

Have your say  
on who manages

# Palmy's Water

in the future

This is one of the most important decisions  
we'll make for our city in decades.

Have your say before  
**4pm Sunday 30 March**

Read the options, pros and  
cons, and the potential costs  
at [pncc.govt.nz/localwater](https://pncc.govt.nz/localwater)



You have until  
4pm Sunday  
**30 March**  
to have your say.

## Who should manage and make decisions about your water in the future?

That's the important question we need your feedback on NOW!

Under the Government's Local Water Done Well programme and its associated legislation, all councils must consult with their communities on how they will manage and deliver water services in the future.

New Zealand is facing major challenges in maintaining and upgrading infrastructure, such as roads, water, and electricity. Our city has generally managed its water assets well in an ever-changing legislative environment. However, the costs of maintaining and improving this infrastructure are putting pressure on both central and local government agencies and, ultimately, on taxpayers and ratepayers.

We must consult on our current approach to delivering water services, even though this option isn't financially sustainable for us and it wouldn't meet legal requirements under the new legislation.

We have two alternative options for you to consider, along with high-level cost estimates for the coming decades. You can read more about these on pages 14 and 20.

Each option has its pros and cons, but one thing is clear—scale matters. The more people (and water connections to homes and businesses) we have contributing to costs, the more affordable water services will be in the future.

This is a complex issue, but it's crucial you understand the challenges, get involved, and have your say about the future of your water services. This will be one of the most important decisions we make in the coming decades.

We're not happy with the timeframes set by the Government, but we're committed to providing you with the best information available, advocating for you, and answering your questions.

**Join us at one of our drop-in sessions, chat with us online, and submit your feedback before 4pm 30 March.**

**Together, we must ensure water services continue to be done well in the future.**



**Grant Smith<sup>JP</sup>**

Mayor, Palmerston North City Council

# Contents

- 4 Water reforms have been a hot topic for successive governments for close to a decade
- 5 Our proposal
- 6 We've looked after our city's water needs
- 8 Our water situation today
- 10 Some important things to know before you see the options
- 12 Our proposed water investment over the next decade
- 13 Nature Calls remains a major project included in all our options
- 14 Option 1**
- 20 Option 2**
- 26 Option 3**
- 32 Charging for water in the future
- 34 Some other points for you to consider
- 36 Learn more about impacts on other communities
- 38 Our timeline
- 39 We need your feedback to help make an informed decision

# Water reforms have been a hot topic for successive governments for about a decade

In 2016, the Havelock North water crisis raised concerns about water management in New Zealand and the high costs to communities to ensure all Kiwis had safe drinking water.

Water is going to cost all communities a lot more in the future – regardless of what option we proceed with. That's due to a range of things such as:

- Compliance with new standards and legislation, such as drinking water and wastewater
- Government policy
- Mitigation for the impact of climate change
- Population and industrial growth
- Replacing or upgrading aging infrastructure
- Increasing health requirements

The previous Labour Government proposed four large organisations to manage water across the country. Near the general election, that changed to a proposed model of 10 entities. In Palmerston North, that would have seen one water organisation for councils in the Horizons region.

The current coalition government changed the water reforms. It introduced new legislation and called its version 'Local Water Done Well.' It keeps water assets council-owned and lets each council choose the best way to deliver water services for its community. The options under the new legislation are included in the bullet points below. In brackets, we explain if it is now an option or, if not, why it was ruled out.

- Status quo (Option 3)
- Council-controlled water organisation (Option 1 and 2)
- Independent consumer trust (this has not been selected as this option would have higher costs for our community than options 1 and 2)
- Single council-controlled organisation (this has not been selected as this option would have higher costs for our community than options 1 and 2)

If you want to know more about this process, check out our website.

The government requires water services to be:

1. Fit for purpose,
2. Financially sustainable, and
3. Subject to more oversight and regulations regarding the quality and cost of water services. There is also legislation guiding how any future water organisation operates.

## In the options within this consultation document, we refer to affordability.

The legislation requires us to consider affordability as one of the things that prove the financial sustainability of our options. We understand that affordability means different things to different people, and some may not see any of the options as affordable.

In our explanations, we have outlined the cost differences between the options, showing some are more affordable than others. Our goal is to provide clear information so you can understand the financial impact of each option.

While cost is a big driver, we considered several other aspects to help determine a preferred option. These include impact on other council services, innovation, the service you get, communities of interest, cultural input, your ability to have a say, growth, climate change and the environment.

**In your submission, we'll be asking you to have a say on these too, so we know what matters most to you.**

## Our proposal

### **We are proposing to create a water organisation jointly owned with other Councils.**

The water organisation would deliver water services to Palmerston North and this would be included in our water service delivery plan, which we submit to government by September. This proposal satisfies the requirements of the legislation.

Option 1 and Option 2 explain potential arrangements for different council combinations. We believe these options have the best outcomes for our community. The impact of not proceeding with these options means we would not meet legal requirements. The full impacts of this are detailed in Option 3 which we are legally required to consult on.

For the past few years, council staff and elected members have worked hard to understand the reforms to ensure our community is well taken care of in the future. In Palmerston North, we think there would be advantages to working together in collaboration with others, and we started talking to other councils about this some time ago.

We've looked at everything from our assets, proposed work, structures of organisations, impact on existing staff, iwi involvement, business growth, community involvement, legal aspects, digital and software needs, and of course the financial implications.

# **We've looked after our city's water needs.**

We're proud to have taken good care of Palmy's water, meaning you have safe and resilient water infrastructure.

## Drinking water



We supply **10 billion litres of safe drinking water** each year

We have the **Turitea dams** in the Tararua ranges

We have **one treatment plant**

We have **12 bores** (wells) across the city to supply communities

We have **3296 hydrants**

We have **7 reservoirs** to hold your treated water and handle emergencies

We have **586km of pipes** - enough to stretch from Palmy to Auckland

We have **5167 valves**

## Wastewater



We treat **12.9 billion litres of wastewater** each year from your kitchen, bathrooms and laundry

Due to rain water entering wastewater pipes, we treat more water than we supply

We have **441km of pipes** - enough to stretch to Hamilton

We have **52 wastewater pump stations** to help move wastewater to the treatment plant

We have **6129 manholes** to access your wastewater pipes

We have a treatment plant and several oxidation ponds to **help treat your wastewater**

## Stormwater



We help to **reduce the impacts of heavy rain**

We have **18 pump stations** to help move rainfall after it reaches the ground

We have **6146 manholes** to access pipes

We have **310km of underground pipes**

We have **20km of open drains**

We have **14km of stopbanks** along drains and streams that we maintain

We have **8.3 hectares of drainage reserves**



## Our water situation today

- City water assets are compliant.
- Water assets make up about 34% of Council assets.
- Day to day water costs are about 13% of Council's operating costs.
- Water projects make up half of our proposed capital work in the next 10 years. For many of our larger construction projects, we use loans to fund them and then pay back over time like a mortgage.
- For our Nature Calls wastewater project, we've also looked at external financing known as the Infrastructure Funding and Financing Act (IFF) to help fund this project.
- Some businesses who use a lot of water also pay for their water consumption and wastewater treatment separately – this is called trade waste. When new development in the city occurs, the developers are also required to contribute to the costs of infrastructure through development contributions.

➤ We're planning on spending **\$900m on water projects over the next 10 years.** Then in the following 20 years we're expecting to invest an additional \$600M.

