

Drinking Water Regulation Report 2025



Water Services Authority
Taumata Arowai

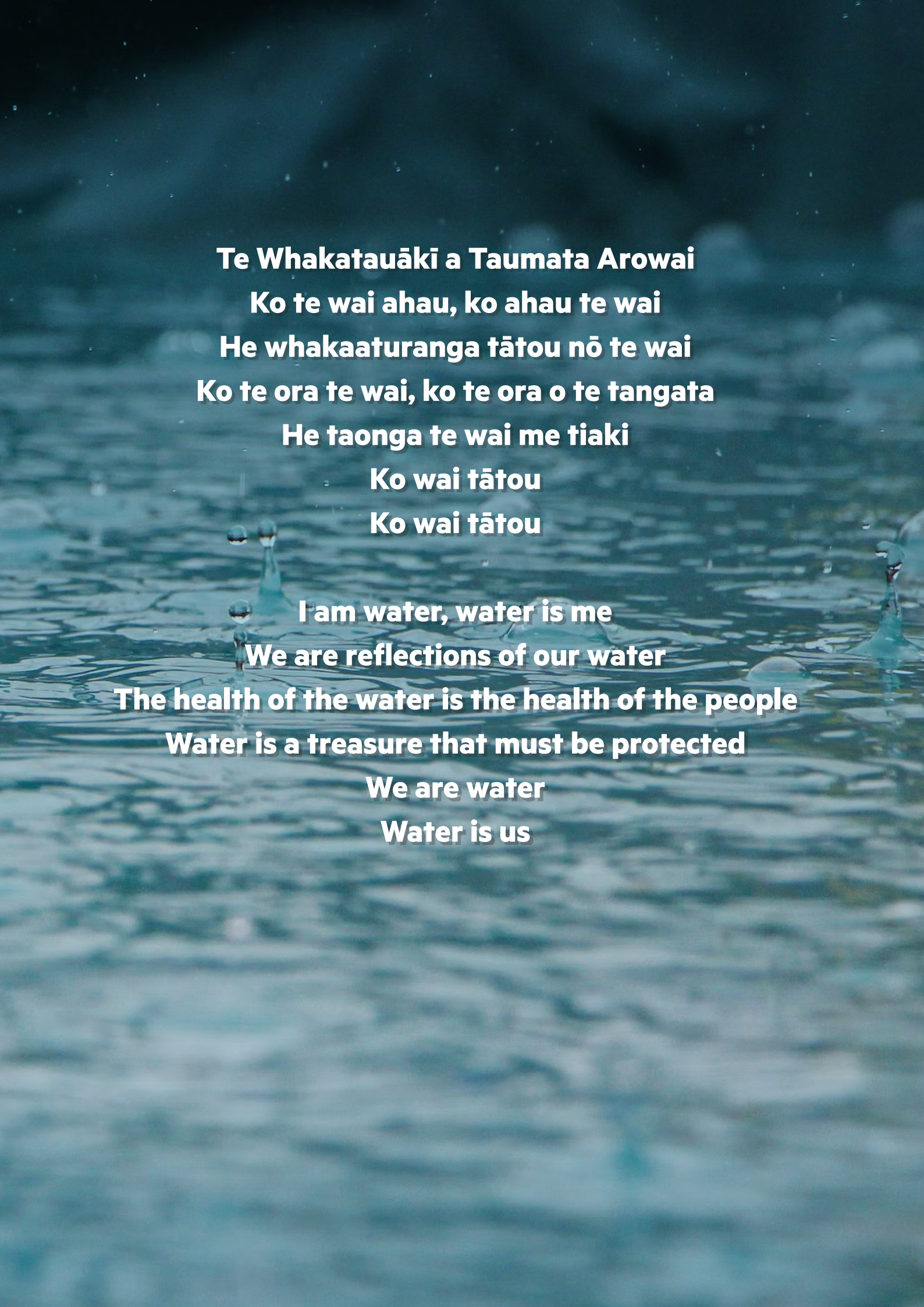


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Te Whakatauhākī a Taumata Arowai
Ko te wai ahau, ko ahau te wai
He whakaaturanga tātou nō te wai
Ko te ora te wai, ko te ora o te tangata
He taonga te wai me tiaki
Ko wai tātou
Ko wai tātou

I am water, water is me
We are reflections of our water
The health of the water is the health of the people
Water is a treasure that must be protected
We are water
Water is us

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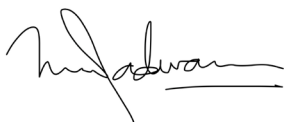
Foreword

We are pleased to present the Drinking Water Regulation Report 2025, which provides an overview of supplier performance in 2025. This report shows strong momentum towards the goal of safe drinking water for everyone in New Zealand.

This is the fifth Drinking Water Regulation Report, and the first to be published since the Compliance, Monitoring and Enforcement Strategy 2025-28 was published in July 2025. It marks an important step in aligning the evidence we collect on the safety and quality of New Zealand's drinking water with progress against the Strategy. It shows how different supplier groups are achieving in terms of their performance against expectations set out in the Strategy, where risks remain, and where future regulatory effort needs to be focused.

This report also follows the publication of the Network Environmental Performance Report 2024/25 in July 2026. Together, these two reports are key oversight tools for the Authority, providing transparency, evidence and insights on sector performance across water services, from the operation of public drinking water and wastewater networks through to the safety of the water that comes out of the tap.

The findings of this report show measurable improvement in efforts towards achieving safer drinking water. Council supplies have continued to install and operate basic treatment barriers. A particular highlight of this year's report is seeing a noticeable increase in the number of New Zealanders who are receiving drinking water with stronger multi-barrier protections. For instance, an additional 415,000 people were served by council supplies with protozoal barriers in 2025 compared to 2023.



Raveen Jaduram
Board Chair

There are also encouraging signs of progress from Ministry of Education school supplies. The incidence of *E. coli* detections and long-term advisories have both decreased, and schools are notifying the Authority more consistently when issues are identified. While these improvements are positive, further progress is needed. Some supplies still lack basic treatment barriers, and long-term consumer advisories remain in place. Our regulatory approach will continue to focus on the areas of greatest public health risk, including stepping up regulatory intensity for councils that do not have multi-barrier protections in place. We will continue helping suppliers move towards safe drinking water and taking proportionate action where required to protect consumers.

Most New Zealanders – 84% of the population – now receive drinking water from registered suppliers with strong protections in place. However, the report also reminds us that 16% of the population do not. A range of easy-to-use guidance can be accessed from the Authority's website identifying practical actions that suppliers can take to keep drinking water safe wherever they are.¹

Our vision is that everyone in New Zealand has safe drinking water when they turn on the tap. As Local Water Done Well is implemented and councils settle future arrangements for water services delivery, we will continue to work with those charged with these responsibilities to support sustained momentum towards this vision.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the work of Te Puna (the Māori Advisory Group), chaired by Riki Ellison, in advising the Board and staff on Māori interests and knowledge in relation to the issues raised in these reports. We also thank everyone involved in making this report available to New Zealanders.

Kia tiakina te wai, hei orange mā te katoa. Safe water every day for everyone.



Allan Prangnell
Chief Executive

¹ www.taumataarowai.govt.nz/drinking-water-suppliers-and-operators/for-drinking-water-suppliers/how-to-guidance

Executive summary

The Drinking Water Regulation Report 2025 shows that New Zealand's drinking water system is continuing to mature. Guided by the Compliance, Monitoring and Enforcement Strategy 2025-28, this report compiles information from across the regulatory system to illustrate where risks are changing, where suppliers are improving, and where regulatory effort should be focused to protect public health.

Key Findings

The report shows measurable progress towards the provision of safe drinking water, while also confirming that performance remains uneven and some significant risks are concentrated in a relatively small number of supplies.

Council supplies have made progress in putting basic treatment barriers in place. In 2025:

- 98% had a bacterial treatment barrier, up from 96% in 2023 (an increase of 91,000 to over 4.2 million people in 2025)
- 94% had a residual disinfection barrier, up from 92% in 2023 (an increase of more than 200,000 to over 4.3 million people in 2025)
- 90% had a protozoal treatment barrier, up from 76% in 2023 (an increase of more than 415,000 to over 3.9 million people in 2025).

The data on notifications and consumer advisories shows stronger engagement from Ministry of Education school suppliers and improvements in how some suppliers identify and manage risk.

- The incidence of *E. coli* detections in Ministry of Education school supplies decreased by 16% compared with 2024, while long-term advisories for schools fell from 17 to seven.
- The ratio of supplier to laboratory notifications for *E. coli* detections in schools has continued to improve, indicating that schools are contacting the Authority more consistently when issues are identified.

More broadly, total supplier notifications of Maximum Acceptable Value (MAV) exceedances decreased from 383 in 2023 to 297 in 2025, and laboratory notifications decreased from 694 to 517 over the same period.

Performance against key treatment rules also improved. These rules help show whether suppliers are running their supplies safely and managing the main risks to consumers.

- Large council supplies meeting or almost meeting bacterial treatment requirements increased from 49% in 2023 to 77% in 2025.
- Protozoal treatment requirements increased from 49% to 76% over the same period.

Chemical monitoring at large treatment plants also improved, with 81% of supplies meeting or almost meeting requirements in 2025, compared with 54% in 2023.

Implications

These improvements matter because treatment barriers, strengthened efforts to comply with monitoring, and assurance rules and timely notifications are the practical safeguards that reduce the risk of people becoming sick from their drinking water. More people are now served by supplies with multi-barrier protection at treatment plants, and the evidence suggests that many suppliers are taking steps toward providing safe drinking water.

At the same time, there is still more work to do.

- Some supplies still lack basic treatment barriers. In 2025, 33 councils had one or more supply that lacked at least one basic treatment barrier.
- While most suppliers now have basic treatment barriers in place for their supplies, not all are yet able to demonstrate that these barriers are operating effectively.
- Long-term consumer advisories remain in place, including 31 advisories that have been active for more than three years.
- Reporting rates and data quality continue to affect how well risks can be understood and prioritised.
- Sixteen percent of the population are served by suppliers that have either not registered with the Authority, or are domestic suppliers serving less than 25 people. This limits our visibility of those suppliers that have not registered with us, and the risks they may need to manage.

The Authority's Response

The Authority will continue to use the evidence in this report to target our regulatory efforts where they will have the greatest impact on public health. We will:

- Work with council suppliers to address remaining gaps in basic treatment barriers, improve performance against the Drinking Water Quality Assurance Rules, and resolve long-term consumer advisories. Where councils do not have multi-barrier protections in place, we will step up regulatory intensity to ensure there is a clear pathway and timely progress to address those risks. Where suppliers are making progress, we will continue to support and monitor that work. Where risks are significant, repeated or not being addressed, we will use proportionate regulatory tools to require action.
- Continue to engage with Ministry of Education school supplies as they strengthen their drinking water systems and processes. This includes encouraging continued improvements in monitoring, notification and risk management, and working with the Ministry as it progresses its Safer Drinking Water in Schools Programme.
- Provide clear guidance and practical support for private, community and other suppliers that are not yet registered to help them understand their responsibilities, choose an appropriate, cost-effective compliance pathway, and take steps towards providing safer drinking water. Bringing more suppliers into the regulatory system will improve our visibility of risks and support better outcomes for consumers.



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Introduction

The Drinking Water Regulation Report (the report) for 2025 provides an overview of the performance of drinking water suppliers in New Zealand. Based on data reported to the Authority, the report presents key findings regarding supplier compliance and reporting rates, drinking water safety, performance against the Drinking Water Quality Assurance Rules 2022 (revised 2024) (the Rules), and how we are notified of water quality events.

The Water Services (Drinking Water Standards for New Zealand) Regulations 2022 (the Standards) and the Rules work together to support safe drinking water. The Standards set the maximum acceptable values for contaminants that may be present in drinking water, including bacteria, protozoa and chemicals. The Rules set out the treatment, monitoring and reporting requirements suppliers must meet to demonstrate that risks are being managed and that drinking water is safe. Together, they provide the basis for assessing whether suppliers are meeting their responsibilities, whether treatment barriers are operating effectively, and where further action may be needed to protect public health.

In 2025, our regulatory approach was guided by the Compliance, Monitoring and Enforcement Strategy for 2025-28 (the CME). This Strategy includes the pipeline to safe drinking water – a series of steps that suppliers should take to lift the performance of their supplies and reduce the risk of people getting sick from their drinking water. While each supplier is at a different starting point, the CME sets out our expectation that all supplies have basic treatment barriers in place by the end of 2028.

The report shows that there has been measurable progress in several areas. Suppliers are putting treatment barriers in place, source water monitoring has continued to improve, and school supplies are increasingly working to identify and manage risks. These trends show that suppliers are taking practical steps along the pipeline to safe drinking water.

For the first time, this report also includes information that is specific to mixed-use rural supplies, reflecting a new statutory reporting requirement. The mixed-use rural Acceptable Solution that came into force in September 2025 presents suppliers with a compliance pathway that considers the risks present to the populations they serve, and provides a proportionate compliance pathway that reflects the resources available to their supplies.

This report also reflects the importance of good quality data to enable effective regulation. The completeness, accuracy and consistency of supplier information affects how well we can understand the risks to supplies and creates trust and confidence for the public that the information reported accurately demonstrates the safety of their drinking water. While reporting quality has improved in some areas, the Authority continues to work with suppliers to drive improvements in the quality of their monitoring and reporting data.

The key themes in this report reflect what we know about drinking water safety across registered suppliers, and our performance as a regulator in 2025. The report shows how the Authority is using evidence to recognise improvement where it is occurring, while maintaining a clear focus on identifying and addressing remaining risks. We are using the information available to us to guide our engagement with suppliers, support better decision-making, respond to incidents, and take regulatory action when needed to protect public health.

Overall, the report shows that there has been continued improvement, but further progress is needed. We will continue to focus on areas that support safe drinking water: effective treatment barriers, timely notifications of and responses to water quality events, reliable monitoring and reporting, stronger supplier capability, and better quality information to support risk-based regulation.

