

Additional notes: Rongowhakaata Iwi Trust submission re Gisborne city sewage overflows

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Water user comments (Nga Mahi Te Taiao, 2013):

Yea the water quality of the river is a huge concern to us as waka ama paddlers and it's something that raises its head as a topic both in our clubs and as club members. Individually we always talk about the rubbish and sewerage that's going in there.

We're one of the top voluntary organisations around and we're doing this for our people and we've got this barrier of the water quality.

We know sometimes that there's a risk paddling especially when the river is discoloured, but it's our sport, our life.

Yes waka ama whanau noticing scabs, people got sick after eating the pipi in August.

The reality that the rivers carry high levels of coliforms from animals does not mean the sewage overflows can be condoned. It does mean the land managers up stream need to lift the game and reduce/manage run off better.

There were heaps of people at the beach gathering the shellfish. I wouldn't touch them. There should have been signs up telling that the waters were contaminated.

The rivers, from the head waters, need to be treated properly and landowners need to take more responsibility to manage run off which includes fecal coliforms from pastoral farming and sediment.

Increase the use of sewage as a biofuel, and treated to level where it can be used as compost/fertiliser in suitable areas ... Create opportunities for community energy and business energy to be innovative and achieve more wins.

Oldest of failing pipe system to be replaced with complete system overhaul before 2025.

GDC needs to make it a priority to restore us to a more pristine environment by prioritising fixing up failing infrastructure, community-led education and action groups, innovative businesses to develop alternative uses for sewage, and being more honest and transparent with the public.

Compared to the later 1980's until 2010 the improvement is noticeable and good. However, you have asked me to rate our current management not looking back....any raw effluent disposal into any waterway around a population is appalling.

I give a 3 x per day radio surf report on 2 stations and during the recent overflow I was reporting that the surf was really good at the town beaches on the Monday and Tuesday. That Tuesday night was the first public notification of the overflow and that was 2 days after the discharge.

Original submission

1. The application fails to adequately address the public health implications of the continuing discharge of untreated sewage to our urban waterways. This is evidenced by an apparent lack of direct engagement with river water users, absence of any relevant epidemiological studies, and the recognised need for a better understanding of residual contaminants, including viruses, in the sediments and shellfish.

I think that information about the discharge into the Bay should be more consistent and communicated better to the public. There should also be better signage about possible public hazards such as contaminated seafood.

I am very keen to have the surveys, info stands etc. in my shop, and excited that community is being asked to participate! Buzzing that community being asked for input, involvement.

A practical example of participants' willingness to become involved was evident when asked whether they would limit using chemicals and other materials that might be harmful to the environment when discharged through the wastewater treatment process, 99% of the 94 respondents answered that they would. Similarly, when asked if they would encourage others to also limit their use of these, 95% of the 88 respondents also stated that they would (ibid).

Paddlers certainly don't think that the effects are temporary. Rather they see them as cumulative.

Is water quality testing undertaken to ensure the waters are safe? i.e. at 5 days post overflow event.

NB: Also overflows from the BTF treatment plant when flows are $\geq 30,000 \text{ m}^3$

Signage warning against gathering and consuming shellfish from urban streams used to be clearly visible but were removed some years ago as sending the 'wrong message'! However, even when present people would still gather shellfish, probably because they couldn't read.

Wastewater Technical Advisory Group undertook gathering of bivalve shellfish to test for Norovirus, including human-specific Norovirus. All samples in the rivers and Bay returned positive for h-s virus. The mussels on Gladstone Rd bridge piers included h-s Norovirus at the Very High level.

Supporting literature: 2010 and 2013 research/surveys (Palmer, Nga Mahi Te Taiao, 2010 and 2013); Coombes 2000; Awatere et al 2000.

The mixing of wastewater with 'natural' water (Wai māori or Waitai) is anathema to tangata whenua. Fundamental tikanga, Māori cultural tenet.

The effects on mana whenua have been huge, removing the river lowland/delta areas from most traditional uses.

Tikanga/mātauranga elevates standard (i.e. reduction in number of overflows) required e.g. 1 in 5yrs cf 1 in 2yrs.

It is unrealistic to compare Gisborne/Tūranga with other larger and older urban waste and stormwater systems. This is both from a cultural values perspective and because of more readily accessible infrastructure. Historical under-investment in sewage and wastewater infrastructure in general. Lack of political commitment and no input from tangata whenua till recent times (Coombes, 2000).

2. This is particularly so given the urgency underpinned by the high recreational and cultural use of our urban waterways.

3. Although GDC have identified methods required to address the recurring overflows, funding allocation is inadequate to ensure that the remedial works can be carried out as rapidly as possible, given the high level

of public concern that the continuing discharges elicit.

4. In the current context of the overflows to Gisborne city's rivers, the consent application for 20 years is inconsistent with C6.2.2 Policies for Point Source Discharges, Policy 9 of the Tairāwhiti Resource Management Plan: 'Discharges of untreated sewage from the reticulated infrastructure network shall be managed to:

- a) Minimise the frequency of these discharges; and
- b) Achieve performance of an overflow occurrence of no more than 50% probability in any given year;
- c) Issue discharge permits for no longer than 5 years except where there is evidence from past performance to demonstrate that wastewater overflow events can reliably achieve the performance standard in clause b. above.'

5. In comparison, discharges of untreated sewage that are not from overflows from wastewater reticulation and pumping stations are not permitted i.e. are prohibited.

NB: The Gladstone Rd bridge pump station/overflow point also appears to be within the Coastal Marine Area, albeit upstream from the Tūranganui rivermouth.

6. The application fails to adequately recognise and provide for the relationship of Rongowhakaata with our waters.

Relief sought by Rongowhakaata Iwi Trust:

Especially including water users (e.g. paddlers, waka and canoe; schools). Wider community. Resourced by GDC (cf Te Tai Uru group established to participate in Eastland Port decision making processes). Alongside KIWA group.

Epidemiological study/ies established. Long term approach.
Shellfish monitoring methodology established (bivalve shellfish as bio-samplers).

Independent reviewer engaged.

Explore innovative funding models.

Provides incentive to reduce overflows and improve infrastructure.

1. An independent, community-based stakeholder and iwi/hapū liaison group is established to work with GDC to assist in the cessation of sewage overflows to land and the city rivers.

2. In partnership with this liaison group, further research and monitoring is undertaken to ascertain the actual risks associated with use of our urban waterways for contact recreation and shellfish gathering.

3. A review of the Drainwise Program is undertaken by a body independent of GDC.

4. Further funding is made available by GDC to more rapidly implement the current Drainwise program including any recommendations provided by the independent review that are acceptable to the stakeholder/liaison group and the wider Tairāwhiti community.

5. The consent is confined to 5 years, with an annual reporting requirement.

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(on behalf of Rongowhakaata Iwi Trust)
July 14, 2021

Awatere, S., Harrison, D., and Ihaka, M., *Tangata Whenua Perspectives of Wastewater*, Te Kāhurangi Institute of Environment & Research, 2000.
Coombs, B. *Ecological impacts and planning history: an environmental history of the Tairāwhiti region*. Auckland University, 2000.