

New Plymouth District Council Draft Annual Plan 2017/18

Presentation by Climate Justice Taranaki Inc., Hearing on 7 June 2017

Water supply

1. The draft Annual Plan includes a proposal to change the rating system for water supply, by introducing a choice for 'low water users' to voluntarily switch to a metered supply "*to save money on their water rate*". This is being offered in the name of fairness (creating "*a level playing field*") and the need to conserve water as per the government's National Fresh Water Reforms.
2. However, the background document for the consultation provides little context on the whole water supply and demand situation in the New Plymouth district, and how effective the proposal would be for water conservation and sustainability.
3. "*Cities go through six stages in their thinking about water – a kind of Maslow's hierarchy based on human needs and aspirations. Cities start out with a focus on obtaining a secure supply of drinking water. They build sewers to protect public health. They build drains to mitigate flooding. At this point, with the fundamental of drainage, sewerage and potable water in place (the 'three waters' of city infrastructure), cities begin to think about the social and environmental benefits of their waterways. They wish to protect the water cycle in all its pathways through the urban landscape. At the end of this journey of awakening, a city might be called 'water-sensitive'.*" Kennedy Warne, NZ Geographic, May-June 2017.
4. Where is New Plymouth city and district on this hierarchy?
5. Although it does sound fair that people who use less water should pay less by opting to switch to a metered supply, it is not clear how it could be effective in conserving water overall, in particular how it might reduce water consumption by heavy users, especially commercial and industrial users.
6. We understand that at the moment, and as proposed, there is no difference in water rates for residential or commercial/industrial users. Council has no data which easily distinguish between residential or commercial/industrial users. It appears that Council does not care who takes the water, and for what use, as long as they pay.
7. We do not believe that it is fair or that there is 'level playing field' if families and low-income earners are charged exactly the same water rate as commercial/industrial users, for the water that they need to drink, cook, wash and grow a few veggies with, when companies profit from the water supplied to them.
8. The proposed water rate only goes up by 2 cents (from \$1.11 to 1.13 per m³) for use in excess of 50,000 m³ a year, when the average household in the district is expected to use less than 226 m³. We are concerned that there appears to be no upper limit in the amount of water that a single user can take.
9. We suggest that Council introduce an additional, lower cap, say 5,000 m³ for 'large users' who consume more than 5,000 m³ to be charged at the higher rate of \$1.13 per m³; while users consuming in excess of 50,000 m³ are charged at a higher rate again. This revised system would offer more equity to households and hopefully help reduce water consumption by large users.
10. We also propose that Council determine an upper limit for water supply to a single user, considering New Plymouth's limited water treatment capacity and anticipated population growth, as acknowledged in the proposed Master Plan for Water Management¹.

11. According to Council engineer's reply (24/5/2017) to our LGOIMA request (26/4/2017), there were only 1,822 metered customers (residential, commercial and industrial) across the district in 2015/16, consuming 2,564,646 m³ that year. We were informed that although Council supplies water to industrial and commercial users on a Water By Meter basis, not all such properties have a meter installed.
12. Council supplies water to companies operating oil and gas wellsites, but does not keep records of whether a well site is operational or not.
13. How could Council possibly regulate a hazardous and resource-hungry industry, and perform its duties under the Health Act and the RMA, if they do not have the records of where or when it's operating?
14. According to the Taranaki Regional Council (2/5/2017 and 16/5/2017), the wellsites in the New Plymouth district that use water from municipal supply (mostly trucked in for fracking) include Greymouth Kowhai-B, Ohanga-A, Turangi-B, Urenui-1, Todd Energy Mangahewa-A, C and E, and Tag Oil Sidewinder. Some of these wellsites and other petrochemical plants such as Methanex and Nova Energy's McKee Power Plant, also take surface and groundwater under regional council consents.
15. Since the reply from NPDC, I have had phone conversations with Council's engineer ... who explained in good detail the various reasons why information on specific industrial water use is difficult and costly to obtain. I do appreciate the time he has taken to answer my questions and clarify the complicated issues involved.
16. We remain insistent however that it is essential for Council to put in place a data system so that residential users can be easily distinguished from different commercial and industrial users, whether it is petrochemical, poultry, meat or fertiliser industry. Such data should be freely available to the public. Regular monitoring, reporting and evaluation of such data are needed so that Council can better understand where the pressure on our precious water supply lies, detect any changes or trend, develop policies and undertake measures that truly contribute to water conservation and sustainability.
17. These are especially important, with undeniable climate change and increasingly frequent and extreme weather events, from drought that directly limits water supply, to wild storms and floods that jeopardise supply infrastructure.
18. Indeed, Council decisions across all areas need to be made in the context of climate change, climate adaptation and resilience, with communities' best interest at heart.

ⁱ New Plymouth District Council, 2016. Proposed Master Plan for Water Management.

<http://www.newplymouthnz.com/Council/Council-Documents/News-and-Notices/2016/09/09/Master-Plan-for-Water-Management-Proposed>