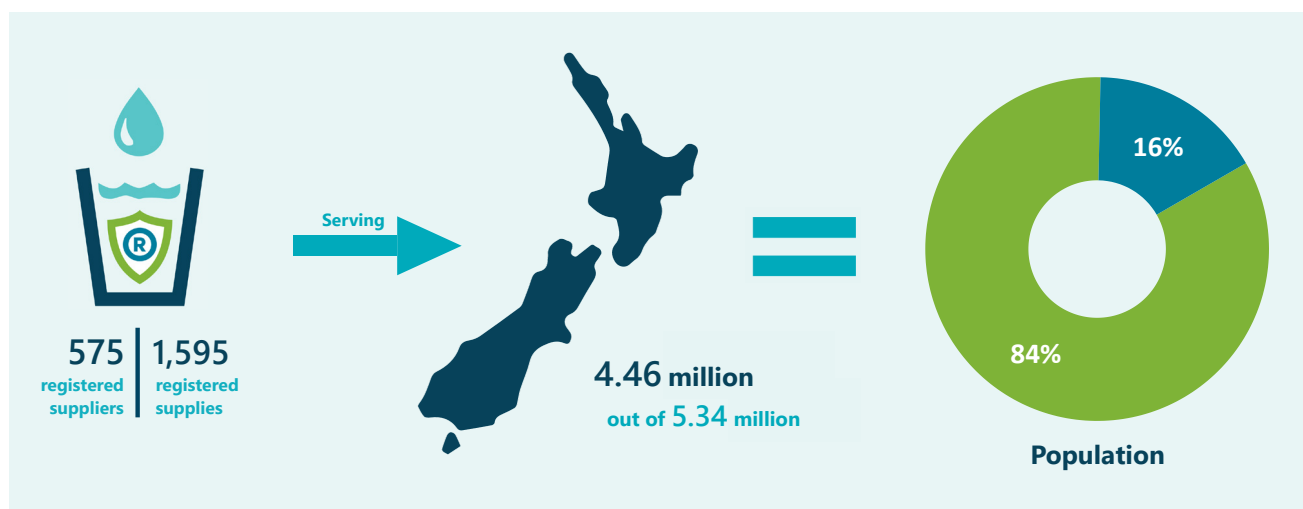
Drinking water suppliers are making good progress in installing basic treatment barriers. The next challenge is ensuring operational systems, processes and practices keep those barriers working effectively and reliably as source water conditions and other external influences change. The report shines a light on areas where these operational practices can further improve to deliver safe and reliable drinking water to the public.

Drinking Water Suppliers

In this report, we focus on the 575 suppliers that own and operate 1,595 drinking water supplies that have registered with the Authority and have confirmed their registration details with us. These 575 registered suppliers provide water to 84% of the population, approximately 4.5 million people as illustrated in Figure 1.

Hinekōrako is our web-based portal for these registered drinking water suppliers to share information with us about their supplies, compliance pathways and drinking water safety.

Figure 1: Population served by registered drinking water supplies



The remaining 16% of the population is served by drinking water suppliers that have not completed their registration with us, as well as domestic self-suppliers, which serve a single domestic dwelling, and shared domestic suppliers, which serve no more than 25 consumers who reside in domestic dwellings. Domestic self-suppliers and shared domestic suppliers are not drinking water suppliers under the Water Services Act.

This report focuses on registered drinking water suppliers. This ensures that our analysis is based on verified information and provides an accurate picture of the compliance and performance of regulated supplies across New Zealand.

To ensure that our regulatory approach is proportionate, consistent and targeted to the areas of highest risk, our expectations of registered suppliers are informed by how each supply is governed and operated. As part of this approach, we have identified three categories of supplier:

- **Council suppliers**, including metropolitan, provincial and rural councils, regional councils, unitary authorities, and new water organisations established under Local Water Done Well.
- **Government suppliers**, including the Department of Conservation, the Department of Corrections, the New Zealand Defence Force and the Ministry of Education.
- **Private and community suppliers**, including commercial suppliers, community groups, marae, and other suppliers that may have limited resources or technical capabilities.

While most people receive water from a relatively small number of council suppliers, most suppliers are small providers serving comparatively few people. Table 1 provides details of the populations served by each supplier type.

Table 1: Supplier types

Supplier type	Number of registered supplies	Population served	Description
Councils 67 suppliers	541 supplies	4,317,455	Territorial authorities, regional councils, unitary authorities and council-controlled organisations (CCOs)
Government 6 suppliers	479 supplies	74,499	Ministry of Education – Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga (schools) Department of Conservation – Te Papa Atawhai (campsites, huts and villages) Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa (prisons) New Zealand Defence Force – Te Ope Kātua o Aotearoa (facilities) Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children Land Information New Zealand
Community and private 502 suppliers	575 supplies	71,965	Facilities and communities – such as universities, private schools, hospitals, airports and ski fields Māori suppliers – this group includes iwi entities, kura supplies, kōhanga reo, marae, papakāinga and Māori community supplies Other – such as mixed-use rural supplies, residential and other private or community supplies not owned by councils Water carriers – operators who transport drinking water without reticulation

Reporting Data

In this report we look at data provided by drinking water suppliers and accredited laboratories, which are indicators of drinking water safety, compliance, risk and overall performance of the sector. Over time, as sector reporting matures, data quality and insights will continue to improve and comparisons will become more meaningful.

This report presents data on supplies that were registered as at 31 December 2025. In some instances, data from previous reporting years may be recalculated using this cohort of supplies, which may result in changes to previously published values due to supplies entering or leaving the reporting cohort.

Minor amendments to the data analysis, such as aggregation logic, definitions, classifications or reporting methodology, may be applied where considered necessary by the Authority to improve the accuracy, consistency or interpretability of data. Where revisions are considered material to the interpretation of results, they will be explicitly identified and described within this report.

Percentages and rates presented in this report may be rounded for reporting purposes. As a result, values that appear the same when rounded to zero decimal places may differ slightly in the underlying data, which may cause corresponding bars or data points in figures to vary in size. Where this occurs, the chart reflects the unrounded values.

A link to the DWRR 2024 is provided below², which includes 2023 data for comparison and reference.

² <https://www.taumataarowai.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Network-Performance/Drinking-Water-Regulation-Report-2024.pdf>

Part One:

Towards Safe Drinking Water

The regulatory system for New Zealand's drinking water is centred on public health and is designed to ensure that drinking water suppliers provide safe drinking water to consumers. Its foundations are the Water Services Act 2021 (the Act) and the secondary legislation made under it, including the Water Services (Drinking Water Standards for New Zealand) Regulations 2022 (the Standards) and the Drinking Water Quality Assurance Rules 2022 (revised 2024) (the Rules). Together these settings provide the framework for identifying, managing and reducing public health risks associated with drinking water.

Our Compliance, Monitoring and Enforcement Strategy for 2025 to 2028

The Drinking Water Regulation Reports for 2022, 2023 and 2024 presented the data supplied to us by drinking water suppliers on Rules reporting, water quality monitoring, and notifications of drinking water safety and compliance issues. The findings of these reports were used to inform the Compliance, Monitoring and Enforcement Strategy 2025-28 (the CME). The CME ensures that our regulatory activities are targeted towards risk, and that they are proportionate and responsive to the realities of supplying drinking water in New Zealand. This Strategy represents a shift towards understanding whether suppliers are effectively managing and addressing immediate and ongoing risks related to source water, treatment and distribution systems to achieve safe drinking water outcomes.

Improving supplier ownership of risks is a key indicator of system maturity and a core objective of the CME. In implementing this Strategy, the Authority is working with suppliers to ensure they meet their regulatory responsibilities and take ownership of the risks to drinking water safety that affect their supplies. This enables both us and the supplier to identify the right indicators of risk and act fast with the benefit of an evidence base to protect public health if something goes wrong.

The CME provides the pipeline to safe drinking water as a pathway to mature risk management, from basic compliance through to comprehensive and proactive management of risks to drinking water supplies. The stages along the pipeline – shown in Figure 2 – represent key steps we recommend suppliers take to lift the performance of their drinking water supplies and reduce the risk to public health.

Each supplier is at a different stage along this pipeline. The CME is focused on ensuring that all suppliers are taking clear steps towards providing safe drinking water every day. Suppliers that have reached the last stage will still have risks to actively manage to ensure that the water supplied to consumers is safe to drink.

Drinking water suppliers across New Zealand vary greatly in size and complexity, from large metropolitan councils serving hundreds of thousands of people, to small community-owned schemes providing water to no more than 25 people. The Authority provides guidance to support all suppliers to identify and manage risks that could impact their supply. We expect all suppliers to respond promptly to address risks, including being transparent with consumers and advising them when their drinking water is or may be unsafe.

Figure 2: Pipeline to safe drinking water



Council Suppliers

Suppliers in this category share a common governance model and accountability to the public. We recognise that the size and structure of councils and their water service delivery models vary. We therefore consider factors, such as the population served, existing infrastructure and available resourcing, when determining the most appropriate regulatory response.

Figure 3 shows that by 2028 we expect council suppliers to be industry leaders in effectively managing risks, demonstrating compliance, and building a strong culture of drinking water safety.

One of the indicators of progress along this pipeline is that *E. coli* detections are rare, and that suppliers promptly address them should they occur. *E. coli* is a species of bacteria that is used as an indicator of faecal contamination in drinking water. Its presence indicates that disease-causing organisms may also be present, and can also indicate weaknesses in treatment processes, monitoring systems or operational activities. In 2025, we received laboratory notifications of *E. coli* detections from 21 councils. Of these, seven councils had two or more *E. coli* detection notifications for the same supply. When *E. coli* is detected, it may indicate that barriers are being operated ineffectively. We expect suppliers with *E. coli* detections to investigate the root cause and to actively manage the risks to their supplies.

While temporary consumer advisories may be put in place by suppliers while they take steps to address issues relating to drinking water safety, long-term advisories are those that remain in place for longer than the temporary period of incident management. In 2025, there were 19 councils with one or more long-term advisories active in 2025. Our expectation of council suppliers is that they have no long-term advisories in place.

From 2026 onwards, we expect council suppliers to consistently achieve full compliance with the Rules or an Acceptable Solution, and to submit accurate, complete reports in line with the requirements of the Rules. Part Three of this report presents data on the performance of council supplies, including the percentage of supplies that met or almost met their reporting requirements, along with the percentage of invalid reports received.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of council supplies that submitted compliance reports in 2024 and 2025 for source, treatment and distribution rules. While some Rules modules showed decreases in reporting rates from 2024 to 2025, these were all less than 3%. In all categories, the reporting rate was greater than 80%. We expect to see this rate increase across all categories in 2026 and 2027.

Figure 3: Pipeline to safe drinking water: Expectation for council suppliers by 2028

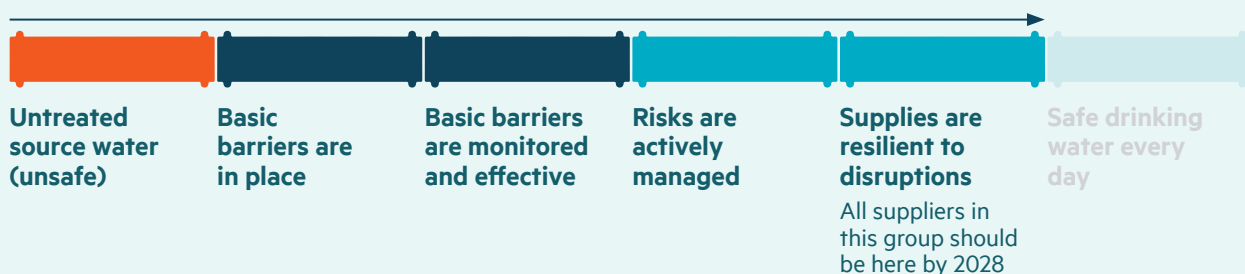
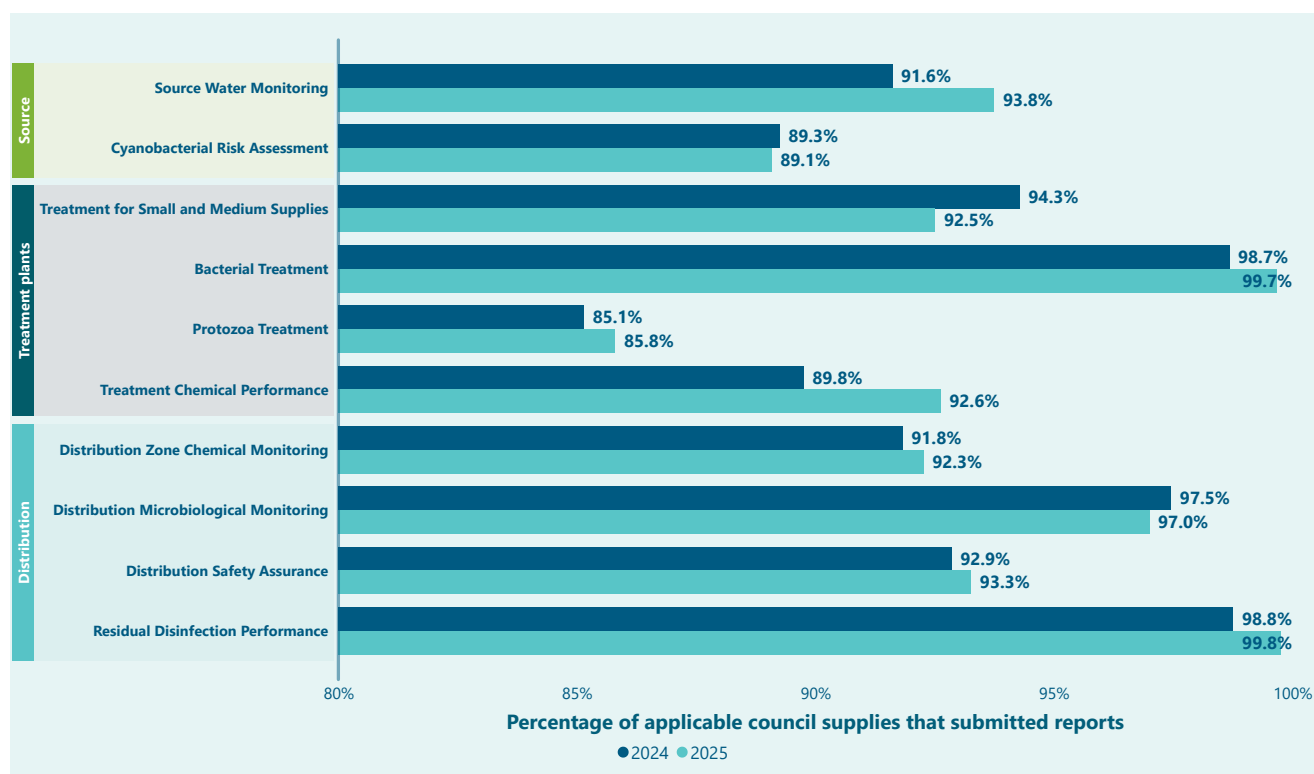


Figure 4: Council reporting rates by Rules module



Multi-Barrier Protection

Ensuring basic treatment barriers are in place and operating effectively is one of the Authority's primary regulatory priorities because these barriers provide the most direct protection against drinking water-related illness. The Authority's initial focus for 2025 was on council supplies that lacked basic treatment barriers against microorganisms – protozoal, bacterial or residual disinfection barriers. Along with source water risk management, these barriers are key

components of a multi-barrier approach to drinking water safety. Further information on the multi-barrier treatment approach can be found on our website³.

