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Report 96.110

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Report to the Wellington Regional Council
from the Landcare Division and the Utility Services Division

Managing Public Access to Water Collection Areas

1. **Purpose**

To provide advice to the Council in response to the first resolution of the Landcare and Utility Services Committees following Report 96.49 : *Proposed Policy on Public Access to Water Collection Areas*. This policy forms part of the Wellington Regional Council Forest Lands and Water Collection Areas Interim Management Plan.

2. **Summary**

This report presents amendments to the proposed policy reflecting the majority view from both committee meetings. The amendments remove a commitment to a permit system, and provide for further assessment of options to achieve the desired management outcomes for effective catchment protection. The policy changes affect:

- access management
- maintenance of existing tracks
- vehicle access.

Adoption of these amendments would allow the Wellington Regional Council Forest Lands and Water Collection Areas Interim Management Plan to be approved. Further analysis and discussion between key parties would then take place at a later date to determine the preferred access management mechanisms. These would be reported separately to the Committees for approval.

The full wording of the revised policy is attached. New wording is shown in italics.

3. Reason for Amendments - Desired Management Outcomes

Concerns about the potentially negative aspects of a permit system have brought about a re-examination of the reasons for the permit and the desired policy outcomes. The desired outcomes are seen as:

- Visitors understand the conditions of use; appreciate water supply and conservation values.
- Reliable data gathered on usage and any environmental effects in each area.
- High level of compliance with conditions of use; overall effects minimal.
- Intending visitors know of, and keep out during closed periods.
- Regional Council's approach perceived as careful but reasonable

Finding the best means of achieving these outcomes will involve consideration of a range of possible mechanisms. The amendments to the proposed access policy ensure that full consideration of all options will be carried out, in consultation with the Medical Officer of Health.

Clauses 5, 6 and 7 are new clauses and address the main issue. Clause 5 of the previous version, the principal reference to a permit, has been deleted. All references to a permit in other clauses have also been deleted.

Both Committees discussed the nature of existing catchment use and management and the benefits anticipated from the proposed policies. Additional words in Clauses (9) and (10) are provided in acknowledgement of the current situation.

4. Other Matters Discussed

(1) Vehicles

The place of vehicles and mountain bikes was raised at both Committees. The relevant clause (12) has been simplified to make it clear that any such provision would only be allowed following appropriate assessment of their likely effects on overall catchment management.

(2) No Camping

The no-camping policy was discussed at the Utility Services Committee. This policy will fulfil the desire of all parties to maintain a high quality water source for bulk water supply, and to keep the catchments in as natural a state as possible. While the term "remote" is used to describe the intended style of management, the areas are not truly remote by comparison with "remote" areas managed by the Department of Conservation. They are more accessible in terms of both time and effort, and are closer than any similar areas to the main centres of population. Therefore the numbers of people camping and impacts from this activity would be more pronounced, and could necessitate the provision of internal facilities.

(3) Wainuiomata Operational Plan

The need for an operational plan for the Wainuiomata Recreation Area, which also addresses wider catchment access management was discussed. The two main reasons for this plan and the recommended facilities *at this entrance* are:

- Wainuiomata is more accessible and overall numbers will be higher than the Hutt Catchment. There are intake facilities in the vicinity of this entrance.
- There are currently no visitor facilities (toilets, information kiosks) in this area. The proposed facilities will serve the dual needs of the recreation area and the wider catchment.

5. Recommendation

- (1) *That Council adopt the amended access policies (Attachment 1) within the Wellington Regional Council Forest Lands and Water Collection Areas Interim Management Plan.*
- (2) *That following further consideration of options and consultation with key parties, including the Medical Officer of Health, final proposals for access management mechanisms be reported to the Landcare and Utility Services Committees for approval.*

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Attachment: A personal view for consideration by Council from
Councillor Ian Buchanan

7.1 Access

- (1) Public access will be allowed into each of the future water collection areas in accordance with the purpose and management of each area and subject to the relevant general and area specific policies.
- (2) Subject to Clause (3) public access will be allowed into each of the existing water collection areas for a trial period of five years, commencing no later than 30 June 1997.
- (3) Public access to existing water collection areas can commence in line with Clause (2) if treated water from the treatment plants is of acceptable quality. The water is deemed to be of acceptable quality when:
 - (a) All determinants are in accordance with the 1995 Drinking Water Standards; and
 - (b) Turbidity of less than 0.1 NTU is reliably achieved for 95% of the time.

