

Proposal on-a-page

i The Water Services Authority—Taumata Arowai (the Authority), on behalf of the Minister of Local Government, is consulting on a set of proposed national wastewater environmental performance standards ('wastewater standards') under section 138 of the Water Services Act 2021.

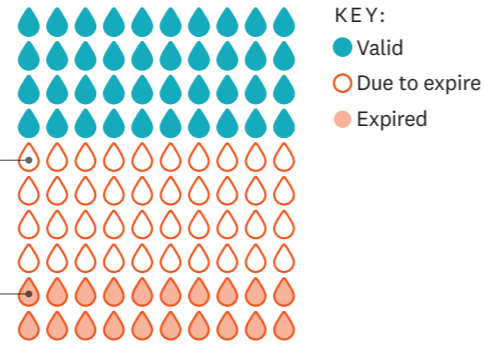
A What is the rationale for change?

A significant proportion of Council and Crown-owned wastewater infrastructure was built 30-40 years ago. These now require upgrades or renewals.

Population growth and urban development also drive the need for infrastructure renewals, with larger communities and housing areas requiring treatment plants and networks with much greater capacity than they currently have.

Around 60% of public wastewater infrastructure will require re consenting in the next decade.

Of this number, 20% of plants are currently operating on expired resource consents.



The resource management system can be challenging for network owners and communities across the country.

Resource consents are developed, assessed, and monitored largely on a case-by-case basis. The current process can be lengthy, uncertain, and information intensive as a result.

B What does this package of wastewater standards cover?

The Water Services Act 2021 (the Act) (section 138) enables the Authority to make wastewater standards following public consultation.

Standards only apply to Council and Crown-owned infrastructure, and may include requirements, limits, conditions, or prohibitions related to activities associated with wastewater treatment plants and networks, including:

- **Discharges to land, air or water**
- **Biosolids** and other by-products from wastewater
- **Energy use**
- **Waste** introduced by a third party into a wastewater network (such as trade waste).

The initial package of proposed standards covers areas where resource consents are commonly sought for wastewater treatment plants and networks, specifically:



Discharges to water

THIS STANDARD PROPOSES:

- Treatment requirements for the main contaminants discharged from a treatment plant, varying by the risk and sensitivity of the receiving environment.



Discharges to land

THIS STANDARD PROPOSES:

- A framework for identifying suitable land for discharge application, based on a site-specific risk assessment.
- Treatment requirements for nutrients and pathogens discharged to land.



Beneficial reuse of biosolids

THIS STANDARD PROPOSES:

- A grading system for processing biosolids from wastewater treatment plants, with corresponding activity status for how and when biosolids can be reused based on Water NZ guidelines.



Wastewater network overflow and bypass arrangements

THIS STANDARD PROPOSES:

- Risk-based planning, monitoring and reporting requirements for overflows from networks and bypasses of plants.
- All existing overflow points must be consented.

• Monitoring and reporting requirements will apply across all the standards.

i Small plant standard (SPS)

The discharge to water standard will impose different treatment requirements for wastewater treatment plants that service very small communities. These plants are significantly different to those that service larger towns and cities. They are usually

oxidation ponds that rely on passive treatment arrangements that require little operation, at isolated sites and often without access to electricity. These small plants often have a minimal impact on the receiving environment because of their small size, particularly in

comparison to contaminants like nutrients from surrounding land. Due to this, no nutrient treatment is proposed as part of the small plant standard, and other treatment requirements are tailored to suit infrastructure of this nature.

