



National Council of Women of New Zealand

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Wahine O Aotearoa

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Submission to the Commissioner for the Environment on “Ageing Pipes and Murky Waters”

Introduction

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 46 nationally organised societies. It has 35 branches spread throughout the country to which women of some 150 societies are affiliated. NCWNZ works to improve the quality of life for women, families and society.

This submission was prepared by members of the Environment Standing Committee, and is supported by policy formed by NCWNZ in 1984 and subsequently.

General Comments

NCWNZ welcomes this document and its focus on the future water supply needs of New Zealand. Water is essential for life and is a limited resource – less than 1% of earth's water is available to us in rivers, lakes, aquifers and the atmosphere (*Gaia Atlas of Planet Management* p108). Conservation of water must be of utmost priority in all communities.

Issue 1: Urban water systems and tikanga Maori

Goodwill and compromise are essential from all parties. Tangata whenua need to be consulted and listened to for their suggestions for working together.

Issue 2: The legislative framework

Because of the impact of water on so many aspects of life, an Act embracing broad principles of water management would be useful. The current legislation as described shows a need for consistency in terms and objectives. If there is to be a new Act, it should cover public health, environmental sustainability, and wastewater as well as those issues already dealt with in legislation.

Issue 3: Pricing and charging for water services

Water services should be publicly owned and private ownership should be forbidden. Private ownership of electricity, for example, has been a poor move for New Zealand. LATEs are a fashionable method of charging with the disadvantage that there is no direct access to the body by the consumer and no direct accountability to the ratepayer. UACs are a charging system favoured by local authorities because they are cheap and easy to administer. However they are not always fair, as the figures on page 25 indicate. NCWNZ believes that people should pay for what they use with rating relief for low-income families to offset hardship. Citizens need to be educated regarding the use of water. Incentives to use roof runoff and reduce water use should be offered by local authorities.

Regional Councils should be able to charge developers for increased runoff into rural drains. At present this is not possible and rural landowners have to cover the costs of increased flooding risks and upgrades to drainage systems. Developers should have to design subdivisions to use and manage water in a sustainable way, with financial incentives for water conservation measures. Fire-fighting demands should not set the water requirements for a whole town or subdivision; other water uses and conservation measures need to be taken into account.

**Issue 4: Risk management**

Some risks are unpredictable – natural disasters – but many potential risks can be anticipated and control measures put in place. New Zealanders need to stop being complacent and put adequate resources into preparedness.

Issue 5: Urban ecosystem management

NCWNZ supports the management of water supply and disposal on a catchment basis and in an integrated and eco-efficient way. In-fill housing and retirement villages would provide an opportunity for new approaches to water supply to be trialled. Financial incentives are usually effective in improving management of water supply. Another possibility could be the use of large areas of reforestation to enhance catchment areas. These would have other benefits – prevention of erosion, a future cash crop, and job opportunities.

Issue 6. Integrated management of water services

Integration provides opportunities for consumers to understand the true cost of water services, including treatment and disposal as well as infrastructure. NCWNZ supports the reuse of water as much as is possible as long as it is compatible with health needs. There are ways that water harvesting can be encouraged. One example would be to promote the use of rainwater tanks, as is done in rural areas, in urban areas, with financial incentives such as rate rebates for those who make use of such collection.

Issue 8. Recognition and valuation of ecosystem services

The true costs of the traditional ways of supplying water need to be researched and then the results supplied to the decision-makers, with a comparison of the use of ecosystem services. A local authority could undertake a pilot study. Most local authorities are interested in only a three-year cycle and in monetary considerations. A longer perspective is needed and also a change in the materialistic outlook. Communities cannot be allowed to expand without planning for the availability and sustainability of water resources.

Issue 9 Linkages between reviews

There is not enough emphasis on broader sustainable issues. It is essential that all reviews should be working towards a common goal and understands that each sector has a part to play in reaching that goal. Reviews should agree on a hierarchy of objectives.

Conclusion

Responsibility for the management of the water resource lies as much with the individual as with governing agencies. Though then idea of assigning a cost benefit to ecosystem services is useful, other countries are further ahead than New Zealand with this and there is much we need to do to catch up. It is essential that everyone is educated so that the need for governance of this vital resource is understood and the cost accepted. The need for progress is urgent.

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