Explanation

The value of 0.1 NTU is taken from Section 3.2.2 of the Drinking Water Standards as a recommended value. Provision is made under these policies for control on public access if and when the treatment plants are not operating to the required standard. If it is not then the risks associated with public access are increased and restrictions may need to be imposed.

- (4) Testing will be undertaken to monitor water quality in the water collection areas. All necessary monitoring will be put in place within one year of the approval of this management plan.
- (5) *Access to existing water collection areas will be managed and monitored to ensure a high degree of understanding by visitors of catchment values, the conditions of use, and the need for compliance with these conditions. Management mechanisms will foster goodwill and co-operation.*
- (6) *The Regional Council may from time to time review and modify the mechanisms by which these access provisions are administered. The processes of implementation and operation will emphasise the responsibility of individuals to know and understand the conditions of access, including periods of closure, and will be assisted in this by the provision of information in all suitable places and media, Bylaws may be developed to support these policies.*
- (7) *The Regional Council will consult with the Medical Officer of Health in the course of developing management systems prior to implementation.*
- (8) The Recreation Department may from time to time undertake monitoring of recreation activity.

- (9) Conditions *and mechanisms in the management of access* will emphasise existing bylaws and policies on the use of fire and the management of hygiene, such that breaches of these policies will be regarded as serious matters and treated accordingly. No litter receptacles will be provided within the catchments and all material taken in by visitors must also be removed.
- (10) In providing for recreation, water collection areas will be managed as “*remote*” areas primarily for hunting, tramping, nature appreciation and related activities. Facilities or structures will only be constructed to manage the effects of recreation on catchment ecosystems or the water supply functions. Specific provisions and restrictions include:
- (a) Overnight stays will not be allowed.
 - (b) Toilets, litter receptacles and signs may be constructed at the main entrances.
 - (c) Tracks, bridges, barriers, signs and markers may be constructed or placed within the catchments where they are needed to minimise the effects of recreation.
 - (d) *Existing tracks and huts serving catchment management requirements will be maintained while they continue to serve this purpose.*
- (11) All appropriate information, including prohibited areas, required routes, and other conditions of use will be conveyed to intending visitors in suitable locations and media. The Recreation Department will gather useful and relevant information on recreation within the catchments and make this available to the Manager, Bulk Water, as required. Advice on temporary closures will be publicly notified, circulated to mountain clubs and posted at entrances.
- (12) *Vehicle access will not normally be permitted except for appropriate purposes in accordance with these policies, taking account of the likely effects and benefits.*
- (13) The landing of aircraft within the water collection areas is prohibited except for approved management purposes and search and rescue.
- (14) The Regional Council reserves the right to review or restrict public access to any area under this management plan for public health, safety, or other management reasons consistent with the purpose and management of each area. A review will be mandatory at the end of the five year trial period. Following this review, access will only be revoked if:
- (a) unacceptable effects on catchment ecology are determined to be caused by public use of the catchments; or
 - (b) an unacceptable increase in public health risk is determined to be caused by public use of the catchments; and
 - (c) the identified effects or risks cannot be remedied through appropriate management.

17.2 Access (Hutt)

Access to the Hutt Gorge between Hutt Forks and the Kaitoke Intake is prohibited unless authorised by the Manager, Bulk Water.

