

Havelock North drinking water Inquiry – Stage 2 outcomes

The report on the Havelock North drinking water inquiry has been released on 6 December 2017.

A copy of the report can be found [here](#).

The report contains comprehensive, wide-ranging and forceful recommendations for improvement to reticulated water supplies across New Zealand. In particular the inquiry has recommended six fundamental principles of drinking water safety are adhered to in New Zealand. These are:

- Principle 1: A high standard of care must be embraced
- Principle 2: Protection of source water is of paramount importance
- Principle 3: Maintain multiple barriers against contamination
- Principle 4: Change precedes contamination
- Principle 5: Suppliers must own the safety of drinking water
- Principle 6: Apply a preventive risk management approach

Applying these principles to councils (as drinking water suppliers), this will require a step change in the management of some drinking water supplies. In particular an approach from source to tap is recommended to take the utmost care in the protection of the water supply, including multi-barrier treatment, including in the reticulation network itself.

To implement these principles there are a detailed range of immediate and long-term recommendations made. Of significant interest to councils the major recommendations include:

- The Director-General of Health encouraging local authorities to provide effective treatment of water supply without delay.



- This is followed by recommended statutory change to require mandatory effective treatment of drinking water, including residual disinfectant in the reticulation network.
- Recommending a dedicated drinking water regulator which can oversee all other reforms and the management of and compliance with drinking water supply standards.
- Amend the Resource Management Act to expressly recognise drinking water source protection as a matter of national importance.
- Accelerate development of a national standard to recognise problems identified in the Havelock North report.
- Require statutory change to ensure emergency response plans, communication plans and pre-prepared boil water notices are in effect for each drinking water supplier.
- A recommendation to review the drinking water standards, guidelines, all regional plans, RMA consent conditions, building consent conditions and water suppliers' policies and standards to bring them into line with any new standards.
- Prohibition of any below-ground bore heads.

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(Continued)

Analysis

Overall this report is a hard hitting and forceful set of recommendations intended to minimise the risk of widespread contamination from drinking water suppliers. The approach likens the supply of drinking water to other critical industries where critical errors can lead to widespread illness, cost, and potentially death. The approach of taking the utmost care in the supply of drinking water is a key message which will clearly resonate with all of those involved in the supply of drinking water following the major event at Havelock North.

Currently the law governing drinking water is found in the Health Act with the Ministry of Health being the body charged with regulating councils as drinking water suppliers. The report is damning of the past regulation and has recommended both a new agency and Act that specifically regulate drinking water supply.

We have experience working with councils, as drinking water suppliers, in protecting water sources. Because the legislation (RMA) was not explicit and did not contain any special mechanism this has been an onerous and expensive, yet very important, process for councils wanting to keep their residents safe. For this reason we anticipate that amendments to the RMA will be welcomed by councils.

Want to know more?

For any specific questions that may arise in relation to this report, or drinking water supply generally, please contact our [local government](#) experts.