➤ We plan to spend **\$432m for day-to-day maintenance and supply** over the next 10 years.



# In 2024/25, residential ratepayers pay around:

**\$957**

This includes:

**\$415**

for drinking water

a fixed charge

**\$375**

for wastewater

a fixed charge

**\$167**

for stormwater

As part of the general rate. The exact amount per property depends on the land value of the property.

Our city has historically had lower water rates than many of those around us.

## Homeowners connected to our water network pay the same for these 'fixed charges'.

They're the day-to-day costs of looking after your water needs, including the replacement of the assets we currently own. Your rates also help cover the cost of repaying the debt for large construction projects. In our Long-Term Plan we have explained that within 10 years there could also be an additional levy of at least \$1000 per connection for Nature Calls.

**Did you know that water pipes only need to be replaced every 80 years?**

What we build in large water construction projects will last many decades. This means the investment helps our community now, and for generations to come.

**That's why this decision is so important**

# Some important things to know before you see the options.

**Soon we'll be showing you the options we're proposing, but there are some things you need to know first.**

The Government legislation has clear rules for borrowing money depending on whether councils keep their water services in-house or join up to form a multi-council water organisation.

## **If water is managed under jointly owned organisations (Option 1 and 2):**

The new legislation allows new water organisations to borrow more money to fund infrastructure projects than what councils can now. Currently we can borrow 2.8 times our revenue (or up to 280% debt to revenue ratio). Our council has chosen a lower limit of 250%. Water organisations will be able to borrow up to five times its revenue (up to 500% debt to revenue ratio) for water construction projects.

## **If water remains in-house (Option 3):**

This option is not financially sustainable. This means it doesn't meet legal requirements. The Government would require that any assets, revenue, expenses and debt associated with water services need to be kept separate or 'ring-fenced' from the wider services of council. Customers connected to the water services, or able to be, will pay for the services. Council will not be able to increase its current self-imposed funding cap for investing in water projects.

---

## We've modelled a range of different scenarios to determine potential costs for you.

The legislation requires us to have a Water Services Delivery Plan. That plan will include the option we adopt following public consultation. As part of our plan we will need to be able to prove that the model we choose is financially sustainable and provide transparent modelling which demonstrates long-term affordability and resilience. This includes clear projections of revenue and expenditure, plans for maintaining infrastructure, and mechanisms to manage debt and responded to emergencies. Modelling for the next ten years is likely to be more accurate because it is based on Councils' Long-Term Plans (also known as 10-year plans). Thirty years is more difficult to forecast due to changing needs/legislation/population etc.

We have conducted a range of different modelling scenarios, which is how we've been able to tell you potential costs for the options. The independent modelling report is available on our website. To be able to model potential costs we have had to make a range of assumptions. These include things like projects after 2034, interest rates, size of organisation, revenue etc. You can read the assumptions in that report on our website too.

It's important to note that the costs we refer to are very high-level because of those assumptions.

## **Pricing over time**

Right now, different communities pay different amounts for water. Under Option 1 or 2, a new water organisation may decide to make water charges the same for everyone in the future. This is known as 'price harmonisation.' It hasn't yet been decided when this would happen. The Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) has indicated that councils involved in a new water organisation could agree on this as part of their setup arrangements. This agreement would mean councils could have some influence over that decision. For us to be able to give you potential costs for Option 1 and 2, we've had to assume when price harmonisation would occur. For ease, we've given you the costs as if it were to happen in the first year of the water organisation operating.



# Our proposed water investment over the next decade.

Our Long-Term Plan (2024-2034) outlines our proposed projects, and costs, for our water services over the next decade. Our plan shows we're proposing to spend \$900m on water services over this period. The bulk of this (about half) is for our Nature Calls wastewater project, which you can read about on the next page.

## Our major projects include:

Up to  
**\$480m** on Nature Calls\*

**\$28m** on drinking water standard upgrades

**\$23m** on stormwater work to support growth at Kākātangiata

**\$8m** on drinking water needs to support growth at Kākātangiata

**\$9m** water supply growth for Whakarongo

**\$18m** on stormwater work for growth in Aokautere

**\$23m** on stormwater upgrades across the city

**\$14m** to reduce the chance of flooding across the city

**\$10m** to replace key water mains for your drinking water

**\$8m** water supply growth for North East Industrial Zone

\*The Department of Internal Affairs has indicated costs could reduce with incoming government changes to wastewater treatment standards.

## New drinking water quality assurance rules

Our water comes from both the Turitea Dam in the Tararua Ranges and a number of bores around the city. New drinking water quality assurance rules will require us to add reservoirs or ultraviolet treatment to some of our bores.

## Growing suburbs need water

As our city grows with more homes and businesses, we need to make sure we have enough water to meet demand. This will require us to install pipes to areas of development, pump stations to move the drinking or wastewater around our city from homes and businesses, stormwater management for heavy rain, and in some instances we will need to build new water bores to supply growing areas, such as Milson, Kelvin Grove and Whakarongo.

## Mitigating climate change

Doing everything we can to reduce the impact of large rainfall events for our city is essential. Over the coming decade, we will be doing more work on this front. This will include things like installing larger underground pipes, creating wetland type environments and maintaining our streams. We'll also be working closely with developers to ensure new developments are well-designed to cope with more intense rainfall events in the future.

All of these projects, costs and timeframes are included in the options we're consulting on. **We think these projects need to happen**, and some are legally required, however if Option 1 or 2 is chosen, then it would be up to the water organisation to determine the timing of this work.

# Nature Calls remains a major project included in all our options.

Our long-term resource consents for treating and discharging wastewater (all the water that goes down a drain inside your home and business) will be expiring in the next few years. Legally, we need to apply for new consents for future treatment and discharge of wastewater.

Projects of this scale only come up every few decades and, when they do, they're expensive. People sometimes think this project is occurring because we're doing something wrong, or we haven't taken good care of our city's wastewater previously. That's not the case. Our consents are expiring soon, which means it's affecting us now. But every community has resource consents for their wastewater treatment and discharge too, and when it's their turn to renew consents they will also face large costs. Other communities are also anticipating large projects for drinking water. This is where more people paying for water helps because we can all help each other.

During our Long-Term Plan consultation, our community told us that the cost we'd projected for Nature Calls was too much. Our elected members agreed and asked staff to take another look at the options for treatment and discharge in the future to see if there are more affordable options. We're doing that now.

The proposed cost at present in our Long-Term Plan is now \$480m excluding inflation. We have explained that this will be externally financed through the IFF Act. The costs are still high level, and you can be assured that we have affordability in our mind as we continue to look at potential options over the coming year. We're also awaiting new government guidance on wastewater standards, the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) has stated that this will bring costs down. We'll be keeping you updated as we continue to work on this, and we will get more feedback from you before we consider any change of our currently proposed option.

The audit of our Long-Term Plan identified a concern about what would happen if we didn't get the external finance, and the impact that this could have on other council services. You can be assured we take this seriously. We understand that risk and we're having conversations with external financiers to ensure that doesn't happen.

---

## Nature Calls is included in each option we're consulting on.

When you read about each option in this document, you can be assured the cost of Nature Calls is included. In fact, all water projects councils have in their Long-Term Plans are included in the costings, as all of them could move to another organisation if we proceed with Option 1 or 2.