Table 2 shows the progress of council suppliers towards implementing these barriers at their supplies. Of note is the significant change in the population served by a water supply with a protozoal treatment barrier – this has increased by more than 415,000 people from 2023 to 2025.

Table 2: Treatment barriers at council supplies

Barrier type	Supplies with barrier	2023	2024	2025
Bacterial treatment	Total number	459	475	493
	Percentage of supplies	96%	97%	98%
	Population served	4,190,648	4,227,852	4,281,656
Protozoal treatment	Total number	357	399	440
	Percentage of supplies	76%	84%	90%
	Population served	3,529,301	3,837,169	3,944,959
Residual disinfection	Total number	393	412	413
	Percentage of supplies	92%	94%	94%
	Population served	4,098,119	4,225,155	4,304,880

³ <https://www.taumataarowai.govt.nz/learning-hub/source-monitoring-and-treatment/multi-barrier>

While the number of supplies with protozoal treatment has increased, at the end of 2025 there were 51 supplies across 22 councils that still did not have this barrier in place, affecting approximately 311,000 people. Overall, there were 33 councils with one or more supply lacking at least one of these three barriers. We are continuing to work with suppliers with increasing regulatory intensity to ensure their rapid progress towards installing multiple barriers at all of their supplies.

The data in Table 2 reflects the information provided to us by suppliers as at 31 December 2025. We note that in some cases suppliers had installed barriers prior to the end of 2025, but only updated their supply data to reflect this in early 2026. This may be due to commissioning requirements or data validation practices, which may have delayed these updates.

Two examples of this were present in the Christchurch City Council supply. The Tanner treatment plant (TP100130) supplying the Christchurch supply (CHR009), and the Wainui treatment plant (TP01962) supplying the Wainui supply (WAI138), both installed protozoal treatment barriers by November 2025. However, the supply data for both plants was not updated until early in 2026. The protozoal treatment barrier installed at the Tanner treatment plant affected a population of 153,885 people.

We are continuing to see suppliers working towards the uptake of multiple barriers. An example of this is the Patea supply (PAT001) managed by the South Taranaki District Council. This supply is sourced by bores between 50 and 115 metres deep and serves a population of 1,310. The source water contains ammonia, which interacts with the chlorine added during the treatment process, causing the chlorine to become ineffective as a disinfectant. As a result, the residual disinfection barrier was not being maintained in the distribution zone.

A pilot treatment system was set up at the treatment plant to test the effect of filtration media types on removing ammonia prior to adding chlorine. After trialling options to effectively treat the source water for this supply a project for a new treatment plant was initiated, which is expected to be completed by end of 2026.

Case study: A new treatment plant combines small supplies to ensure treatment barriers are in place

In 2023, it was identified that three Thames Coromandel District Council supplies serving small rural townships lacked basic treatment barriers. The supplies Matatoki (MAT009), Puriri (PUR003) and Thames Valley (THA002) serve a combined population of 500 people.

The Thames Coromandel District Council decided that combining these supplies into a single supply was the most appropriate way to achieve compliance and meet the needs of the community now and into the future. This project represents a significant investment for the council and will take time to complete, as it includes land acquisition, resource consenting, design and the construction of a new treatment plant. We are monitoring progress on this project, which is due to be completed by June 2028. These three supplies will remain on a boil water notice until the new water treatment plant is fully commissioned.

Government Suppliers

Our expectations of government suppliers are similar to those of council suppliers, in particular around the frequency of *E. coli* detections and long-term consumer advisories.

Figure 5 shows that by 2028 we expect government suppliers to use reliable treatment and monitoring practices and continue to build their ability to manage risks to drinking water safety.

Figure 5: Pipeline to safe drinking water: Expectation for government suppliers by 2028



Table 3 shows the number of laboratory notifications of *E. coli* detections for each government supplier in 2025. It also lists the number of unique supplies that had two or more

E. coli detections. There were 41 schools with only one *E. coli* detection in 2025, and 22 with two or more detections.

Table 3: Government suppliers: Laboratory notifications of *E. coli* detections

Supplier	Number of <i>E. coli</i> detections	Number of supplies with two or more <i>E. coli</i> detections
Ministry of Education	108	22
Department of Conservation	12	3
Department of Corrections	1	0

As suppliers progress along the pipeline, we expect to see the incidence of *E. coli* detections reduce as basic barriers are put in place, along with monitoring to confirm their effectiveness. This will also be supported by a decrease in the number of long-term consumer advisories. There were 21 supplies with active long-term advisories in 2025. Fifteen of these were boil water notices at Department of Conservation supplies, and six were 'do not drink'; advisories for Ministry of Education

school supplies. By the end of 2025, three of the advisories for schools had ended, showing that the risk to each of these supplies was successfully addressed and mitigated.

Table 4 shows the number of supplies that were required to submit compliance reporting in 2025, along with the percentage of these supplies that reported to us on time.

Table 4: Government suppliers: Reporting rates for 2025

Supplier	Number of supplies with reporting requirements	Percentage of supplies that met reporting requirements
Department of Conservation	17	11.8%
Department of Corrections	3	100%
Ministry of Education	340	1.2%
New Zealand Defence Force	8	87.5%

We expect to see government suppliers increase their compliance with the Rules, including their rates of reporting. As government supplies (especially school supplies) move to Acceptable Solution compliance pathways, we expect the reporting performance of these suppliers to improve as their understanding of their compliance requirements matures and becomes part of established procedures.

Private Suppliers

Private suppliers – also referred to as commercial suppliers in the CME – include small businesses in rural, remote and semi-urban areas, such as private schools, airports and ski fields. They can also serve large commercial supplies, such as universities and hospitals. This category also includes water carrier operators who transport drinking water without reticulation networks.

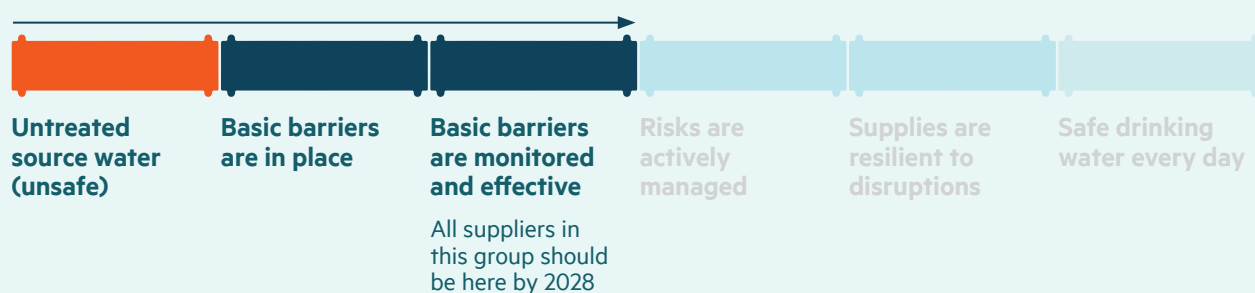
The CME expects private suppliers to manage risks to their drinking water supplies at the same level of maturity as government suppliers. This includes reducing the number of *E. coli* detections and ensuring that basic treatment barriers are in place and being effectively monitored by 2028.

Community Suppliers

Community suppliers include iwi entities, kura supplies, kōhanga reo, marae, papakāinga and Māori community supplies, along with other community supplies not owned by councils.

Figure 6 shows that by 2028 we expect registered community suppliers to understand their responsibilities, take practical steps towards compliance and have basic drinking water safety measures in place. This includes choosing a compliance pathway – either following an Acceptable Solution, or by submitting a drinking water safety plan (DWSP) and complying with the Rules. Suppliers must also update their supplies in Hinekōrako and work towards the requirements of their chosen pathway. These may include installing basic treatment barriers, carrying out regular water quality testing, and responding promptly to drinking water safety risks with appropriate actions.

Figure 6: Pipeline to safe drinking water: Expectation for community suppliers by 2028



Registration and progress towards compliance

In 2025, there were a total of 575 registered private and community supplies, serving a combined total of more than 70,000 people. For the purposes of this report, private and community suppliers are reported as a combined group, consistent with the methodology used in the Drinking Water Regulation Report 2024.

Table 5 shows that most registered supplies have either a DWSP or an Acceptable Solution in place. However, there are 47 supplies that require a DWSP in line with the Rules requirements, but have not yet submitted one to the Authority. Suppliers that elect to follow the Rules need to demonstrate that the reporting requirements of the applicable Rules modules are met.

Table 5: Compliance pathways for private and community supplies

Compliance Pathway	Number of Supplies
Acceptable Solution in place	111
DWSP in place	361
DWSP required but not submitted	47
General exemption in place	1
DWSP not required – population under 25 people	55
Total	575

To understand how private and community suppliers are progressing, we first need these suppliers to register with us. By registering, suppliers provide us with critical information about their supplies, including the population served, water source type, treatment methods and operational

responsibilities. We will gain more insight into how this group of suppliers is performing in subsequent reporting years as previously unregistered suppliers are required under the Act to register by November 2028.



Part Two:

Reporting and Managing Risks

Every day, drinking water suppliers play a vital role in supporting the health and wellbeing of people across New Zealand by providing them with safe, reliable drinking water. Water quality monitoring and assurance programmes are important parts of a supplier's ability to demonstrate that the drinking water that they supply is safe. The Rules require suppliers to monitor water quality and undertake quality assurance activities across the drinking water network, from the source to the distribution network to the consumer.

New Zealand's drinking water comes from a range of sources, including lakes, rivers, groundwater and roof water. It can contain contaminants that are harmful to people's health. Contamination of drinking water can also occur during treatment or within distribution systems if processes and infrastructure are not well managed. Notifications provide an important early indicator of emerging risks and help the Authority target monitoring, engagement and enforcement activity.

Notifications

The Act requires that suppliers notify the Authority when there are: concerns about the safety or compliance of drinking water; restrictions or interruptions to the supply of drinking water that last more than eight hours; or there is an imminent risk to the sufficiency of the water available through the supply.

Notifications are vital to ensure that suppliers are taking appropriate action that reflects the seriousness of each incident. We assess and provide a proportionate response to notifications that we receive from registered supplies. We also assess notifications from unregistered supplies, although these notifications often lack critical information about the supply.

When a notification indicates that drinking water may be unsafe, or that an MAV in the Standards was exceeded, sections 21 and 22 of the Water Services Act 2021 require that the supplier must take immediate action to protect public health. This response may include advising consumers of the risk, issuing a boil water notice or 'do not drink' advisory or making an alternative source, such as bottled or tankered water, available to those affected. These sections of the Act also require the supplier to notify the Authority when drinking water is or may be unsafe, or does not comply with the Standards.

In response to a notification, suppliers must undertake an investigation to identify the likely source or cause, and implement measures to ensure that the incident does not happen again. Some improvements may be immediate, and others may take place over a longer period of time (e.g. as part of the supplier's drinking water safety planning process). If the mitigation process is ongoing, suppliers must ensure that any risks to drinking water safety, sufficiency or compliance are managed in the interim.

Notifications of MAV exceedances

When a MAV is exceeded, both the supplier and the accredited laboratory that tested the water must notify the Authority. Notifications from laboratories are important as they cover all drinking water samples, including those submitted by unregistered supplies. As laboratories are independent of suppliers, they can identify when a supplier has failed to fulfil their duty to notify us. Notifications from laboratories can also alert us to issues before a notification is sent from a supplier.

In 2025, we received 297 notifications of MAV exceedances from suppliers, compared with 517 from laboratories⁴. While many suppliers are fulfilling their duty to notify us of MAV exceedances, in 2025 there were still instances where suppliers did not notify us when a MAV was exceeded in one or more of their supplies. Instead, these exceedances were notified to us by the testing laboratory. We expect every water supplier to notify us when a drinking water MAV exceedance is detected. Investigating the causes of non-notification of MAV exceedances will be a focus for the Authority in the coming year.

⁴ We may allow a supplier to not notify us of individual exceedances that relate to the same underlying issue, and only notify us once the issue is resolved. This helps to reduce the administrative burden on the supplier. As we do not make the same allowance for laboratories, this accounts for some of the difference between the number of notifications received from suppliers compared with the number received from laboratories.