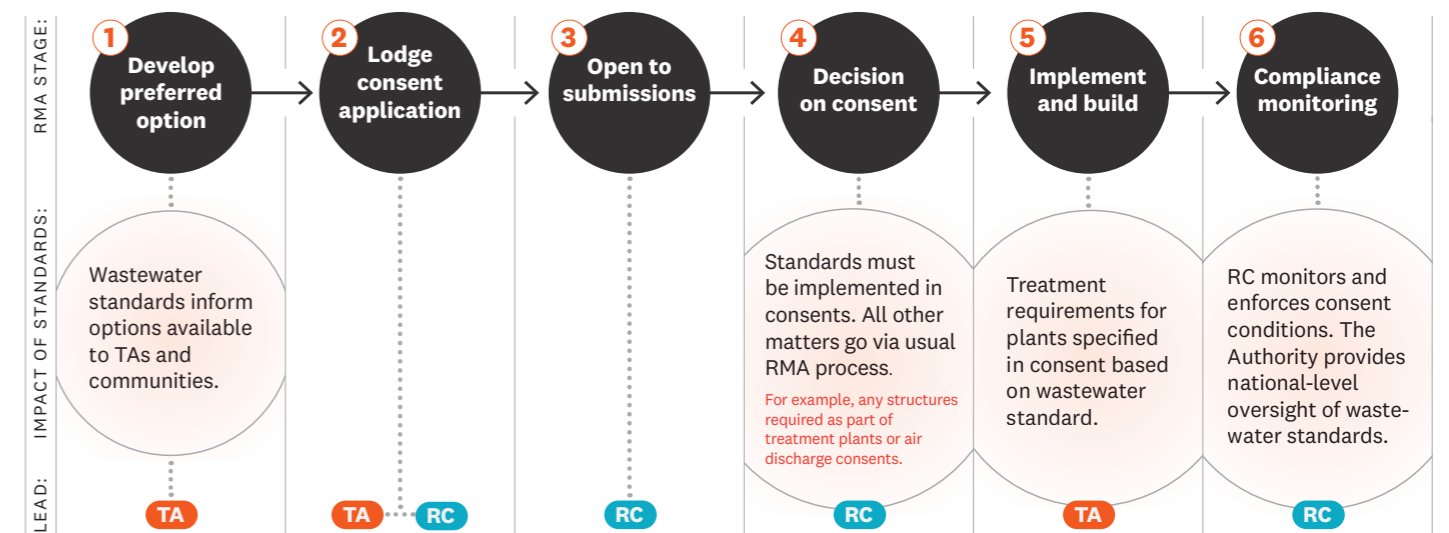
C How will territorial authorities (TAs) and regional councils (RCs) use the standards?

Territorial authorities (TAs) who have wastewater treatment plants due for upgrade or renewal will consult with their communities under the Local Government Act 2002 to determine the best arrangement for their circumstances.

The standards will set treatment requirements based on the type of water body or land the plant discharges to. These standards will guide councils and communities in making decisions, and in the design, planning, and funding once a decision is made.

Examples of what this might look like:

- Decommission and replace an old plant with one that discharges to land in the summer, and water in the winter, or
- Upgrade an existing plant or combine multiple plants into one centralised arrangement.



D What are the expected benefits of the proposed standards?

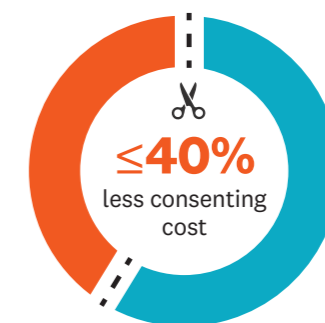
Wastewater standards will:

- ✓ Support environmental outcomes.
- ✓ Drive cost and time efficiencies.
- ✓ Support owners of networks to better plan and fund infrastructure.
- ✓ Provide clear expectations about treatment quality to communities.

Expected cost efficiencies:

Based on case studies, we expect up to 40% reduction in consenting costs. This includes cost reductions in staff time, technical and feasibility assessments, legal costs, and consultation/engagement expenses. Over time, further savings will come from standardising infrastructure and operations

to comply with the proposed wastewater standards.



The standards will provide certainty to TAs, helping them to better:

- Plan
- Design
- Engage with communities
- Fund infrastructure upgrades
- Develop long-term plans

E What was the process to develop the standards?

The Authority developed these proposals using evidence, technical advice, testing.



Review of a range of previous work relating to the area.



Commissioning technical reports into potential areas where standards could be made.



Commissioning case studies of wastewater arrangements to understand the perspectives of iwi/Māori, TAs, and RCs.



Commissioning detailed technical advice into the discharge to water and land standards.



A Technical Review Group made up of TAs, RCs, peak industry bodies, and leading industry professionals.

The goal is to create credible standards that balance:



i The proposed standards do not cover the following matters:

- ✗ Discharges to air from wastewater treatment plants.
- ✗ Recycled treated wastewater for non-potable use.

- ✗ Other contaminants from treatment plants (such as endocrine disruptors, heavy metals, and PFAS).

- ✗ Arrangements for private networks or onsite wastewater treatment systems (such as septic tanks).