While Nature Calls is a big project for our city, other councils will also have big projects that will need to be funded and form part of the work of any future joint water organisation if we proceed with Option 1 or 2. This would be able to occur more easily in Option 1 and 2 due to scale and combined ability to increase borrowing limits.

**Did you know that across New Zealand, 70% of wastewater treatment plants need to be reconsented in the next decade?**

15% are still operating despite their consents already being expired.



# Option 1



## ‘The Four’

A water organisation jointly owned by Palmerston North City Council, Horowhenua, Manawatū, and Kāpiti Coast District Councils.

We would create a joint council controlled organisation to manage water services in these areas.

We already have council owned organisations in our city, so this model is familiar to us and our community. We manage the Airport, Te Manawa Museum, The Globe Theatre and The Regent Theatre in this way. The Central Economic Development Agency is most similar to what’s proposed as it’s jointly owned with Manawatū District Council.

### **This option is our council’s preferred option for several reasons.**

The main reason is that it’s the most affordable for our community. Together, our four councils serve 223,000 people, and we’re all within about an hour of each other. Our communities have strong links, and being close together, with a number of dense urban areas, means more connections per kilometre of pipe, which helps keep costs down.

Working together also helps reduce costs over time. A joint water organisation could save money by buying supplies like pipes and treatment chemicals in bulk, using shared software and vehicles, and streamlining decision-making since it would focus only on water services.

Because this option is relatively local, it would also make it easier to attract and keep skilled staff compared to some of the variations in Option 2 and allow for extra staff cover in the case of sickness/leave etc.



### **The councils would work together to set up the organisation.**

If this option is selected, the four councils would work together on a transition plan. It would appoint representatives to a joint committee known as a shareholder council. This group would then set up the new organisation by appointing a skills-based board of directors.

The shareholding council committee would also create a 'statement of expectations'. That would outline Council's expectations, determine priorities, and set the strategic direction that would inform the decisions and actions of the organisation. Legislation also requires that the new water organisation prepares a water services strategy which would detail its approach to water management. That strategy would be reviewed every three years and relates to a period of at least 10 financial years, so it would act like a Council long-term plan.

The board of directors would be 'skills based', meaning a mix of people with the experience and skills in managing large organisations, various stakeholders and may have utility experience.

The transition plan would include topics such as the expected start date, iwi involvement, scope of delivery services, location, customer experience and staff transitions.

You can see a **potential structure for a water organisation** on page 35.

### **Councils wouldn't be involved in day-to-day decisions**

Unlike Council management, no Council staff or elected members would be involved in the organisation's daily decisions. It would be independent of Council.

### **The organisation is responsible for its own funding and for charging customers.**

The legislation requires that the new organisation must determine the funding needed for water services.

It would be responsible for all levels of service. This includes sourcing, treating, and discharging water, planning for future repairs and upgrades, charging for water, and keeping you, our community informed and involved.

As the water assets transfer to the water organisation, it takes on our 'water-related' debt\*. It can also borrow money for water construction (capital costs), separate from council borrowing. Currently, councils must balance water spending with other services they manage.

This also means that councils can keep investing in other services, such as transport, rubbish, recycling, and key community facilities. Councils would still consult and seek feedback on these other services through their long-term plans and other community consultations.

Option

1

Preferred  
option





# The financials

Within ten years, residential ratepayers could be paying around **\$2,100** per year for water under this option. This figure drops to \$1,400 in 30 years. These numbers are in today's dollars and don't include inflation.

The potential cost in ten years is more realistic than the 30 years. That's because councils are using their Long-Term Plans to determine the work. It's hard to know what may change in 30 years so that number has more uncertainty.

As the water organisation would be responsible for water services and the funding of those services, it would also be responsible for the water assets. Currently we have \$66m of debt related to those assets, which we would transfer to the water organisation to pay back. All the councils in the option would do this too. We would also be able to remove all proposed water debt from our current Long-Term Plan. This is approx. \$340m over the current Long-Term Plan. While Nature Calls is included in the costs for this option, it's not included in the debt as we explained in our Long-Term Plan that it would need to be financed externally through the IFF Act.

Removing the spending and forecast revenue from water services from our current Long-Term Plan results in a \$577m reduction of available debt headroom over the 10 years of our plan. We will still be able to invest in our other infrastructure areas, such as transport, rubbish and recycling, parks, community facilities and our venue and event facilities. But, the timing of these proposed projects may need to change. This means we still have capacity to do major infrastructure projects, but we would need to have a look at the timing of our planned projects – just like we did in our Long-Term Plan.

The rating impact of removing water from Council is a bit more unclear. Fixed charges for water would no longer be billed to ratepayers as the new water organisation would be responsible for charging for this.

## Key points



### Who owns the water assets?

Under this option, the assets for water and wastewater would be owned by the water organisation, but council remains a shareholder.

It's likely Council continues to own all stormwater assets and be responsible for the work programme, but contract the day-to-day management to a water organisation. See page 35.



### Who makes decisions?

The board of the water organisation. But, this would be informed by statement of expectation from the shareholding councils.



### Iwi involvement

Needs to be confirmed but we expect this to be discussed prior to setting up the organisation.

We believe iwi should play a strong role in water management and our Council would expect similar involvement to what Rangitāne has with us at the moment.



### Civil defence response

Councils and water organisations would work this out during the setting up of the organisation. Based on how civil defence works with other vital services, we expect the organisation would look after the water and we'd look after you our community. You can be assured looking after our community will always be a top priority for councils.

# Potential pros



## Legal compliance

Meets legal requirements.

## Community affordability

A more affordable option for our community than Option 3.

## Interest by other Councils

At the time of this document being adopted, all councils listed are intending to consult on this option.

## Scale

A population base of 223,000 people means there are more people to pay for water than our current population. This option could also create efficiencies through things like procurement, for example, buying pipes and treatment chemicals, software, vehicles etc. We would also be able to attract and retain specialist staff.

## Geography

We're all located together which means we can be more efficient in responding to our communities. For example; operational centres, vehicles and people are closer together, which means there could be faster responses. This would also be beneficial in a civil defence response. This option has more dense urban areas across the council boundaries, which means there are more water connections per kilometre of pipe – this can help keep costs down. There are also no major geographical challenges, such as ranges or mountains, for us to work around.

## Governance

Councils within this option already have established relationships. This means the setting up of an organisation and the ongoing governance of water organisation could be easier.

## Water service

Would meet legal requirements. It's also likely that water services could improve, as with more people able to pay, and an increased ability to borrow, the water organisation could invest in this work sooner than what councils could.

## Impact on other council services

It's unlikely to have the negative outcomes on all other council services that Option 3 has. Council also may still choose to look at services we provide through subsequent Long-Term Plans and seek public feedback.

## Growth and development

Again, the scale means the water organisation would have a better ability to prepare for and manage future growth needs for water.

## Climate change mitigation

With the advantage of scale, improved efficiencies and an increase in borrowing capacity, more climate change mitigation could be likely.

## Environmental outcomes

With the advantage of scale, improved efficiencies and an increase in borrowing capacity, better environmental outcomes could occur.

## Social impact

Better social impacts than Option 3 as council can continue to invest in other areas and help create connectedness.

# Potential cons

## Community involvement in decision-making

There is unlikely to be opportunities for the community to be involved in decision making. There could be consultations from time to time. The community would need to advocate for services if they had concerns. However, councils can also influence the organisation as shareholders.

