

By email

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Hon Nanaia Mahuta
Minister for Local Government
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Tēnā koe Minister

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Assurance of retaining ownership of the water collection areas

Greater Wellington Regional Council (Greater Wellington) seeks your reassurance that following the review of Three Waters, we will continue to own and manage two water collection areas that play a key role in our conservation efforts in the Wellington region.

Together the Hutt Water Collection Area and Wainuiomata /Orongorongo Water Collection Areas (the WCAs) supply around 70% of the drinking water for Wellington, Lower Hutt, Porirua, and Upper Hutt cities. Management requires not only significant effort to minimise threats to water quality and supply, but also further investment and expertise to protect their highly valued native ecosystems.

To achieve these outcomes Greater Wellington works in concert with Wellington Water to manage the WCAs via a management plan titled the 'Hutt and Wainuiomata/ Orongorongo Water Collection Areas Management Plan'. The land is free from commercial and residential developments, transit or any other infrastructure or activity that may have pollutant impacts. To protect water quality, public access is limited to managed hunting and walking opportunities. Under our Key Native Ecosystem programme, we carry out a full range of animal and plant pest monitoring and control activities. All these measures help ensure high quality water for human consumption and reduced costs for water treatment.

Greater Wellington is well placed to continue to manage these areas to provide an uninterrupted supply of high-quality drinking water to the new Water Service Entity. We would seek new Service Level Agreements that enable us to protect the areas to a higher standard than may be required for the protection of a raw water source.

As a result of our management efforts over decades, the WCAs are regarded as two of the most important and well-preserved forest systems in the lower North Island. At Wainuiomata the unlogged lowland, rata-rimu dominant rain forest is ideal habitat for kākāpo, hihi and rowi kiwi and could double the existing populations of each of these iconic species.

Earlier this year Greater Wellington received a feasibility study showing that a proposed 3313-hectare eco-sanctuary in the Wainuiomata Water Collection Area is a technical possibility. Fifteen times the size of Zealandia, the sanctuary will require a predator-proof fence guarding the entire perimeter. Since 2020 we have been liaising with the Department of Conservation and Ministers to explore the options for realising this vision. Without more clarity about the process for asset transfers through the Three Waters Reform, a dark cloud hangs over the eco-sanctuary concept.

Minister, Greater Wellington is generally supportive of the direction of the Three Waters Reform, and the concept of transferring water supply assets (treatment plants, pump stations, dams) to the new Water Service Entities. Our Water Collection Areas though are precious taonga for our communities and we see their future remaining with us in partnership with mana whenua. We ask that you reassure us that is your intent through the Three Waters Reform.

Ngā mihi



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