Table 6: Laboratory notifications of MAV exceedances

Notification type	2023	2024	2025
Number of notifications of <i>E. coli</i> detection	325	219	221
Number of chemical MAV exceedance notifications	369	380	296
Total notifications received	694	599	517
Average number of notifications received per month	57.8	49.9	43.1

Table 7: Supplier notifications of MAV exceedances

Notification type	2023	2024	2025
Number of notifications of <i>E. coli</i> detection	162	101	119
Number of chemical MAV exceedance notifications	221	218	178
Total notifications received	383	319	297
Average number of notifications received per month	31.9	26.6	24.8

Table 6 presents the number of notifications we received from laboratories. This data tells us that an exceedance has occurred and signals a possible risk to the water supply where the sample was taken. Table 7 presents the number of notifications that we received from suppliers. These notifications tell us that a supplier is aware of a possible risk to their water supply, and what they are doing in response to this event.

Table 6 and Table 7 show that the number of notifications of MAV exceedances that we receive from both suppliers and laboratories has consistently decreased year-on-year since 2023.

There was a noticeable decrease in the number of *E. coli* detections notified to us from 2023 to 2024, but this did not significantly change from 2024 to 2025. The slight increase in *E. coli* detection notifications from suppliers is the result of increased reporting rates from Ministry of Education schools. This indicates that schools are more consistently notifying us of exceedances when they are detected.

Laboratory notifications of *E. coli* detections

E. coli is a species of bacteria that is commonly found in the intestines of humans and animals. It is relatively easy to test for and is used internationally as an indicator of faecal contamination. The presence of *E. coli* indicates that pathogens that can cause illness may also be present in the water. Persistent *E. coli* detections may indicate weaknesses in treatment barriers, source water management, operational practices or monitoring systems.

Testing for *E. coli* is helpful to determine if treatment barriers are operating effectively and drinking water is safe. However, since only a tiny percentage of the water is tested, and it takes at least 24 hours to receive results, it is important that suppliers can demonstrate that they always have effective bacterial barriers in place.

Drinking water that is safe and complies with the Standards should not contain pathogens or their indicators. If suppliers become aware that *E. coli* has been detected, our expectation is that they will promptly fulfil their duties under the Act. This includes taking steps to protect public health (e.g. through a consumer advisory such as a boil water notice), investigating the cause and preventing a recurrence. Any notification of *E. coli* is serious and requires an effective and timely response and investigation.

In 2026, we will be releasing guidance for suppliers for responding to *E. coli* detections. This will include our expectations that suppliers identify the most probable cause of contamination and take action to prevent a recurrence, as required under the Act. The Authority supports a stronger focus on root cause analysis, corrective action and continuous improvement, with the aim of reducing *E. coli* detections over time.

In 2025, we received 221 notifications of *E. coli* detections from laboratories, a similar amount to the 219 notifications received in 2024. Figure 7 shows the locations of suppliers that had one or more laboratory notification of an *E. coli* detection in 2025.

Figure 7: Laboratory notifications of *E. coli* detections by supplier type

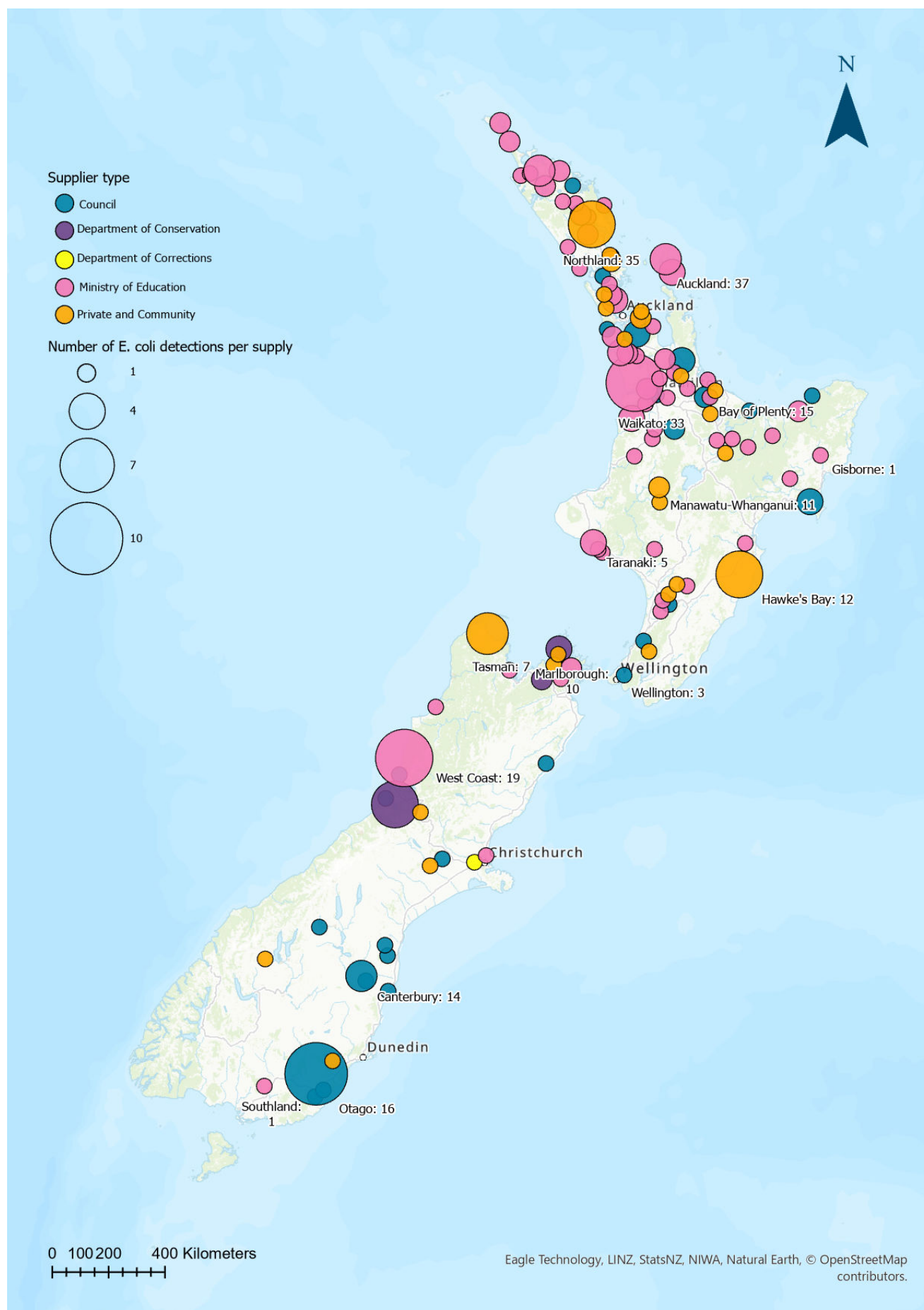


Table 8: Number of laboratory notifications of *E. coli* detections by supplier type

Supplier type	2024	2025
Council	45	50
Government (excluding Ministry of Education)	7	13
Ministry of Education	129	108
Community and private	38	50
Total	219	221

Laboratory notifications of chemical MAV exceedances

The decrease in the number of chemical MAV exceedances is a positive indication that water suppliers are increasingly identifying and managing risks to their supplies. This shows

that proactive steps are being taken to improve drinking water quality, in addition to the immediate reactive steps taken by suppliers when MAV exceedances are detected.

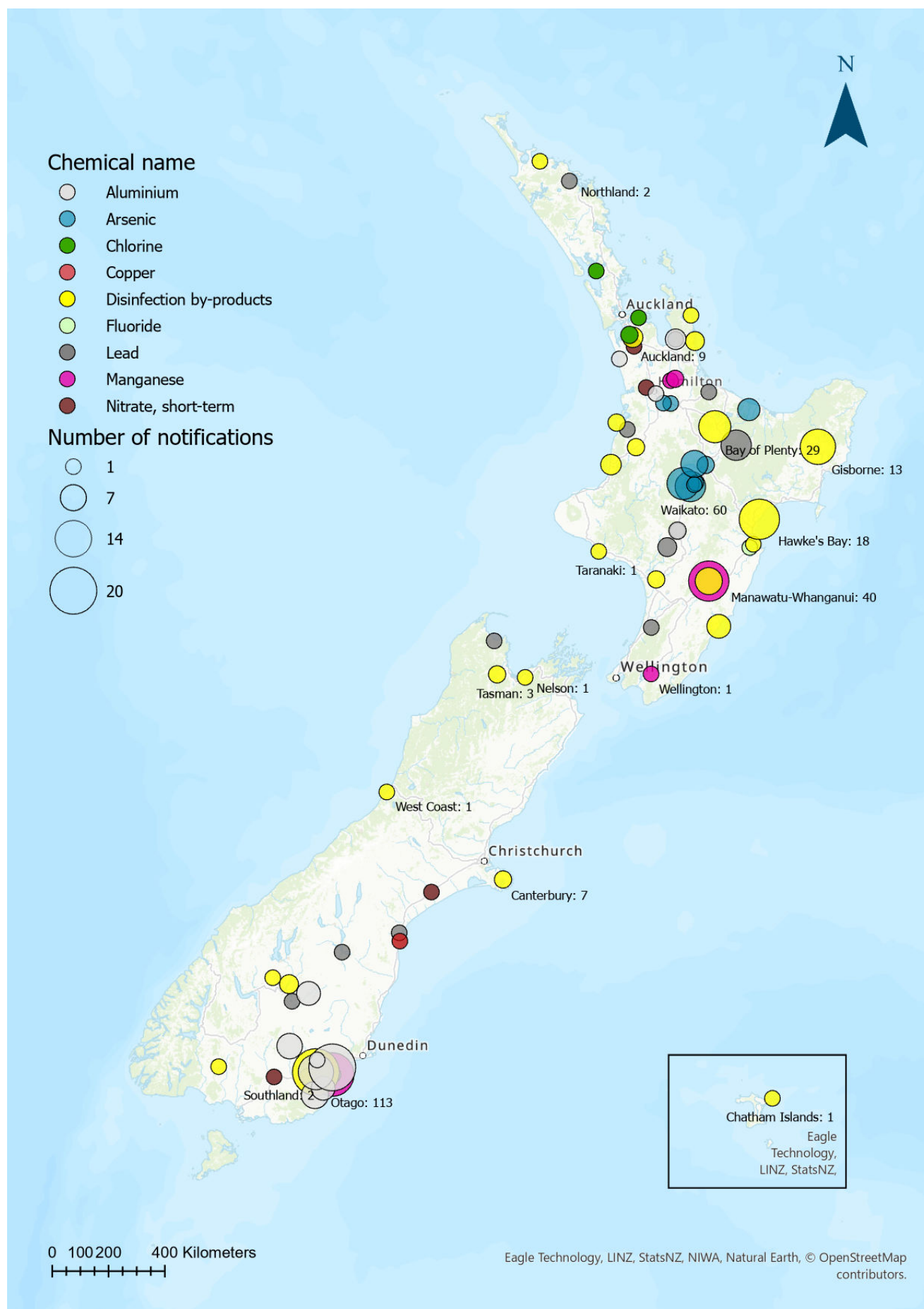
Table 9: Number of laboratory notifications of chemical MAV exceedances by supplier type

Supplier type	2024	2025
Council	355	247
Government (excluding Ministry of Education)	2	13
Ministry of Education	5	9
Community and private	18	27
Total	380	296

Table 10: Laboratory notifications of chemical MAV exceedances by determinand for 2025

Determinand name	MAV mg/L	Unregistered supplies	Registered supplies		
		Number of exceedance notifications	Number of exceedance notifications	Median exceedance (as value times MAV)	Maximum exceedance (as value times MAV)
Aluminium	1.0	2	70	1.5	24.1
Arsenic	0.01	36	41	1.2	2.5
Chlorine	5.0	6	5	1.3	2.0
Copper	2.0	1	1	1.38	1.38
Disinfection by-products	Varies	1	116	Varies	Varies
Fluoride	1.5	0	1	1.18	1.18
Lead	0.01	13	26	1.7	4.6
Manganese	0.4	16	38	2.1	54.3
Nitrate, short-term (as NO ₃)	50.0	17	4	1.0	1.5

Figure 8: Laboratory notifications of chemical MAV exceedances



Ministry of Education schools

In 2025, there were 423 school supplies registered with us. The data received from these supplies highlights encouraging signs of improved engagement and risk management among Ministry of Education school drinking water supplies. The rate of school supplies notifying us of samples that are non-compliant with the Standards (i.e. when a determinand is detected at a value greater than the MAV) has continued to improve, providing greater visibility of drinking water performance. In addition, the incidence of *E. coli* detections notified by laboratories has decreased by 16% compared with 2024.

Table 11: Supplier and laboratory *E. coli* notification trends for schools

Supplier type	2022	2023	2024	2025
Supplier notification of <i>E. coli</i> detection	12	59	60	56
Laboratory notification of <i>E. coli</i> detection	90	133	129	108
Supplier to laboratory ratio of <i>E. coli</i> detection notifications	0.13	0.45	0.47	0.52

The upward trend in the ratio of supplier to laboratory notifications of *E. coli* detections indicates that school supplies are contacting us more consistently when *E. coli* is detected. The decrease in the number of laboratory *E. coli* notifications could also indicate that schools have better systems in place to ensure safe drinking water.

The data indicates that some school supplies are monitoring for chemicals in their source water and notifying us where chemical risks are detected. While it is encouraging to see schools with an identified chemical risk continuing to monitor for chemical contamination and taking actions to address it, there are still some schools that may not be carrying out this testing as required. We will monitor this trend and expect to see chemical testing and reporting rates continue to improve.

The Ministry of Education has an ongoing drinking water improvement programme (Safer Drinking Water in Schools) that includes a series of infrastructure upgrades. While further progress is still needed, the available evidence reported to the Authority suggests that schools are increasingly identifying, monitoring and responding to drinking water risks. We expect to see continued work from the Ministry of Education to invest in necessary improvements to school drinking water supply infrastructure, and will continue to work with school supplies to ensure that they are progressing along their pathways to safe drinking water.