## Council's role

Councils would have no day to day involvement in water service delivery. But, the shareholding councils would be creating a 'statement of expectations', which would be monitored closely.





# Option 2

## ‘Up to 6’

A water organisation jointly owned by Palmerston North City Council and one or more other councils within the Horizons Regional Council boundary.

---

This option is the same as Option 1, except for which councils would be involved in the water organisation. We believe this option is less likely to occur, and depending on which councils are involved, there could potentially be some risks.

Councils in this area already work closely with each other due to us all being within the Horizons Regional Council boundary. Councils have been working together on the water reforms for the past few years. While we’re in a wider region, our communities do differ from each other. Palmerston North is the main urban area. Most other communities are rural and/or coastal.

### **We believe there are two potential groupings under this option.**

Palmerston North City Council, Whanganui District Council, Ruapehu District Council and Rangitīkei District Council.

Whanganui, Ruapehu, and Rangitīkei District Councils are looking at forming a water organisation together. As of the date this consultation document was adopted, all three had stated on their websites that they would also consult on an option that includes working with other councils within the Horizons Regional Council area. We haven’t had specific discussions about a water organisation involving all four of us, but since we are all considering a regional model as an option, it remains a possibility. There has been some indicative modelling of potential costs for all councils within this wider region.

Whanganui has a larger population and well-established water infrastructure, meaning this option could include two major urban areas. This can help manage costs by having more water connections per kilometre of pipe.



This grouping does, however, present some challenges due to the distance between our councils. This could make it harder to create efficiencies in areas such as operational centres, staff coverage, and equipment storage.

While we're all within the Horizons Regional Council boundary, Palmerston North isn't neighbours with the other three councils. This means we don't know each other as well as Horowhenua and Manawatū District Councils. Not sharing a boundary between us could provide a challenge in an emergency response. If there was a need for a particular piece of equipment or specialist staff member, the response could be delayed due to travel times between boundaries.

Under this grouping, there are a number of combinations that could work to meet government requirements.

### Palmerston North City Council, Horowhenua District Council and Manawatū District Council

Our three councils are part of Option 1, along with Kāpiti, showing that we're open to working together in the future. Manawatū and Horowhenua have decided not to join a full regional model but are still considering smaller partnerships, as seen in Option 1.

Under this option, we could collaborate with all three councils, just one other council – or together join with some of the other councils in the cluster above.

An advantage to working with Manawatū and Horowhenua is that our councils and communities are closely connected—people often cross boundaries for work, visiting family and friends, or leisure. In a civil defence response, we have alternate routes to access each other too. Being geographically close means we could achieve some efficiencies, but the savings wouldn't be as significant as if we partnered with a council that had a larger population to help share

You can see a **potential structure for a water organisation** on page 35.



**A couple of councils are not included in potential combinations.**

Option 1 includes Kāpiti Coast District Council. As they're not in the Horizons Regional Council boundary we haven't included them in this option.

Tararua District Council sits within the Horizons Regional Council boundary. However, in December, it voted to exit any further discussions regarding a regional water organisation. It is only consulting on its status quo, and a collaboration with Wairarapa Councils. As it has not signalled an interest in working with any councils in the regional boundary, they're not included in this option.

If either council (Kāpiti or Tararua) had a desire to join a water organisation with councils named in this option, we would be open to that.

We also haven't looked at the two mini clusters combined. That's because Horowhenua and Manawātū District Councils ruled out a full regional model, so we don't know what their appetite may be for joining with Whanganui, Rangitīkei or Ruapehu. We would be open to working with all five of these councils if they desired.

If you're wondering why some councils in the region have signalled they don't want a full regional model, the main reasons are a desire to work with their immediate neighbours, within a catchment, or may be considering a single council water organisation.

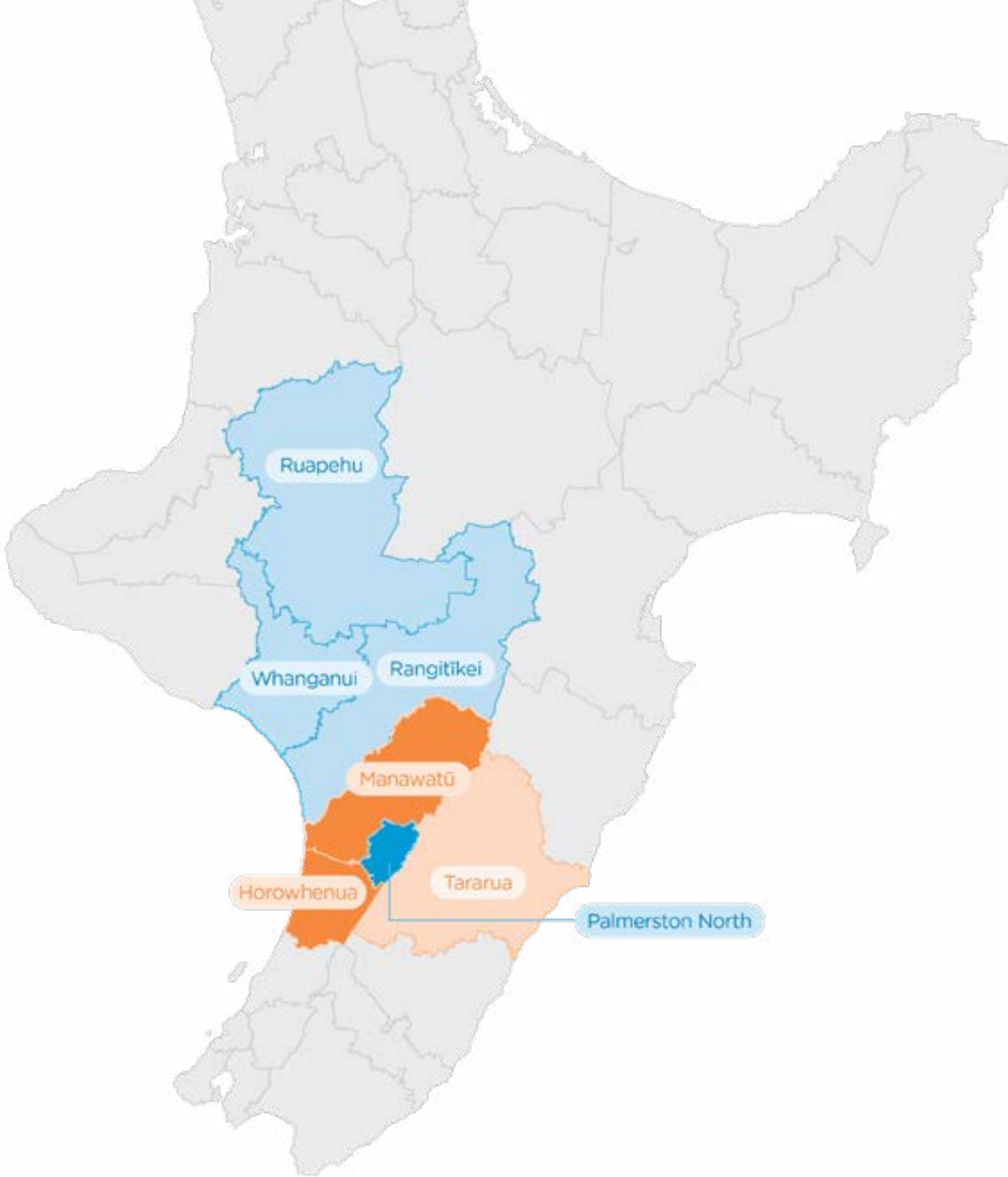
**This option is not our preferred option for a couple of reasons.**

This isn't our preferred option as there is too much uncertainty. None of the councils involved have any of the groupings we have discussed as preferred options at this stage. That doesn't mean they're out of the question, but they're just more unlikely to occur than Option 1.

