

North Canterbury Working Together on Three Waters

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North Canterbury councils are collaborating on what the future for Three Waters might look like when central government passes legislation later this year.

Local Water Done Well, is central government's new policy for water reform, and will require changes to the structure of water services and provision nationwide.

Once the legislation passes later this year, each Council will have 12 months to create a Water Services Delivery Plan that details how they will meet higher standards, investment, and regulations.

The new policy allows for local solutions and arrangements to be made to address water infrastructure needs while, importantly, maintaining local ownership and representation.

For these reasons Hurunui, Kaikōura, and Waimakariri District councils have been working with the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) and looking at options ahead of time to see what could achieve these outcomes while still having tangible local say about future direction and investment.

Several models are to be considered by the councils that address service delivery while retaining 'local say'.

"The North Canterbury councils working together makes sense," says Kaikoura Mayor Craig Mackle. "Our populations are made up of both rural and urban communities, our economies are interrelated, and many of our residents see themselves collectively as being North Canterbury."

"Our councils also have a history of working together," says Hurunui Mayor Marie Black. "For example, Hurunui supplies water to a portion of Waimakariri residents on the Ashley water scheme using Waimakariri consents. We united following the Kaikoura and Hurunui earthquakes, regularly support each other during Civil Defence activations, and more recently have been aligned in our feedback in opposition to the previous Government's mandated reform model for Three Waters."

Waimakariri Mayor Dan Gordon says the three councils are members of Communities 4 Local Democracy He hapori mo te Manapori (C4LD), and Local Water Done Well builds on the work undertaken by C4LD.

“C4LD always acknowledged that higher regulations and standards are required and coming and that there is a need for different models to fund future further investment in Three Waters.

“However, this can be achieved while maintaining local ownership, accountability to the community, alignment with wider council projections and planning, and the fact that higher standards can be met more effectively in the long run by looking at alternative models, and we congratulate the Coalition Government for recognising this.”

Once functional models are identified, the councils will engage with their communities and decide on the options. This is likely to take place towards the end of the year or in early 2025.

The current status quo however is unlikely to satisfy the new regulatory regime for water infrastructure and so change at some level will likely occur.