Table 8 shows that around half of laboratory notifications of *E. coli* detections in 2025 were from self-supplied schools – 108 in total. Figure 9 shows the locations of schools that had laboratory notifications of chemical MAV exceedances and *E. coli* detections in self-supplied schools, along with the locations of registered school supplies in New Zealand.

The data presented in Table 11 shows that while the number of laboratory notifications of *E. coli* detection is continuing to trend downwards year on year, the number of supplier notifications of *E. coli* detections has remained relatively consistent since 2023.

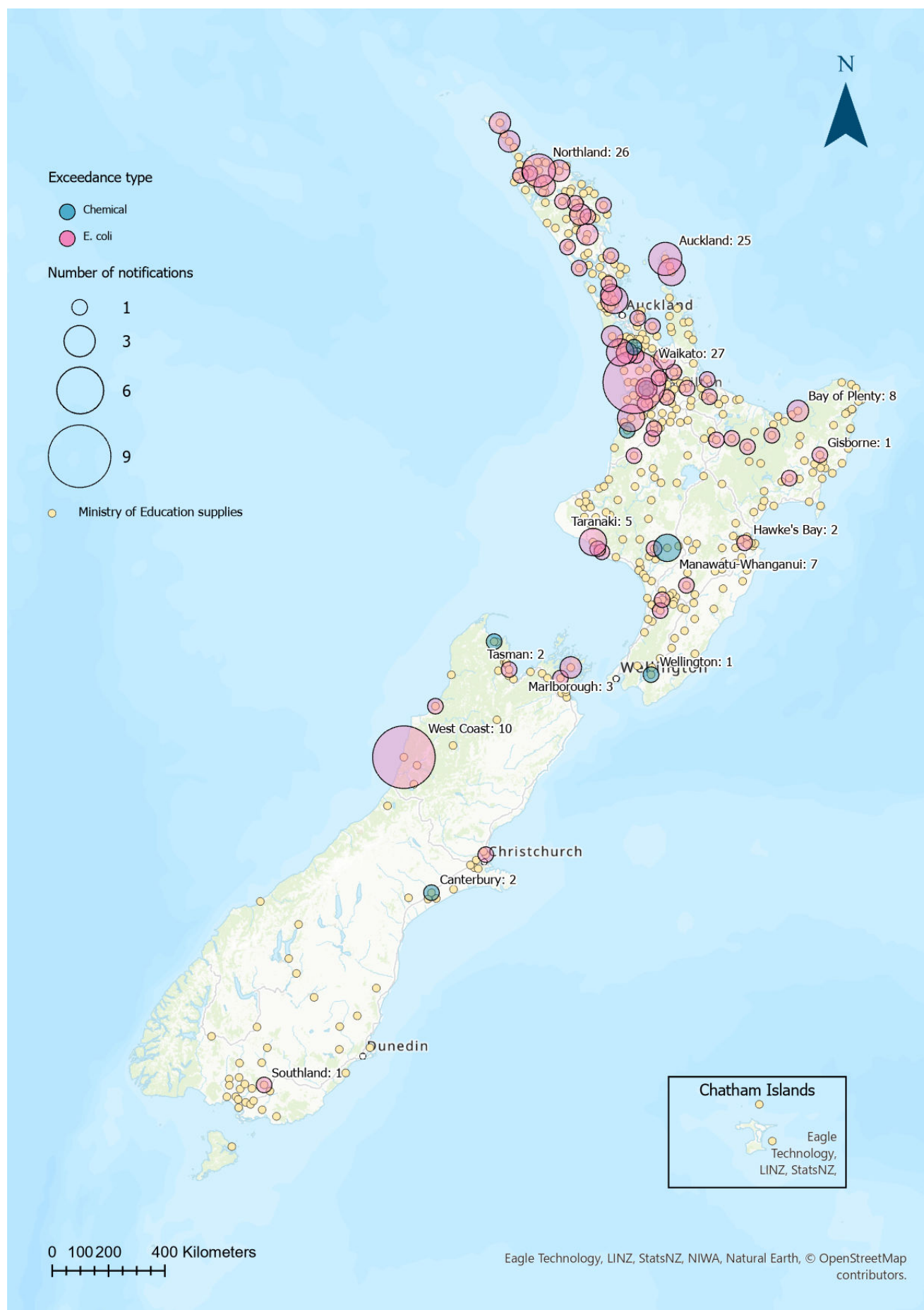
Notifications of drinking water that is, or may be, unsafe

These notifications are submitted by suppliers. They may be linked to a laboratory notification that the water is non-compliant, or they may be submitted when there are other indicators that water is or may be unsafe (e.g. failure of a treatment barrier or potential contamination in a distribution system).

When suppliers notify us that drinking water is or may be unsafe, they may include information about the reason for the notification. Commonly occurring reasons that we have received include:

- maintenance or equipment failures (e.g. UV lamp outages)
- process control issues, such as chlorine dosing rates
- human error
- environmental reasons, such as changes to water chemistry
- poor sampling practices, where sample contamination results in data that is not representative of the water being supplied
- lack of appropriate infrastructure (e.g. when heavy rainfall increases the turbidity of source water beyond the capacity of the treatment plant).

Figure 9: Laboratory notifications and registered school supplies



Understanding the root cause failure of events that may make drinking water unsafe is an important step in preventing similar issues from occurring in the future. When suppliers notify us of these events and include information about their investigation into the underlying cause, it provides valuable insight into the factors contributing to the incident and the actions needed to address them, including whether a consumer advisory is required. We encourage more suppliers to undertake and report root cause analysis as soon as potential contamination arises, as this supports more effective risk management and can help in identifying recurring issues.

In 2025, we received 289 notifications that drinking water is or may be unsafe – a significant decrease from the 550 notifications received in 2024. As illustrated by Figure 10, this was due to the decrease in notifications received from Clutha District Council. In March 2023, the Authority issued a direction to Clutha District Council and the previous operator of its supplies to carry out additional monitoring for

aluminium in five of its supplies, in order to investigate the cause of elevated aluminium levels and prepare a remedial action plan.

Since then, Clutha District Council has taken steps to improve the operation of its manually controlled aluminium coagulant dosing process. The extensive monitoring programme has shown that the result of this work is an overall reduction in the level of aluminium present in the treated water. In 2024, there were 119 laboratory notifications of aluminium MAV exceedances in Clutha supplies. In 2025, this was reduced to 56. In February 2025, we determined that the council met the requirements of the direction.

An increase in temporary consumer advisories being issued when non-compliant samples are decreasing may indicate that suppliers are getting better at communicating potential public health risks to consumers.

Figure 10: Comparison of notifications from registered supplies and Clutha District Council



Suppliers are responsible for ensuring the safety of their drinking water and managing the risks to their supplies. Some suppliers have more mature processes for identifying, assessing and responding to potential risks, including when determining whether an event should be notified to the Authority that drinking water is or may be unsafe.

Case study: Managing source water challenges while protecting public health

The Ruatoki Supply (RUA003) serves a population of 600 people and is managed by the Whakatane District Council. It has a shallow bore source, which is next to a river, and the treatment processes include UV disinfection and chlorination. Following an extreme weather event in early 2018 the bore became exposed to the river. This exposure means that when the turbidity of the river water is high (common after heavy rain), it can also result in high turbidity in the bore, reducing the effectiveness of the treatment processes. This vulnerability resulted in five boil water notices being issued in 2025.

Whakatane District Council has been looking for a new source for some time and has drilled a number of bores in the area with no success. The council is continuing the riverbed stabilisation works, and is now considering building a new treatment facility to manage source water turbidity issues.

While providing consistently safe drinking water is the goal, we are pleased that Whakatane District Council recognises the potential impact of increased turbidity on treatment processes, and issues boil water notices when the drinking water supplied may be unsafe. We expect the council to install the necessary infrastructure to manage the source water turbidity events and avoid the need to issue boil water notices.

Drinking Water Safety Plans

DWSPs are risk management tools prepared by suppliers that outline how safe, reliable and resilient drinking water will be supplied to their consumers. DWSPs focus on the identification, assessment and management of risks across the whole drinking water supply, from source water abstraction to treatment processes and distribution monitoring through to the point of supply. A DWSP must include information on the supplier's multi-barrier approach to drinking water safety, as well as identifying how the supplier will respond to events and emergencies, and how they will comply with the Rules.

For drinking water supplies that supply no more than 25 people, or where suppliers have chosen to follow an Acceptable Solution, a DWSP is not required. The Act requires that suppliers choosing to follow the Rules and prepare a DWSP do implement one for each of their supplies, and lodge a copy of this plan with the Authority.

Table 12 shows the number of supplies that require a DWSP and the number of supplies with a DWSP lodged with us for 2023 to 2025. If a supply has both an Acceptable Solution and a DWSP in place, it is excluded from this table and included in the following section on Acceptable Solutions.

Table 12: Supplies with drinking water safety plans

Year	Number of supplies that require a DWSP	Number of supplies with a DWSP lodged	Population served by supplies with a DWSP lodged
2023	1,059	620	4,351,429
2024	1,020	749	4,395,488
2025	1,038	757	4,406,386

The data shows that for those supplies that require a DWSP, the number of supplies for which a plan has been submitted to us increased significantly between 2023 and 2024. While the population that is served by supplies with DWSPs is over 4.4 million people, this has remained relatively unchanged over the past three years. This suggests that further intervention may be needed to strengthen risk management practices and support suppliers to progress along their

compliance pathways. This is supported by the objective of the CME to increase the number of private and community suppliers adopting effective risk management approaches.

Yearly changes in the number of supplies that require a DWSP are due to a number of factors, such as new supplies being registered and existing supplies being granted exemptions or implementing an Acceptable Solution.



Part Three:

Supplier Performance and Compliance

In this section, we review how suppliers are meeting their monitoring and performance requirements under the Rules to address the four key risks that can impact drinking water safety – microbiological contamination, chemical contamination, physical contamination leading to ineffective treatment, and loss or interruption of supply.

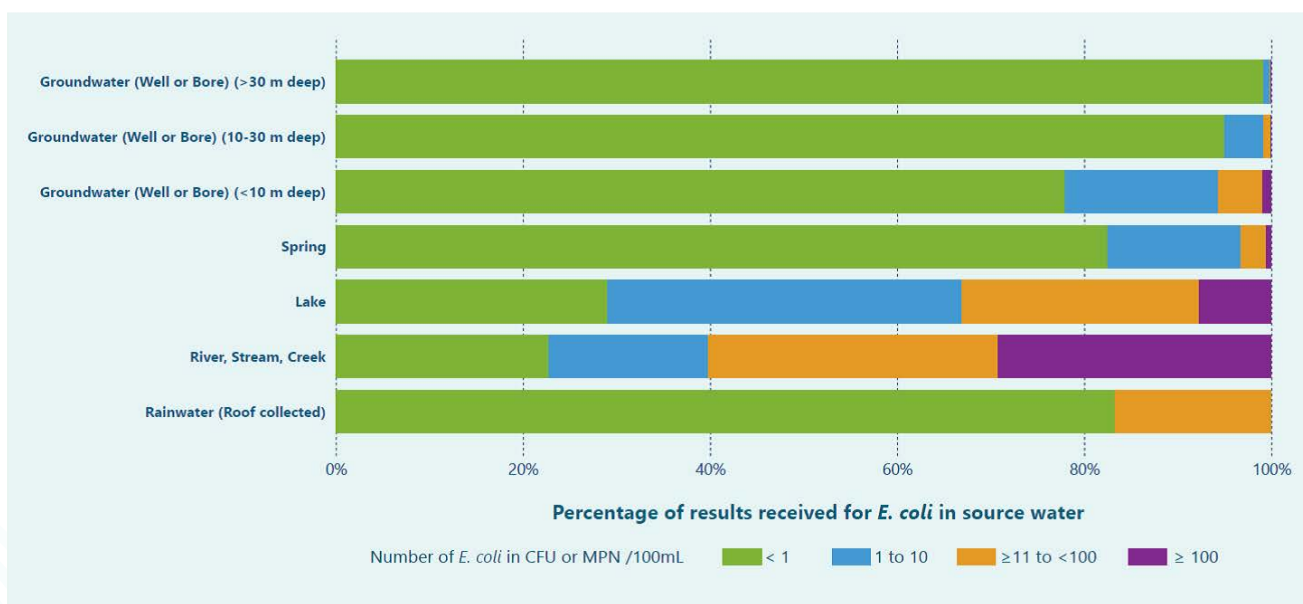
Microbiological Contamination

One of the primary purposes of drinking water treatment is to remove or inactivate microbiological hazards. This is because waterborne pathogens can cause rapid onset of acute illness in a population. Microbiological contamination happens

when harmful microscopic organisms (e.g. protozoa and bacteria) get into drinking water or are not removed, killed or inactivated through treatment processes. The Rules require suppliers to monitor source water, treatment plant processes and distribution water quality, to ensure that the risk of microbiological contamination is managed from the source to the consumer.

Although *E. coli* is present in surface water sources, such as lakes and rivers, it can also be detected in bore water sources on occasion. The Rules require *E. coli* monitoring to be carried out in all source water types. This helps suppliers to understand the quality of the source water being treated and is a part of the risk management process.

Figure 11: *E. coli* detection rates by source water type for 2025



Cyanobacteria in source water

One type of microbiological contamination risk that can affect drinking water supplies is the presence of cyanobacteria. Also known as blue-green algae, cyanobacteria are micro-organisms that live in freshwater and marine environments. Some cyanobacteria produce toxins (called cyanotoxins), which are harmful to humans and animals. In drinking water these toxins can pose an immediate and serious health risk. Risks to source water are higher when there are large numbers of cyanobacteria, which could be due to blooms or mats that form under the surface of the water.

Cyanobacteria are primarily a risk for supplies that use surface water sources, such as lakes, rivers and streams, where environmental conditions can support their growth. Groundwater sources are generally less susceptible to cyanobacteria because they are naturally protected from the sunlight and surface conditions that enable blooms to develop.