With this level of uncertainty proposed costs could change significantly. If some councils aren't part of the organisation, it affects the number of water connections, the scale, and therefore the number of people paying.

Despite the current uncertainty regarding how many councils could be involved, we think it's important to present this option to you in its entirety showing you potential scenarios. All councils will consult with their communities at slightly different times. But we wanted to ensure you have an option that might involve some or all of these councils in case their communities have different views, or those councils choose to extend discussions.

Every other aspect of this option is the same as Option 1.



**Key:**

**Palmerston North City Council**  
Open to collaborating with other Councils

**Horowhenua District Council and Manawatū District Council**  
Aren't consulting on a full regional model but, through option 1, have indicated an interest in working with us and some other councils

**Whanganui District Council, Ruapehu District Council and Rangitikei District Council**  
These councils websites show they're likely to consult on working with councils in this region. However, it's not their preferred option.

**Tararua District Council**  
Are not consulting on an option involving councils in this region

# The financials



Depending on the combination of councils, within 10 years residents could be paying up to **\$2700**. There is a very small chance it could cost less than that but that would rely on a number of councils being involved (at least four or five) and at this stage we think that is highly unlikely. Within 30 years, residents could be paying up to \$1800.

With more councils involved, the cost is lower. We have modelling on our website that shows you a range of potential cost scenarios if some councils were involved, and some weren't.

These numbers are in today's dollars and don't include inflation.

These costs assume all councils named are involved. If there were fewer councils, that would impact cost.

The potential cost in ten years is more realistic than the 30 years. That's because councils are using their Long-Term Plans to determine the work. It's hard to know what may change in 30 years so that number has more uncertainty.

As the water organisation would be responsible for water services and the funding of those services, it would also be responsible for the water assets. Currently we have \$66m of debt related to those assets, which we would transfer to the water organisation. All the councils in the option would do this too. We would also be able to remove all proposed water debt from our current Long-Term Plan. This is about \$340m over the current Long-Term Plan. While Nature Calls is included in the costs for this option, it's not included in the debt as we explained in our Long-Term Plan that it would need to be financed externally through the IFF Act.

Removing the spending and forecast revenue from water services from our current Long-Term Plan results in a \$577m reduction of available debt headroom over the 10 years of our plan. We will still be able to invest in our other infrastructure areas such as transport, rubbish and recycling, parks, community facilities and our venue and event facilities. But, the timing of these proposed projects may need to change. This means we still have capacity to do major infrastructure projects, but we would need to look at the timing of our planned projects – just like we did in our Long-Term Plan.

The rating impact of removing water from council is a bit more unclear. Fixed charges for water would no longer be billed to ratepayers as the new water organisation would be responsible for charging for this.

## Key points



### Who owns the water assets?

Under this option, the assets for water and wastewater would be owned by the water organisation but council remains a shareholder.

It is likely council continues to own all stormwater assets and be responsible for the work programme, but contract the day-to-day management to a water organisation. See page 35.



### Who makes decisions?

The board of the water organisation.

However, this would be informed by a statement of expectation from the shareholding councils.



### Iwi involvement

Needs to be confirmed, but we expect it would be discussed prior to setting up the organisation.

We believe iwi should play a role in water management and our council would expect similar involvement to what Rangitāne have with us at the moment.



### Civil defence response

Councils and water organisations would work this out during the setting up of the water organisation. Based on how civil defence works with other vital services, we expect the organisation would look after the water, and we'd look after our community. You can be assured looking after our community will always be a top priority for councils.



# Potential pros

## Legal compliance

Meets legal requirements.

## Community affordability

Affordability will depend on the number of councils involved. The fewer councils there are, the more the costs are likely to increase.

## Scale

Depending on how many councils are involved, there could be improved scale. However, if there are few councils, we may not have the scale needed to achieve as many positive benefits.

This option could create efficiencies through things like procurement, such as buying pipes and treatment chemicals, software, vehicles etc.

## Water service

Would meet legal requirements. It's also likely that water services could improve, as there is a larger customer base, and an increased ability to borrow, the water organisation could invest in this work sooner than what councils can.

## Impact on other council services

It's unlikely to have the negative impacts on all other council services that Option 3 has. Council also may still choose to look at services we provide through subsequent Long-Term Plans and seek public feedback.

## Growth and development

Again, the scale means the water organisation would have a better ability to prepare for and manage future growth needs for water.

## Climate change mitigation

With the advantage of scale, improved efficiencies and an increase in borrowing capacity, more climate change mitigation could be likely.

## Environmental outcomes

With the advantage of scale, improved efficiencies and an increase in borrowing capacity, better environmental outcomes could occur.

## Social impact

Improved social impacts compared to Option 3 as council can continue to invest in other areas and help create connectedness.

# Potential cons

## Interest by other councils

This option is not any council's preferred option, which means it comes with risk as it may not eventuate.

Horowhenua District Council and Manawatū District Council (and Tararua District Council) have ruled out a regional model including all seven councils in the Horizons Regional Council boundary. However, both Horowhenua and Manawatū District councils have showed they're open to working with us.

Ruapehu, Rangitikei and Whanganui District Councils are consulting on a potential regional model, however, it is not their preferred choice.

This uncertainty means a version of this option could be less likely to occur than Option 1. We're open to having conversations with councils in our region about how we could work together and get the best outcomes for our communities.

## Geography

This varies depending on which councils are involved. It's easier the closer we are all together. With the potential for such a large area this could create operational challenges which could impact on the cost of these services for our community.

## Governance

This also varies depending on how many councils are involved, and what our existing relationships are like with those communities. With councils closer to us it's easier as we know each other well already. It could be more complex with more councils to reach consensus on the governance structure of the organisation.

## Community involvement in decision-making

There is unlikely to be direct involvement in decision making. There could be consultations from time to time. The community would need to advocate for services if they had concerns like they do now with power and phone services etc. However, councils can also influence the organisation as shareholders.

## Council's role

Councils would have no day-to-day involvement in water service delivery. But the shareholding councils would be creating a 'statement of expectations', which would give them the ability to add specific details.



# Option 3

## Status quo with changes

(not financially sustainable and therefore it's not legally compliant).

This option would see council continuing to manage and deliver the city's water services. However, for the reasons outlined below, this option is not feasible. That is because it will not meet legal requirements due to the need for financial sustainability.

We wouldn't typically consult on an option that doesn't meet legal requirements. However, the Government requires all councils in New Zealand to consult on its 'status quo'.

### **The need to ring-fence water would cost you more.**

The new government legislation requires us to 'ringfence' all money spent on water services. Ring-fencing water finances means separating all water-related revenue and costs from other council services. This helps to ensure the community understands the true cost of their three water services.

Currently, different council services indirectly help fund others. For water services we rely on revenue from other areas of council to meet the legal requirements for borrowing money for large construction projects.

If we had to ring-fence this money, the cost for water would need to increase significantly for our community as the entirety of our water services would need to be funded by users.

