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MEDIA RELEASE

Hawke's Bay councils continue progress on regional water services model

The region's territorial authorities have agreed to continue exploring options for a joint approach to a new affordable and sustainable water services delivery model.

Napier Mayor, Kirsten Wise says all four areas face similar challenges with regards to the delivery of water services.

"Ageing infrastructure, demands from growth, uncertainty around resilience to climate change and increasing environmental standards all point towards increasing investment requirements for all councils across the Bay.

"We have made strong investments in our infrastructure, but we recognise that the future level of investment needed requires us to look at how we can collectively ensure clean, quality water for those in our communities now, as well as for future generations."

Central Hawke's Bay Mayor, Alex Walker says giving consideration to a regional approach to water services in Hawke's Bay is a 'no brainer', and it's something the councils began working on before the previous Government's water reforms.

"We've been working collaboratively to recover from Cyclone Gabrielle and plan for a more prosperous Hawke's Bay - having reliable water infrastructure is an important part of this mahi."

Hastings Mayor Sandra Hazlehurst says no commitment has been made to adopt a regional solution and the work will allow for councils to analyse how the new policy will affect councils individually, and how a joint approach could help with planning and costs.

"We know we have investment challenges ahead with our drinking water, stormwater and wastewater. As councils we need to ensure we address these in the most cost-effective and sustainable manner for our residents. This means we need to consider all options carefully."

Wairoa Mayor, Craig Little says an important part of the process will be asking communities for their views on how water services should be delivered and funded.

"It's only fair our communities have a say on whether a regional water services model would best serve their needs."

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Before the previous government's water legislation came into effect, Hawke's Bay councils worked together in 2019 to review the current and potential water services delivery options.

The new government's Local Water Done Well policy indicates that by mid-2025 councils, either individually or collectively, will be required to produce water service delivery plans that enable them to meet regulatory and investment requirements. A new economic regulation regime will require the delivery of water services to be financially sustainable, with revenue from water services to cover costs.

Hawke's Bay councils have agreed to Terms of Reference for continuing the work carried out to date and coordinating an approach to the new Government's requirements under Local Water Done Well.

The Regional Recovery Agency (RRA) has been engaged to coordinate this work, with a focus on supporting councils to make a decision around whether a joint water services delivery model should be pursued. This work is being funded separately to its core recovery work, by the four councils involved and by Central Government.

"In line with our existing cross-council coordination function this is a natural fit for the agency," says RRA Independent Chair, Blair O'Keeffe.

"The future of water services delivery certainly has close synergies with the region's focus on ensuring a more resilient and prosperous future for Hawke's Bay as part of its recovery journey."

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