The Rules require suppliers to assess the cyanobacteria risk of each of their supplies that report against the Level 2 or Level 3 source water rules. If the risk is assessed as being medium or high, the Rules ensure that additional requirements apply. Suppliers are also required to update their assessment of cyanobacteria risk for each of their sources in the source registration details on Hinekōrako, our online supplier portal.

Figure 12 shows that in 2025, 86% of council supplies met their requirements to undertake a cyanobacteria risk assessment. While this is a slight increase from 82% in 2024, the number of supplies that did not submit a report on these requirements remained constant at 11%. However, the number of invalid reports that we received decreased.

Figure 12: Council supplies meeting cyanobacteria risk assessment requirements

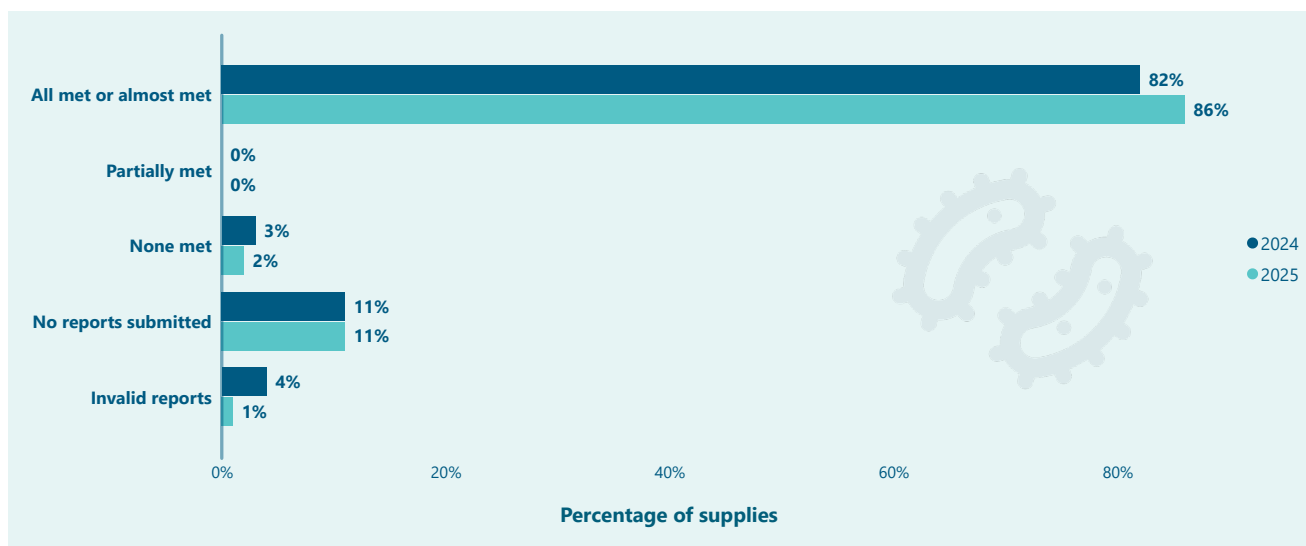
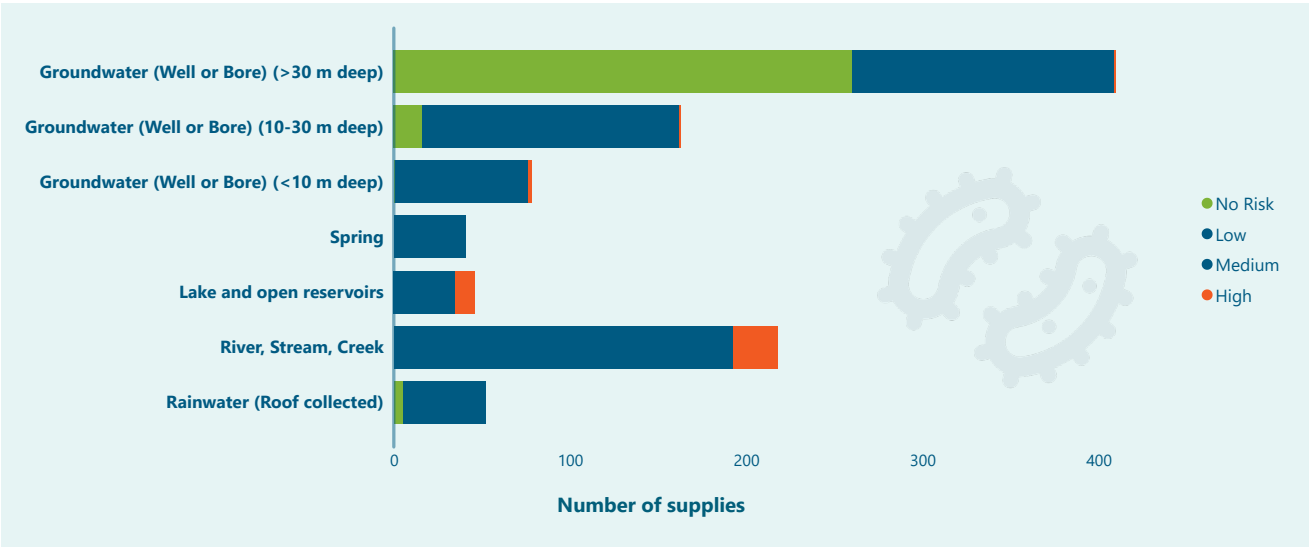


Figure 13 shows the risk outcomes of cyanobacteria assessments for council supplies. Of the 290 surface water sources, 12% were assessed as having a high risk of

cyanobacteria, 45% as having a medium risk and 33% as having a low risk.

Figure 13: Cyanobacteria risk assessments for council supplies

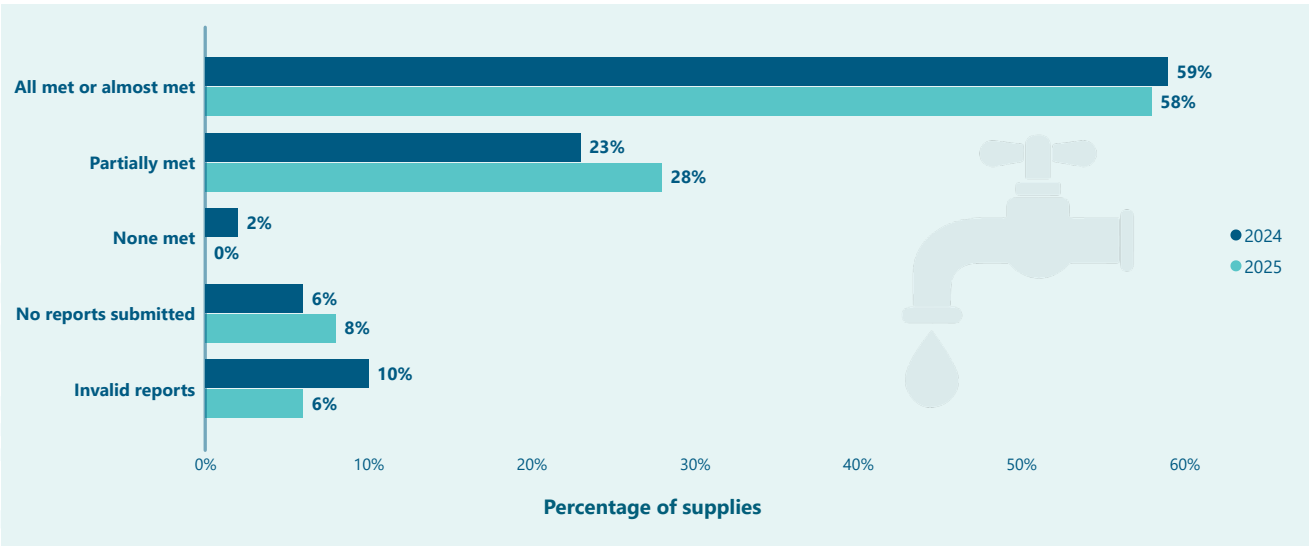


Protozoal and bacterial barriers at treatment plants

The Rules require small and medium supplies to have both filtration and UV treatment processes as these work together to provide effective barriers against protozoa and bacteria. The Rules also include requirements for taking and testing samples, meeting water quality limits, and ensuring other treatment process requirements are achieved.

In 2025, 58% of small and medium council supplies met all or almost all of the applicable treatment rules, which is consistent with what was observed in 2024. The proportion of reports that were invalid or not submitted highlights an ongoing challenge with reporting quality and completeness. We expect to see improvements in the overall reporting rates of these suppliers in subsequent reporting years.

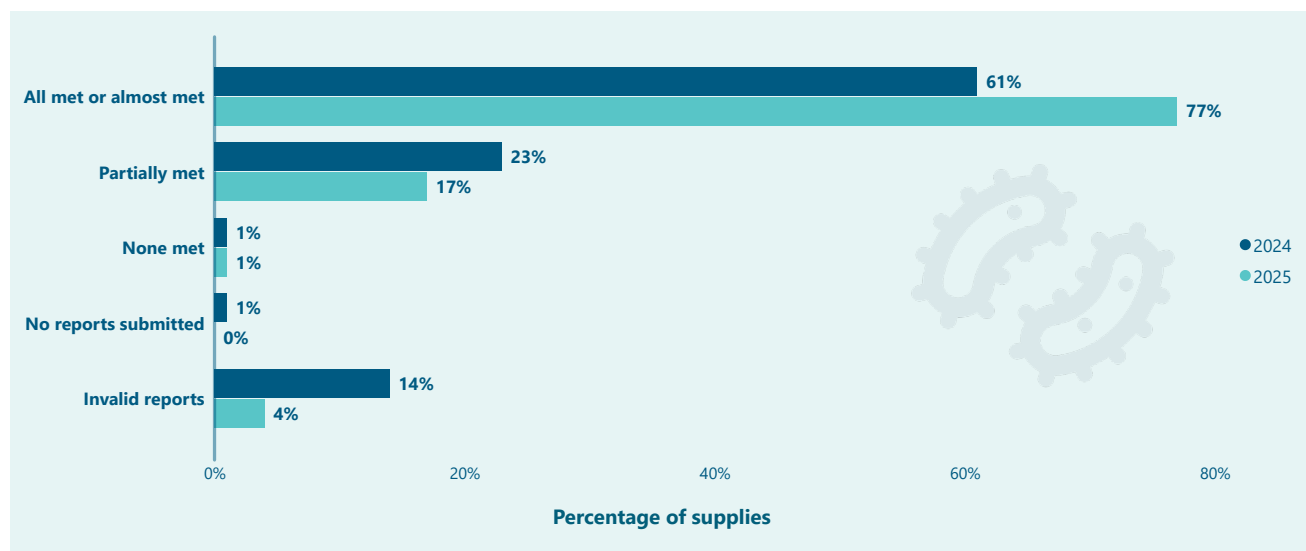
Figure 14: Small and medium council supplies meeting treatment rules



The Rules for large supplies require treatment plants that supply populations greater than 500 people to demonstrate daily that their treatment barriers to bacteria and protozoa are effective. Different rules apply depending on the types of processes at the treatment plants.

The percentage of large council supplies that reported as meeting or almost meeting their bacterial treatment requirements increased from 61% in 2024 to 77% in 2025. The decrease in the percentage of invalid reports submitted shows improvements in the reporting quality of these supplies.

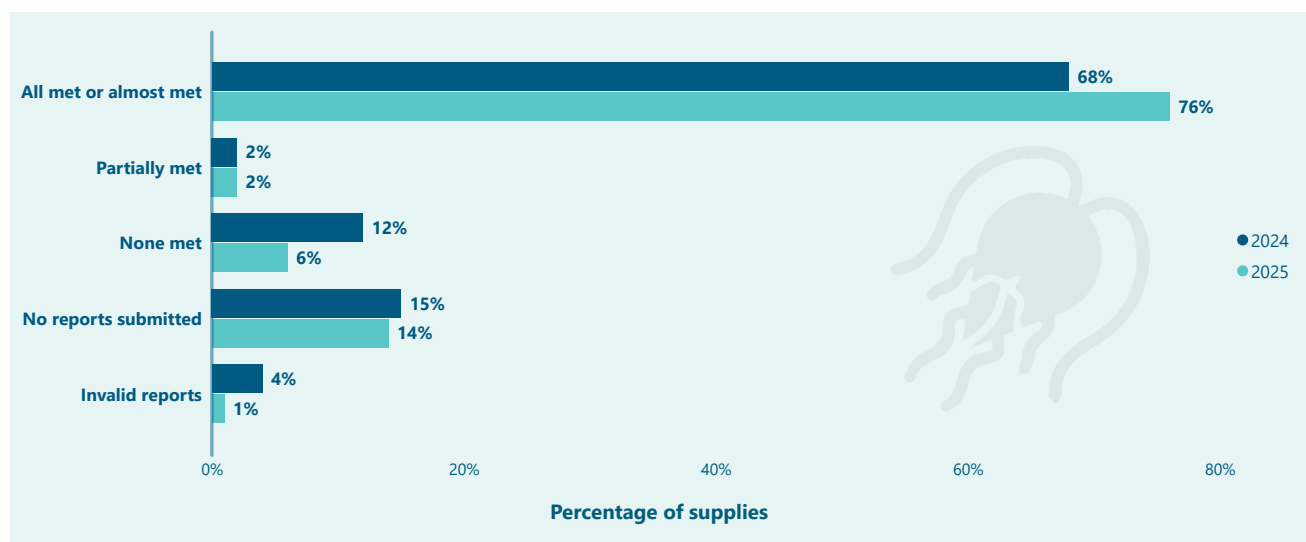
Figure 15: Large council supplies meeting bacterial treatment rules



The Rules also require large supplies to ensure that there are sufficient treatment processes in place to provide a protozoal barrier. The percentage of large council supplies that reported as meeting or almost meeting these requirements has also increased year-on-year, with 76% of supplies falling in this

category in 2025, up from 68% in 2024. This increase means that since 2023, there are almost one million more people served by supplies that have sufficient protozoa barriers in place (2.88 million in 2023 compared with 3.79 million in 2025).