### **Limited borrowing would restrict investment in other council areas too.**

The new legislation won't allow us to borrow any additional money for water projects if we keep water services in-house. This means we have to work within our existing borrowing restrictions, which will be tough when there will be so many pressures and regulatory requirements to meet. In Option 1 and 2, the legislation allows a water organisation to borrow far more money than we currently can to maintain and upgrade infrastructure. Under this option, we can't borrow more, see page 10. The new legislation does not allow that if it remains as part of an in-house council services.



Your water services have strict rules and regulations, and our water infrastructure also needs to be upgraded in a timely manner to prevent water pipes bursting, ensure safe drinking water etc. This means council would need to keep investing in water projects under its current borrowing cap.

With there being a limited amount we could borrow, we wouldn't have enough money to meet our communities expectations in maintaining and investing in other things. This would affect primarily large infrastructure services, and would see large reductions in the replacement, maintenance and potentially any new infrastructure for our transport, rubbish, recycling, housing, cemeteries, parks and properties like libraries, museums and theatres.

**There'd also likely be an impact on the day to day services you receive from council.**

Higher water bills and ring-fenced costs would make us concerned about the financial impacts on affordability and our community.

**Affordability is front of mind for us and increased costs for you mean we'd need to take a serious look at the other services we provide to see how we can reduce spending in other areas to lessen the impact on you.**

We have not looked into this to determine the extent of what that could look like for our community at this stage. Council would need to spend a lot of time considering different changes to service levels and get your feedback if these things were to change on a significant scale.

**This option does not meet legal requirements.**

What we've explained may sound unsettling. But, we're not alone here; most councils are facing the same difficulties with the rising costs of providing water services under current funding models.

The Government's 'Local Water Done Well' legislation requires us to prove financial sustainability for the future.

This option is not affordable for our council nor our ratepayers. Our community would face major financial and potential social impacts as a result of changing service levels and reduced investment in other council areas.

This means this option cannot meet the legislative requirements for water services in the future.

We'd also risk not meeting legal requirements for other council services if we reduced investment in other key infrastructure areas.

Lastly, the Government would prefer we collaborate with other councils on water services. We don't know what would occur if we did not follow that direction.



# The financials



Within 10 years, residential ratepayers could be paying **\$3,800** per year for water under this option. This figure drops to \$2,700 in 30 years. These costs include an additional levy of at least \$1,000 per year for Nature Calls which would be coming into effect over the next decade. These numbers are in today's dollars and don't include inflation. The potential cost in ten years is more realistic than the 30 years. That's because we have used our Long-Term Plans to determine the work needed. It's hard to know what may change in 30 years so that number has more uncertainty.

Council debt levels under this option would be similar to now, however the majority of future borrowing would need to be allocated to water projects. We'd also still need external financing for our Nature Calls project.

In our Long-Term Plan we've explained Nature Calls could cost at least \$1,000 a year for those connected to our water. This is included in the cost above, to show you the true cost of water services if they stayed with council.

We would need to significantly reduce borrowing for transport, property, community facilities, parks, rubbish and recycling services. This would impact the current services you receive. Under this option, property owners would be paying far more in rates than they do now, and receiving fewer services than they do currently.

## Key points



**Who owns the water assets?**

Council (and therefore ratepayers)



**Who makes decisions?**

Council. Also subject to regulatory oversight.



**Iwi involvement**

Status quo.

We currently work closely with our mana whenua, Rangitāne, and have partnership agreements in place. Iwi play a key role in our water areas, specifically including advice, historical insights, strategic direction, and even on-the-ground work in helping with fish counts in our streams. Our relationship helps us contribute towards enhancing the mauri (lifeforce) of our streams and awa (river).



**Civil defence response**

Status quo.

We will continue to look after our water and our community in an emergency.

# Potential pros



## Council's role

Council would continue to have day to day decision making.

## Community involvement in decision-making

Input through the Long-Term Plan and Annual Budget consultation processes.

## Water service

Would meet basic legal requirements, but limited ability to improve services (e.g. higher treatment quality).

# Potential cons

## Legal compliance

Won't meet legal requirements.

## Community affordability

Not affordable for community.

## Social impact

Far higher rates bills will impact community through a variety of ways.

Loss or reduction of other council services could lead to broader social implications for residents. Reduced council spending could impact other local businesses and employment.

## Environmental outcomes

Due to high costs, we may not meet community aspirations.

## Impact on other council services

Maintaining the status quo for water services could severely impact other council services due to the new legislation requiring ring-fencing.

Some services might have to be discontinued, and others would face significant cuts. This would have other major impacts on our community and its wellbeing.

## Growth and development

Limited funding for water services could slow growth and development in the city, as the necessary water infrastructure in growth areas would need to be funded through other means.

## Climate change mitigation

Difficult due to cost pressures.





# Charging for water in the future.

Under the Local Water Done Well legislation, an economic regulator will monitor the pricing of water under any option. The legislation asks us to explain to you how water can be funded in different ways. Under the options, it will be up to either council or a new water organisation to determine how to do this in the future.

## Fixed water charges

This is what we do currently in Palmerston North. Residents connected to our water and wastewater networks pay a fixed rate each year for each service. Everyone in the city pays a proportional amount for stormwater management, determined on their land value. Some people don't think this is the best or a fair way to manage water as some homes use very little water but pay the same as those who use large amounts of water and may have things like outdoor irrigation, pools etc. These charges pay the day-to-day costs of getting you water, treatment and discharge of wastewater and replacing some assets.

### **We'd have to spend some money to set up a new organisation.**

There would be some large initial costs to set up a new water organisation. They include things like transferring some legal responsibilities, transferring assets, setting up an office, buying software, hiring staff, infrastructure, billing processes, customer service and much more.

Estimates are around \$14 million for this. These costs wouldn't apply for option 3. For Options 1 and 2, most of the costs would be paid for by the water organisation. These costs are included in the examples in Option 1 and 2.





## Water meters

Many councils are introducing water meters. Kāpiti Coast District Council use water meters, and so do some communities in Horowhenua. Palmerston North also uses water meters for our commercial water users. Water meters are connected to each property and measure the volume of water used. That then determines how much a property pays for water.

**When Kāpiti Coast introduced meters there was a significant reduction in water use, and it also helped locate leaks.**

Some people view meters as a fairer option as you only pay for what you use, and therefore are incentivised to use less water. It also means people with pools or irrigation systems pay for those large volumes of water. However some have concerns about the impact on large families or people who use more water for health reasons.

If councils collaborate to create a water services organisation there will need to be conversations about how water is charged to ensure it is consistent. This could also be a conversation during any transition set-up. We suspect that at some point in the near future water meters will be likely.

The legislation requires that any organisation adopts pricing structures that reflect the cost of the services, while promoting equitable access to water, and that all revenue must be re-invested. This is to avoid excessive charging.

Under all options, the legislation allows for charging people connected to the drinking water and wastewater networks, as they are now. We would also expect that all properties (regardless of if they're connected to the water supply) would continue to contribute towards the cost of stormwater management. The legislation requires that the costs for each are itemised, as they are now. It also allows for charges to be applied to properties not connected to the network but within the service area to reflect the cost of maintaining the service.

We expect that commercial water users, and our trade waste (wastewater) customers will also continue to pay for their water. Any new water organisation would look at how this works across the wider region to ensure it's consistent.

