

A call for rational water governance

By John Pfahlert, chief executive officer, Water New Zealand.

It is no secret that the governance of water administration in New Zealand is somewhat fragmented. With several central government agencies, 67 district councils and a dozen regional councils all with some aspect of control, the scope for widely differing approaches and competence in delivery exists.

In the area of reticulated water management the Government has recently taken steps via amendments to the Local Government Act to enable a more directed approach by including new provisions for the implementation of Council Controlled Organisations for water. Even that approach has seen Local Government New Zealand be highly critical of the Government, arguing that it undermines local democracy and decision making.

Our Association has historically advocated for changes to the structure of Local Government, and for a more corporate/business approach to the delivery of water services. That message has not always been well received by Local Government and to be fair, has been counter-productive to a good working relationship with councils.

Acknowledging the limitations of the existing administrative arrangements, we have embarked on a more collaborative approach with councils to drive consistency of approach in the way in which water assets are managed. Clearly the existing system is not optimal, but in the absence of any political desire for change we are focused on what can be done.

So how and where does Water New Zealand get involved in governance-related matters to do with water?

We do so at a number of levels.

At the highest level we almost always contribute submissions to proposed changes to legislation affecting the sector. The recent Local Government Act changes above are a case in point. Other examples in the past year are submissions to select committees on proposed changes to the management of Standards New Zealand (which has now been brought within the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment), the Resource Management Act and on the proposed Fire and Emergency NZ Bill.

Of much greater significance however is our work at the policy level, long before legislation actually appears in the

House. In the nine months of 2016 we have contributed submissions in the following areas – all of which can be found on our website:

- Submission to MBIE on hazardous substances regulations
- Preliminary comments to the Productivity Commission on better urban planning
- Submission to MFE on Next Steps for Fresh Water – a Land and Water Forum paper
- Submission to the Waikato Regional Council on its freshwater discussion paper
- Submission to WorkSafe on the management and removal of asbestos draft code of practice
- Submission to MFE on proposed National Policy Statement on urban development capacity
- Submission to DIA on new fire and emergency regulations
- Submission to MBIE on verification methods
- Submission to the Attorney General on the Terms of Reference for the Havelock North enquiry
- Final submission to the Productivity Commission on better urban planning

The development of our submissions always involves us seeking input from the membership before they are lodged.

We also engage with external groups who have an interest in governance and water management issues. For example we have participated in the Land and Water Forum (LAWF) over many years, contributing to each of its four reports. That work is ongoing and we are raising issues of urban stormwater management with LAWF at present.

We also work closely with government departments involved in water-related issues. Foremost among these are the Department of Internal Affairs, Ministry for the Environment and the Ministry of Health.

The most recent issue to present itself is the Commission of Inquiry into the Havelock North campylobacter outbreak. It is likely our focus will be on any systemic issues associated with water management which the inquiry identifies as needing attention.

The role of the Association is to represent the sector where an identified need presents itself, and where we believe we can add value. Ongoing input from the sector is essential to discharging that role. [WVNZ](http://www.waternz.org.nz)

OECD PRINCIPLES ON WATER GOVERNANCE

Supporting the Global Coalition for Good Water Governance are the OECD's Principles on Water Governance.

These water governance principles were adopted at the seventh World Water Forum in Daegu, Korea last year. Among those around the world who helped develop and support these principles was our own Andrew Fenemor from Landcare Research.

The OECD Principles on Water Governance provide the 12 must-do's for governments to design and implement effective, efficient, and inclusive water policies in a shared responsibility with the broader range of stakeholders. They were developed using a multi-stakeholder approach within the OECD Water Governance Initiative, and backed by ministers at the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting on June 4, 2015.

The Principles were developed on the premise that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to water challenges worldwide, but a menu of options building on the diversity of legal, administrative and organisational systems within and across countries. The OECD Principles on Water Governance recognise that governance is highly contextual, that water policies need to be tailored to different water resources and places, and that

governance responses have to adapt to changing circumstances. They acknowledge that water governance is a shared responsibility between levels of government, public, private and non-profit stakeholders.

The OECD Principles on Water Governance provide a framework to understand whether water governance systems are performing optimally and help to adjust them where necessary. They can catalyse efforts for making good practices more visible, learning from international experience, and setting reform processes into motion at all levels of government to facilitate change where and when needed. They can also help avoid traps and pitfalls, learning from international experience.

Since their adoption, the Principles have been endorsed by 42 countries, including New Zealand, and some 140 major stakeholder groups. Work is now underway to identify and scale-up local, basin and national best practices for each Principle, and to develop water governance indicators to assess the state of play of water governance in interested countries, basins and cities. Results will be published in the OECD's Water Governance at a Glance report in 2018.