Figure 16: Large council supplies meeting protozoal treatment requirements

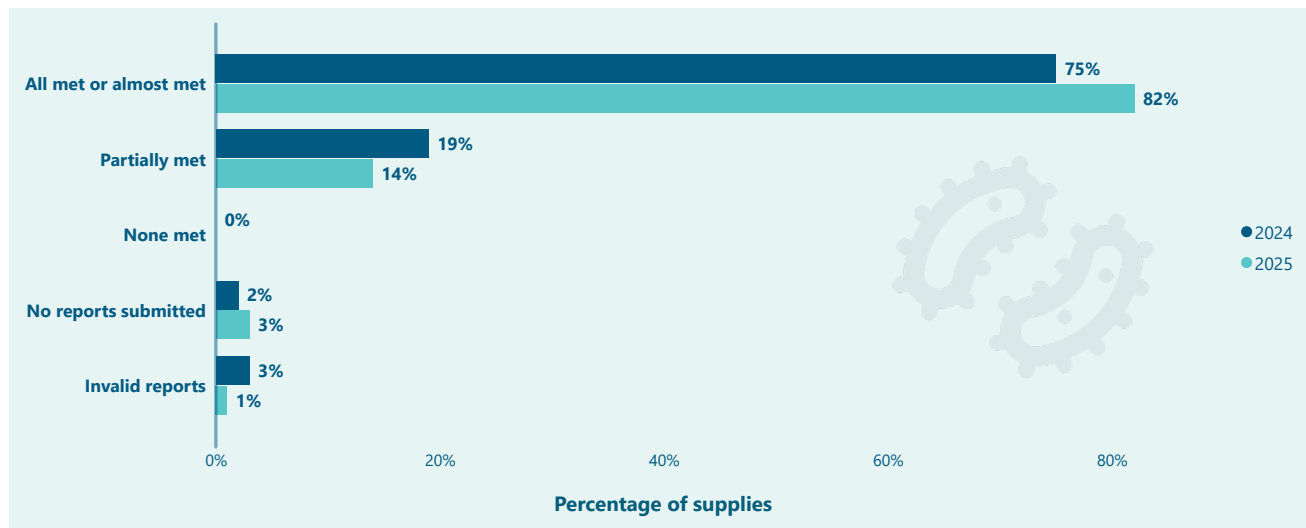


Bacterial monitoring and residual disinfection in distribution zones

Distribution zones cover the part of the drinking water supply network that delivers water to consumers. There may be one or more distribution zones associated with a supply. The Rules set bacterial monitoring requirements for distribution

zones based on their size, with samples required every three months for small supplies, every month for medium supplies, and between three and six samples per week for large zones, depending on the population of the zone.

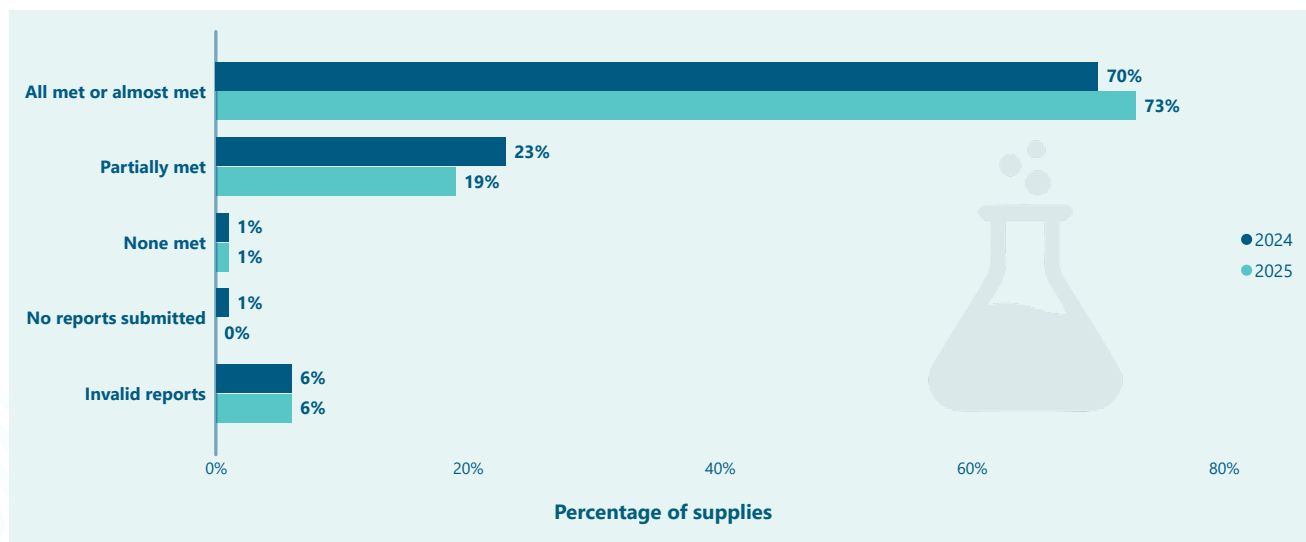
Figure 17: Council supplies meeting bacterial monitoring rules for distribution zones



Medium and large supplies with a distribution network are also required to monitor water for free available chlorine (FAC). FAC provides a residual disinfection barrier to

microbiological contamination, ensuring that after the water has left the treatment plant, a barrier is in place up to the point of supply to consumers.

Figure 18: Council supplies meeting residual disinfection monitoring rules for distribution zones



For the residual disinfection barrier to work effectively, suppliers need to demonstrate that enough FAC is present in most samples taken in medium and large distribution zones. In 2025, 82% of supplies met the bacterial monitoring requirements (Figure 17), and 73% of supplies met the residual disinfection monitoring requirements (Figure 18).

If *E. coli* is detected, this is a sign that the residual disinfection barrier may not be as effective. While there may be other causes for the *E. coli* detection, the investigation carried out by the supplier should include an assessment of the FAC levels detected in samples. Table 13 presents the number of *E. coli* samples taken for each distribution zone level, and the percentage of samples where *E. coli* was detected⁵.

Table 13: Distribution zone *E. coli* monitoring in 2025

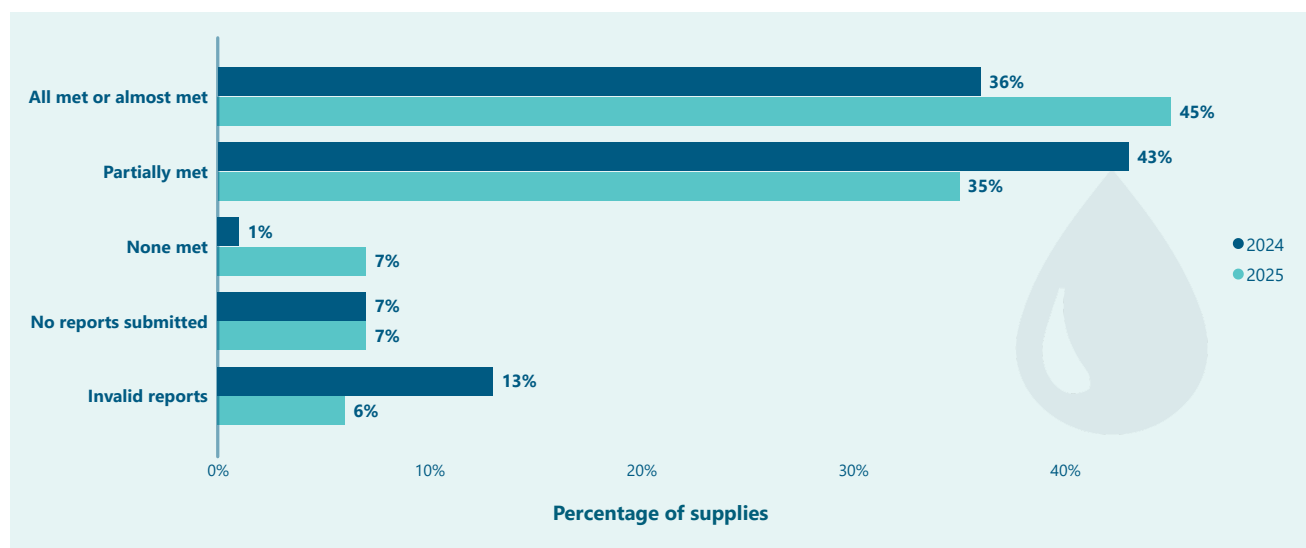
Zone size	Number of <i>E. coli</i> samples taken	Number of <i>E. coli</i> detections	Percentage of samples with <i>E. coli</i> detection
Small	665	7	1.1%
Medium	3,572	6	0.2%
Large	48,364	47	0.1%

The Rules set out safety assurance requirements for small, medium and large distribution zones through specific rules for backflow prevention, distribution network storage practices and hygiene procedures.

Drinking water suppliers have a duty under the Act to ensure that their supply arrangements protect against the risk of backflow (the undesired reversal of the flow of water that can introduce contaminated water into a distribution network). The Rules include a range of backflow prevention requirements for Level 3 supplies. While these rules are still new, the requirement to have backflow prevention has been in place for many years.

For large distribution zones, the Rules also set out network storage requirements, such as having water storage management plans to ensure storage reservoirs are secure and free from contamination, and requirements to follow industry best management practices. The Rules also address aspects of hygiene procedures, such as record keeping and the development of standardised procedures, as well as activities such as watermain disinfection and ensuring any tools that interact with the supply are also appropriately disinfected before use.

Figure 19: Council supplies meeting distribution network safety assurance rules



⁵ The data for this table is taken from the compliance monitoring sample data reported to us via Hinekōrako. This dataset may not include samples taken in response to incidents or for investigation purposes, so it does not include all *E. coli* detections notified to us by laboratories.

Figure 19 shows that a total of 45% of large council supplies met all of the distribution network safety assurance measures in 2025, compared with 36% in 2024. This indicates that there is significant room for improvement across the sector. The Authority is concerned about the performance of water suppliers regarding their distribution systems, and we are undertaking work to better understand the issues and risks specific to these networks. We will continue to have a focus on how suppliers perform against their compliance requirements for distribution zones in the coming years.

Chemical Contamination

Managing chemical risks is important, although elevated chemical levels are less likely to cause an immediate risk to health. When chemicals are detected at levels greater than 100% of the drinking water MAV in source water, it is not considered to be a notifiable exceedance as these samples

are taken prior to any treatment. However, the Rules may require additional monitoring of treated water to be carried out if source water levels of a chemical exceed 50% of the MAV. This helps suppliers to understand the potential risk to their supply, and to ensure that treatment processes are effective and operating as expected.

Chemical monitoring in source water

Elevated levels of chemicals in source water can occur naturally due to water leaching or pulling substances from surrounding rocks and surfaces. Chemicals can also enter the water through discharges, runoff or spills. Processes in the water can also change the chemical composition of the water (e.g. the release of cyanotoxins by cyanobacteria and the oxidation or reduction of metals).

This section presents data on three key chemical determinands that are monitored in source water: arsenic, manganese and nitrate.





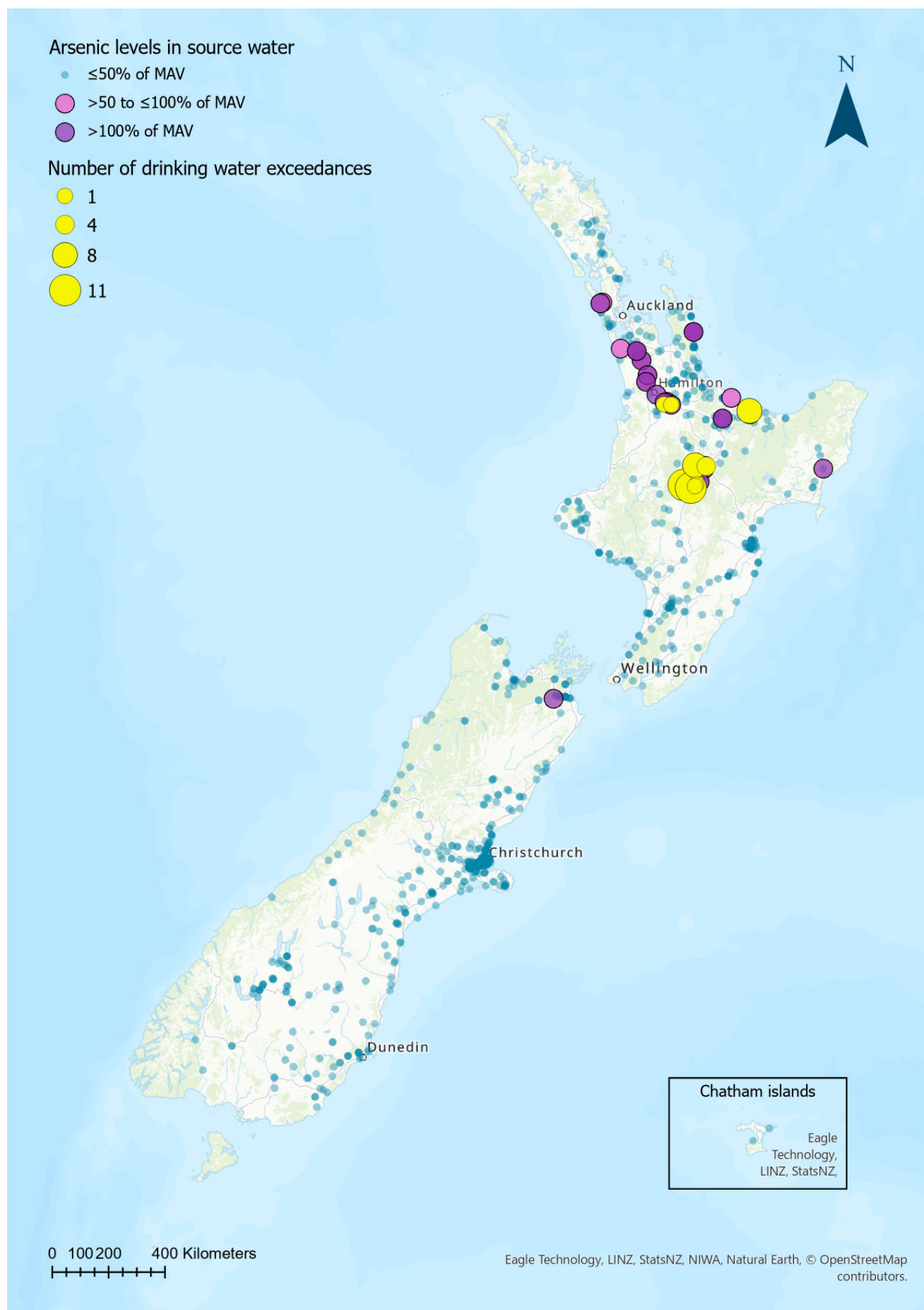
Arsenic (MAV: 0.01 mg/L)

Arsenic is naturally present in some water bodies and is often associated with geothermal or geologic volcanic activity, which is common in parts of New Zealand. Groundwater and surface waters fed by springs in these areas may contain elevated levels of arsenic. The drinking water MAV for arsenic is 0.01mg/L. Arsenic has a long-term MAV, which means it has been set at a level to ensure that arsenic levels in drinking water will not pose a significant health risk over a lifetime (70 years).