Currently, your water costs are charged as part of your rates. Under option 1 or 2, with other areas being involved, we expect that in time you would receive a separate invoice from the water organisation. This would be like your power, phone and internet bills where you may receive an invoice monthly or quarterly. You'd also talk to that organisation directly for any concerns or feedback about water or bill payments. The legislation allows for late fees for unpaid charges.

# Some other points for you to consider.

## **The law is clear on keeping water assets publicly owned.**

The legislation includes several requirements to ensure water assets cannot be sold or transferred to private entities without extensive legislative and community consent.

## **Our water assets are important.**

In our current long term plan our council considers our water assets to be significant for our community and our current plan doesn't propose any change in ownership. Under options 1 and 2, ownership of some of these assets would transfer to the water organisation. This would require us to amend our current Long-Term Plan based on our proposed timeframes. If you have any comments on this specific aspect please let us know on our submission form.

## **Stormwater management is very important to us.**

Stormwater is a unique part of our regions water system – because unlike wastewater or the drinking water supply, some of the critical parts of the system are shared across other services. For example, the roads hold stormwater (heavy rainfall) as they drain. Our parks and reserves are designed to have lots of green space to help hold onto as much water as possible in heavy rain events. Both of these aspects help reduce the chances of flooding.

While stormwater management is factored into the modelling, it is likely council continues to own all stormwater assets, and be responsible for the work programme, but contract the day to day management to a water organisation. That includes things like upgrading pipes, clearing drains and grates etc.

Our council is passionate about good stormwater management and doing all we can to mitigate the impacts of climate change for our community. We're working on a strategy and flood models currently to help us in that space.

## **We've been keeping iwi updated.**

We've continued to keep our partners and local mana whenua, Rangitāne o Manawatū, involved through our regular interactions with them. Iwi from across the region have also met for some group hui. Rangitāne have shared with us that they wish to be involved in all aspects of this project, including the development of the water services delivery plan, transition agreements, and the water organisation.

We will continue to work with and seek feedback from Rangitāne throughout the process. This process will need to carefully consider iwi interests and involvement, especially if there are differing objectives across the wider area. We believe iwi do have a role to play in water management.

## **A bigger population doesn't mean a bigger say in joint organisations.**

Under Options 1 and 2, the water organisation would make decisions. Despite having the largest population, our elected members have not made any resolutions about the governance expectations for a potential joint organisation.

## **We believe your water services could improve.**

Under Option 1 and 2, we expect your water services will improve if we join with others. With more people paying for water, the improvements we need to do can likely occur faster than what we would have been able to do.

Being an urban area, our community does have a higher expectation of service and we'll be advocating for maintained or improved levels of service with any organisation.

With more people to pay there will also likely be a push for innovation and better environmental outcomes.

## All options will be subject to a range of regulations.

There are a range of changes being made to better monitor water services – including the quality of water, but also the cost.

### Under Option 1 and 2:

If we were to join other councils, the organisation would still be subject to strong oversight. Firstly, there's the shareholding council who create a 'statement of expectation' about what is expected, how councils will monitor it and assess its performance. The organisation has to respond to this in its water strategy. The organisation would also be required to create annual reports and other public reporting of their work and financial position.

### For all options:

Under the new legislation, regulators would keep a close eye on water services.

The Commerce Commission would look at pricing.

Taumata Arowai – The Water Services Authority, ensures drinking water meets legal standards.

Councils will have to pay additional costs now for these regulators. This coming year that includes \$400,000 to Taumata Arowai and \$100,000 for the Commerce Commission. If Option 1 or 2 proceeds, these costs would be paid by the water organisation. Council would pay these costs in the interim.

Lastly, there are still a wide range of other laws that would influence water services, for example the Reserves Management Act.

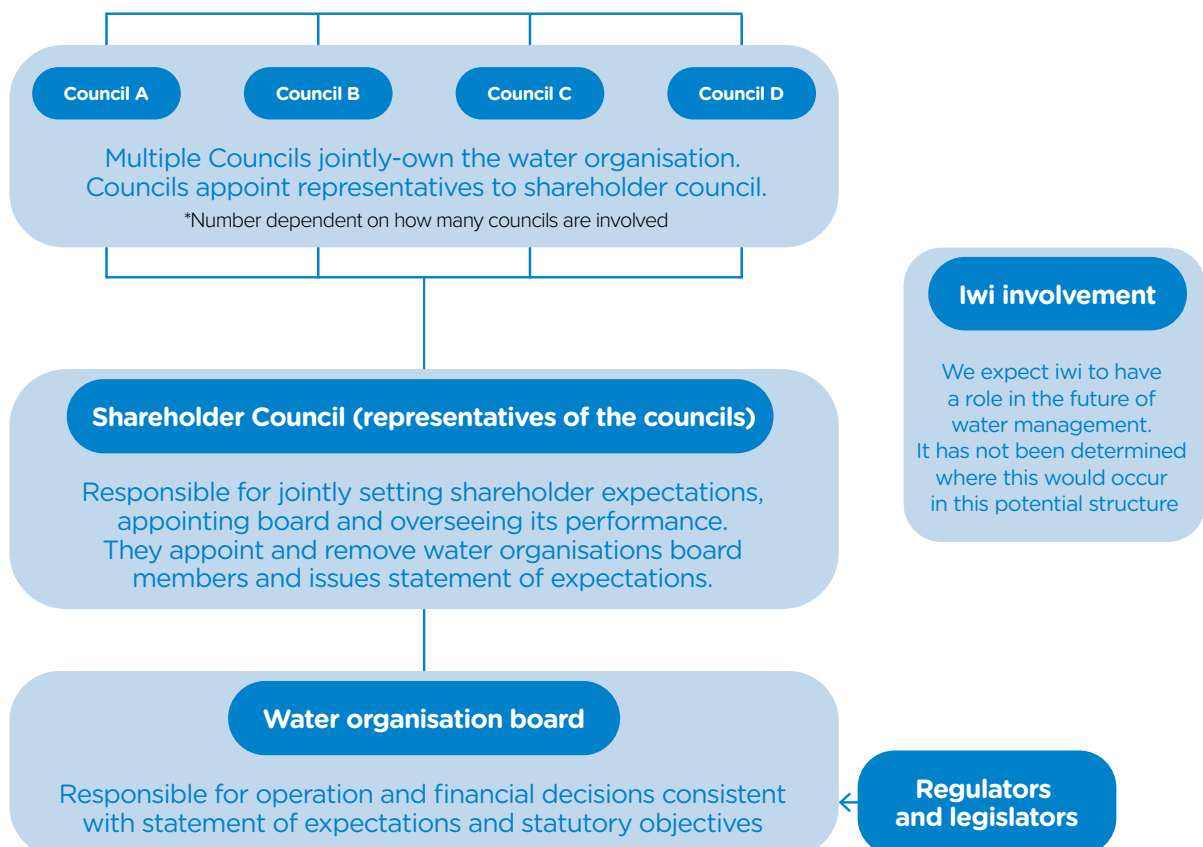
Another major regulatory change coming up is new standards for wastewater treatment. It's been indicated this would reduce costs for councils.

---

## This is how a jointly owned water organisation could be structured.

This diagram comes from the Department of Internal Affairs.

We've added iwi to the side to as that we believe they should have a role.





