provisions for in-stream flows and ecological health
- Increased competition for agricultural land by primary producers and industrial expansion on the Heretaunga Plains
- Reduced productivity, accelerated soil erosion and related decreases to water quality resulting from poor land management practices
- Risk and uncertainty of changing weather patterns due to climate change
- Notwithstanding climate change, increasing competition for the water resource for residential, industrial, commercial, agricultural, recreational and cultural purposes
- Loss of wetland habitats and the ecosystem services they provide.

Since 2010, the Regional Planning Committee has been constituted in law and national direction on freshwater management has been released and revised three times (in 2011, 2014, 2017 and 2020).

Consequently, the role of tangata whenua in regional water management has shifted significantly. The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 reinforces a shift to be made, requiring that the framework for managing freshwater gives effect to Te Mana o Te Wai. This concept is defined locally and requires Councils to actively involve tangata whenua in plan development and decision making. Despite these changes to national policy direction, the debate regarding iwi rights and interests in water continues nationally.

The main nutrient management tool for estimating nitrogen leaching, Overseer, is no longer being used for legal compliance purposes, following a critical report by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment. No suitable replacement tool is currently available.

Changes to land use, such as intensifying pastoral activities or converting to a different type of activity (e.g. pastoral to arable cropping, carbon forestry or production forestry), have a related impact on the environment, economy and community. Some changes may be beneficial; others may lead to negative environmental outcomes, reduce local employment or have knock-on effects for local communities.

How we are doing?

Over summer, the most popular swimming spots in Hawke's Bay are monitored weekly and reported on the LAWA (Land Air Water Aotearoa) website at lawa.org.nz. In the five years that recreational water sites have been monitored (2016-2021), the numbers show that:

- Freshwater rivers and lakes were suitable for swimming 91% of the time
- Estuary and lagoon sites were suitable 88% of the time
- Marine sites were suitable 97% of the time.

The Regional Council's website holds a lot of information on land and freshwater in Hawke's Bay:

- Water management
- Freshwater quality
- Lakes
- Wetlands
- Groundwater
- Recreational sites.

The Regional Council runs a comprehensive water and flow monitoring programme, and provides information in several ways:

- A summary of what data is collected can be found at hbrc.govt.nz, search: #envirodata
- The latest information on the state of the region's water is available at lawa.org.nz
- Hawke's Bay's State of the Environment is now reported monthly and three-yearly.

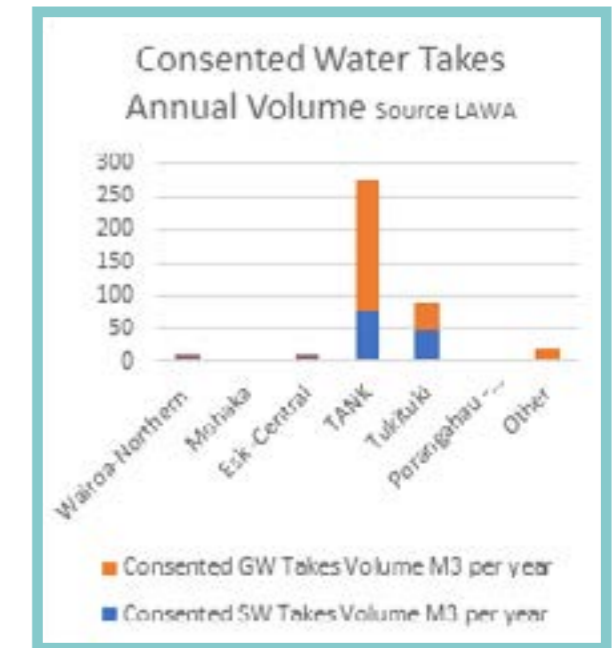
At a regional level, the Regional Plan provides for the integrated management of natural and physical resources. It is planned to develop this on a catchment-by-catchment basis. The Tukituki Plan was completed first in 2015. The TANK Plan was notified in May 2020 and decisions of the Hearing Commissioners are due in 2022. The Outstanding Water Bodies Proposed Plan Change to the Regional Policy Statement is under appeal (2022). Mediation is in process ahead of any Environment Court hearing.

On average, over 500 resource consents are processed each year for freshwater takes, discharges and associated land uses. Most applications are granted subject to a range of conditions being met. However, some areas are fully allocated, including in parts of the Heretaunga and Ahuriri catchments, where no further water is permitted to be allocated under lower river flow conditions.

Consents are monitored and there are a range of inspection programmes for bore security, dairy farms, industry and plantation forestry. Compliance action is taken where necessary. Only a few breaches have led to prosecution. Education and information have been important tools in the first instance. The latest annual Compliance Report for 2020-2021 can be found on our website.

Information about the new national water rules, which sit beside the Regional Resource Management Plan can be found on our website. Practical responses for managing land and freshwater resources can be found on our website:

- For those farming, on the Farmers Hub
- For activities undertaken by the Regional Council, under river health initiatives.



Where to from here?

The Regional Council will talk with everyone about land and freshwater matters mainly through its catchment-based engagement activities. A number of issues raised locally will be common across the region. To make the best use of everyone's time, the Council will set up region-wide working groups to tackle region-wide issues, and local, catchment-based groups will work on developing practical action plans to meet local needs. This should enable regional consistency to the revised management framework, where this is appropriate, yet also encourage local action.