23.1 Access (Wainuiomata/Orongorongo)

- (1) Access through the intake area of the Wainuiomata River will be via a specified route. General access within this area is prohibited.
- (2) Access on the road alongside George Creek between the lower intake and the Orongorongo pipeline tunnel is prohibited unless authorised by the Manager, Bulk Water.
- (3) Access in George Creek by track upstream of the tunnel portal is prohibited unless authorised by the Manager, Bulk Water.
- (4) Access in Big Huia Catchment and in the Orongorongo River in the vicinity of the intake facilities is prohibited unless authorised by the Manager Bulk Water. An alternative route to allow access around this section of the river will be constructed if needed.

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copies to JEM, NMCB, RB, JD.
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Proposed Policy on Public Access to Water Collection Areas

A personal view for consideration by Council
Cr. Ian Buchanan

1. *Primary Issue: Should the catchment areas be opened to public access?*

This has largely been answered in the documentation provided by officers. The risk to public health is considered to be sufficiently small that continued closure cannot be justified. This view is supported by the Medical officer of Health, although he would prefer the catchments to remain closed.

2. *Secondary Issue: What is the best form of management to apply to access to the catchments?*

It is accepted that some "control" on numbers entering the catchments is desirable to maintain the already low public health risk that could result from the introduction of human pathogens and the failure of the treatment plants. At issue is whether this control is best achieved by physical barriers (ie difficult terrain and access) or by imposed access controls (limited permits).

In considering this, it needs to be acknowledged that unauthorised access has long been a tradition in these catchments, even before water treatment was achieved. There is no reason to believe that this will change. The only increase in use of the areas is likely to come from organised tramping clubs on day trips or moving through the catchments, and from "fringe" users on short walks, particularly at Wainuiomata!

If the Wellington Regional Council provided no encouragement for access to the interior of the catchments by way of facilities, and communicates the importance of accepted minimum impact codes to all users, increase in use is unlikely to be great. The exception to this is short walks on the formed road at Wainuiomata. The imposition of a permit will not of itself have any impact on numbers of users. The only way this can occur is if permits are limited and rigidly enforced. The practicalities of this enforcement are open to serious question.

If it is accepted that numbers using the catchment with or without a permit system are not likely to be significantly different then it follows that the already small public health risk would not be measurably different either way. As this is the primary concern, then it is difficult to justify the imposition of a costly permit system. I am quite sure that the logic of this will not be lost on the Medical Officer of Health, and that discussions with him along these lines would lead to his acceptance.

The other reasons advanced for permits relate to information dissemination and monitoring. Both these aspects will only reach those obtaining permits. To be effective, both need to be applied to the total users, something that will need to be done with or without a

permit system. Information on codes of practice through brochures, publicity and main entrance signage can be effective in this regard. If numbers monitoring is important, and I am not totally satisfied that it is, then it would have to be done on-site anyway. If no servicing of users is adopted, then it has to be asked what would be achieved by monitoring numbers. The type of access envisaged will be for "no impact" use, making it difficult to find a purpose for expensive research and monitoring.

A minor side issue of concern to some; that of not allowing overnight stays. Again, this has to be tested against its potential to impact on the risk to public health. In my view, adherence to minimum impact codes by all users, whether overnight or not, will result in no additional risk. If no permanent camp sites are established, and all human waste is buried away from water courses, then it is difficult to see how risk is increased by allowing overnighting. The argument is between access and no access. If this favours access without encouragement, then I can see no reason for the restriction on overnight stays.

Changes to Access Policies:

I am proposing, for the above reasons, that the following changes be made to 7.1 in the Forest Lands and Water Collection Areas.

- 7.1 (5) Delete
(6) Delete
(8) "In providing for recreation.....and water supply functions"
Delete the rest
(9) "All appropriate information, including prohibited areas, routes, behaviour codes and other conditions of use will be provided at suitable entrance points, through the media and other appropriate means.
(10) "Private vehicles.....other appointed manager. Mountain bikes are prohibited from the water catchment areas."

These suggestions maintain the integrity and purpose of the access policy while removing costly bureaucratic systems.



Ian Buchanan
Councillor