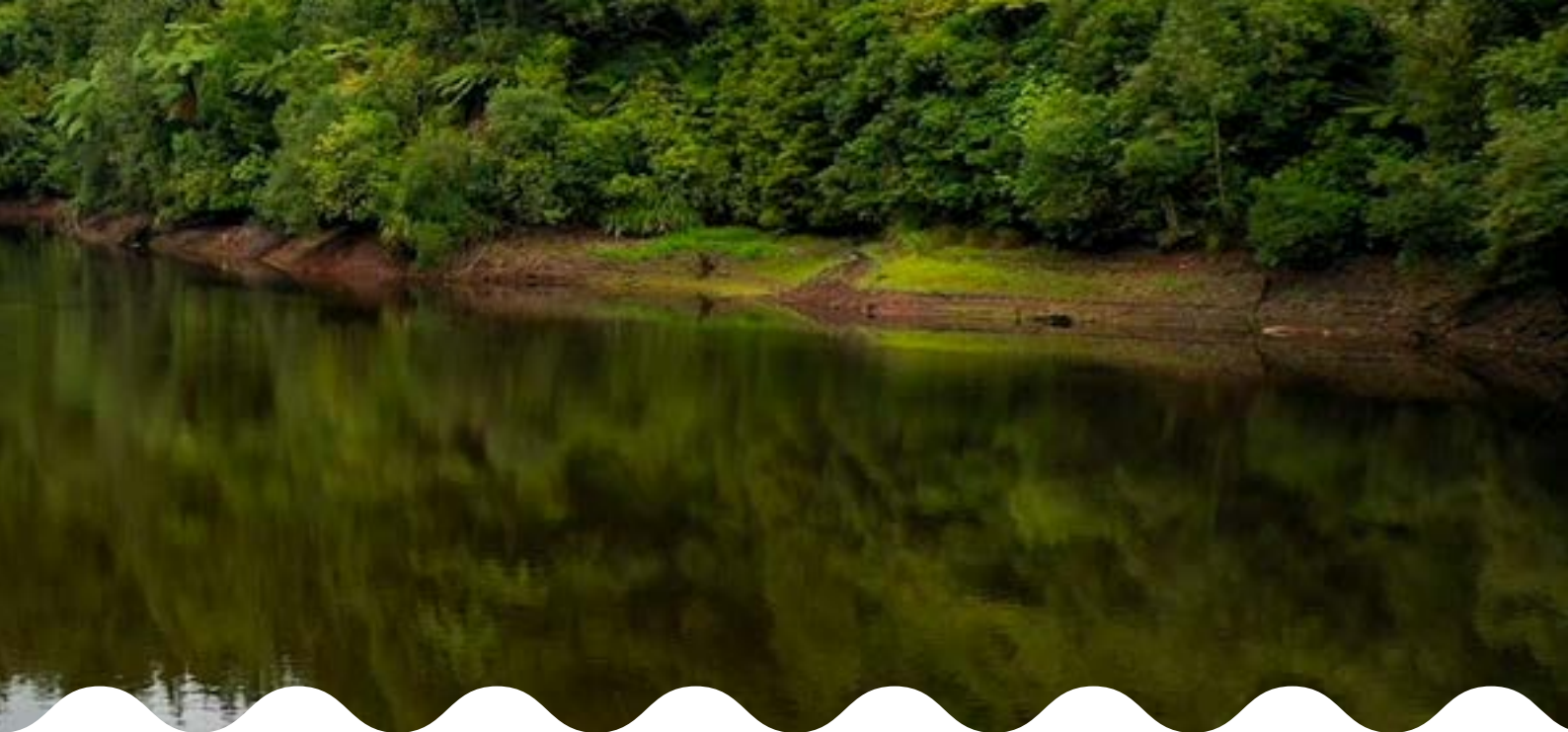
# Learn more about impacts on other communities.

Communities will be affected by changes to water services in different ways. The other councils mentioned in this document are consulting with their own communities on a range of potential options for their future water services

We have financial modelling available on our website that provides more detail about each council. However, during their consultations, they will also explore other factors, such as potential impacts on council services and their communities. We encourage you to read their consultation documents when considering which option to support in your submission. We're hoping to have a fact sheet from each of the council's names included in the options about their current water services, current water related debt, and major investments in the coming decades.

It's important Palmerston North residents have their say in our consultation so that our elected members can continue to advocate for you. However, you are also welcome to make submissions on other councils' consultations.

We're also happy to chat to people in other council boundaries about Palmerston North's situation and what potential changes to water services might mean for our community. You can come to our drop-in sessions, make a submission on our consultation, and chat to us on our social media channels.



Read more about other communities, including their consultation documents on their websites:

**Kāpiti Coast District Council**

[kapiticoast.govt.nz](http://kapiticoast.govt.nz)

10 March - 13 April

**Manawatū District Council**

[mdc.govt.nz](http://mdc.govt.nz)

10 March - 10 April

**Horowhenua District Council**

[horowhenua.govt.nz](http://horowhenua.govt.nz)

10 March - 10 April

**Whanganui District Council**

[whanganui.govt.nz](http://whanganui.govt.nz)

17 March - 14 April

**Rangitīkei District Council**

[rangitikei.govt.nz](http://rangitikei.govt.nz)

5 March - 2 April

**Ruapehu District Council**

[ruapehudc.govt.nz](http://ruapehudc.govt.nz)

10 March - 11 April



# Our timeline.

March

Community consultation

April

Hearing of submissions

May/June

Council decides future of water management

Prior to 3 September

Council adopts Water Services Delivery Plan and submits to Government

Approx October

Hear back from Government and confirms acceptance or if changes are needed. Minister can appoint a Crown Facilitator or Crown Water Specialist to provide an acceptable plan if the submitted plan isn't accepted

November 2025 - July 2027

Implementation period

30 June 2028

Either council or water organisation must prove financial sustainability

# We need your feedback to help make an informed decision.

We know you may have questions, and we're here to help answer them. We have a range of ways for you to get in touch with us, and to make your submission.

You have until  
**4pm Sunday**  
**30 March**  
to have your say.

## Come to a drop in session

**Roslyn library** 12 March 1.30-2.30pm

**Awapuni Library** 13 March 10-11am

**Ashhurst Library** 20 March 5-6pm

**Central Library** 22 March 2-3pm

**Te Pātikitiki** 25 March 10-11am

## Make a submission!

Making a submission is the most important thing you can do. It also means that if you'd like, you can choose to speak to elected members about your views at our hearings. Simply tick the box on the submission form to do that and we will be in touch to arrange a time.

### You can make a submission in three easy ways:

1. On our website [pncc.govt.nz/localwater](https://pncc.govt.nz/localwater)
2. Fill in a hardcopy form from one of our libraries or customer service centre and drop it in a box in person
3. Fill in a hardcopy form and post it to us:

**Local Water Done Well Consultation**  
**Free Post PX33317**  
**Palmerston North**

While we have traditional submission forms, you are welcome to also share your views in any way that suits you.

That could be a short video, a poem, a song, a piece of art – whatever you choose! If you want to do this, please do it via our website – fill in the beginning of the submission form with your contact details and then attach as a file, or drop a hard copy in a submission box (please just ensure your name and contact details are on it).



**Te Kaunihera o Papaioea**  
Palmerston North City Council

**[pncc.govt.nz](http://pncc.govt.nz)** / [info@pncc.govt.nz](mailto:info@pncc.govt.nz) / 06 356 8199