Figure 20 shows that for most supplies that detected arsenic in their source water at levels greater than the drinking water MAV, the treatment processes in place were sufficient to ensure that no exceedances were detected in treated drinking water. However, due to local geology and groundwater inputs into Lake Taupo, the lake water (and hence Waikato River water) has levels of arsenic that is near or above the MAV. Water supplies using the lake or river must be aware of the specific risks that these sources have.



Figure 20: Arsenic levels in source water samples compared with drinking water MAV exceedances



Manganese (MAV: 0.4 mg/L)

Manganese can be found in many sources of drinking water, including lakes, rivers and groundwater. It is normally from natural sources but can be found as a result of human activity, such as mining and industrial discharges from the production of iron, steel or manganese-based chemicals.

Manganese is a common cause of aesthetic issues in drinking water and has the potential to impact on the effectiveness of treatment processes, such as UV disinfection. The Aesthetic Values for Drinking Water Notice 2022 set a target of less than or equal to ($\leq$) 0.04mg/L to prevent laundry staining, and $\leq$ 0.1mg/L as a taste threshold for manganese in drinking water.

The drinking water MAV for manganese is 0.4 mg/L. Most MAVs are set at a level to ensure that drinking water will not pose a significant health risk over a lifetime (70 years)

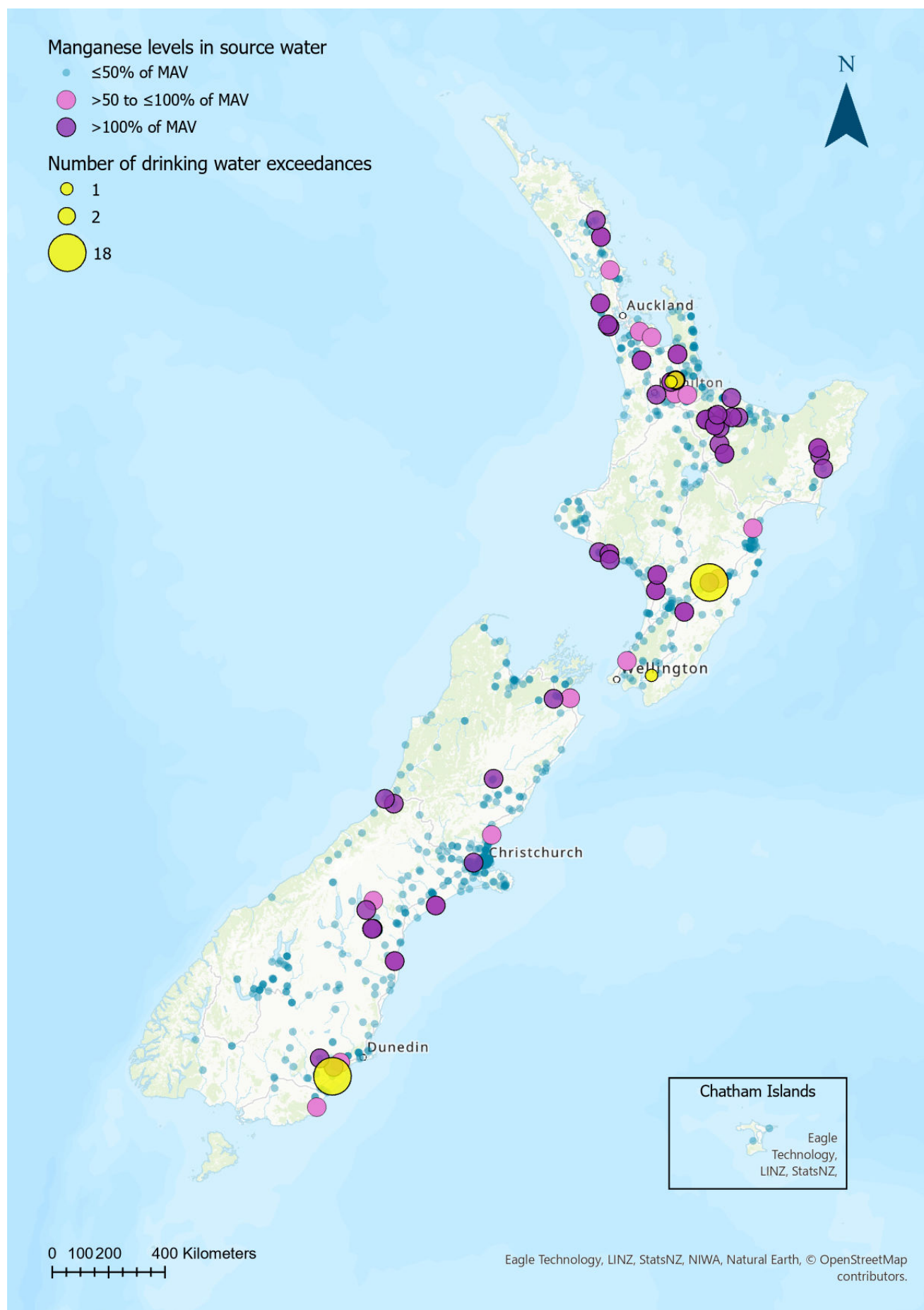
of consumption. For this reason, short-term exposure to water with chemical levels above the MAV are not generally considered to pose a health risk.

Emerging evidence indicates that manganese may be a risk at lower levels than previously thought, which will be considered when the Drinking Water Standards are reviewed in 2027. In the meantime, suppliers should take a cautious approach when responding to elevated manganese.

Figure 21 shows that there were two supplies with multiple manganese exceedances detected in treated water. In the North Island, the Norsewood supply (NOR002) managed by Tararua District Council had 16 laboratory notifications of manganese exceedances. In the South Island, the Milton supply (MIL001) managed by Clutha District Council had 18 notifications.



Figure 21: Manganese levels in source water samples compared with drinking water MAV exceedances



Nitrate (MAV: 50 mg/L as NO₃, 11.3 mg/L as N)

Nitrate (NO₃) is often found at low levels in surface water and groundwater. While nitrate naturally occurs in the environment, human activities, such as farming and wastewater discharges, can increase nitrate levels. At high concentrations, nitrate can impact public health. Nitrate levels can also be impacted by things like rainfall and may change throughout the year. Testing for nitrate is important to understand nitrogen levels in the water people drink.

The MAV for nitrate in New Zealand aligns with international drinking water guidelines. The nitrate MAV is a short-term MAV as it is designed to protect against an acute risk, methaemoglobinaemia. This means that a 'do not drink' notice is likely to be required if the MAV for nitrate is exceeded in treated drinking water.

Due to the difficulty in treating water to remove nitrate from source water, action will generally be required when the level detected in source water approaches the MAV. This may include increasing the frequency of source water and treated water monitoring to ensure that the treatment processes are operating effectively. Blending water from different sources can be a cost-effective way to lower the nitrate concentration in raw water prior to treatment.

The Authority continues to monitor and review the overall body of evidence on nitrate in drinking water. Consideration of any changes to the appropriate level of the MAV for nitrate will be part of the review of the Standards that the Authority is undertaking in 2027.

Figure 22 shows the locations of supplies that test for nitrate in source water. In most of these supplies, nitrate levels were below 50% of the MAV in source water samples. This includes instances where a sample was taken but nitrate was not detected.

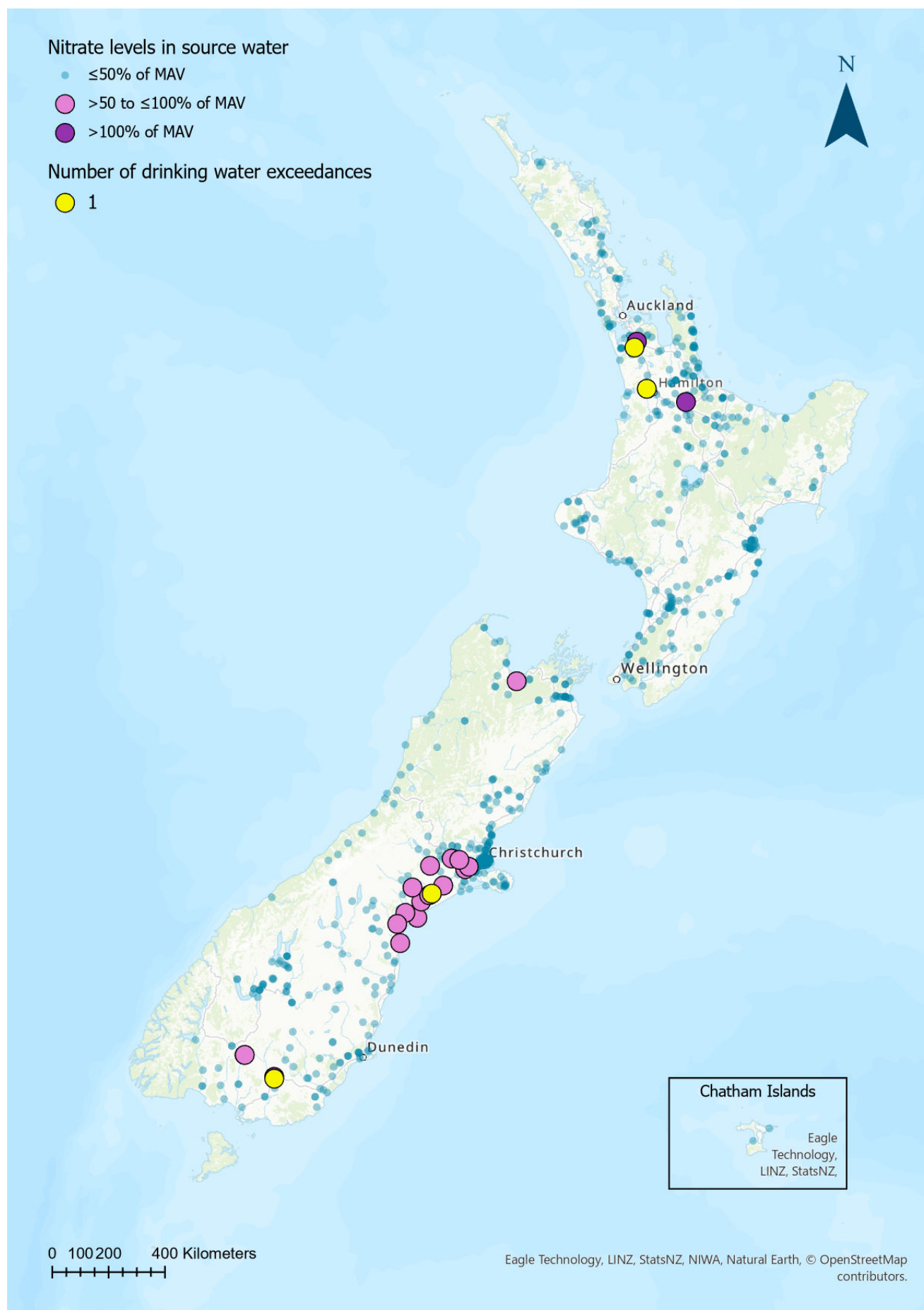
The map also illustrates where nitrate was detected in source water at levels greater than 50% of the MAV. When nitrate is detected in samples at this level, the source water risk management plan (SWRMP) for the supply needs to set out a proportionate risk-based monitoring programme that includes more frequent sampling at both the source and in treated drinking water. This ensures that suppliers understand how their source water quality may vary over time, and whether changes or trends indicate that future investments in treatment need to be considered. Our website includes further information about how suppliers monitor for nitrate.

The map also shows that there were four locations where nitrate was detected in drinking water at a level greater than the MAV, and these are detailed in Table 14. Through our notification process, each of these suppliers provided information to us that showed they had undertaken measures to manage the risk to their supply.

Table 14: Suppliers with nitrate MAV exceedances in drinking water in 2025

Supplier and supply name	Population served	Number of exceedances
Te Kowhai School (TEK020) Ministry of Education	340	1
Harrisville School (HAR002) Ministry of Education	220	1
Ashburton Borough School, Lagmhor Site (LAG001) Ministry of Education	45	1
Gore Supply (GOR001) Gore District Council	8,181	1

Figure 22: Nitrate levels in source water samples compared with drinking water MAV exceedances



Case study: An effective response to nitrate detection

On Friday 18 July 2025, Gore District Council notified the Authority that drinking water from the Gore supply (GOR001) may have been unsafe. The council advised residents about the elevated nitrate level, issued a 'do not drink' notice and provided drinking water through tankers. Local authorities informed local communities that may have been operating on private supplies to check that their water was safe to drink, given the elevated levels of nitrates found in the town supply source water.

To reduce the nitrate concentration in the short term, the council pumped water from the Mataura River into the Coopers Well bore field. The 'do not drink' notice was lifted on 22 July after monitoring showed that the nitrate levels were below the MAV.

The levels of nitrate within the bore field had been elevated for many years. The council was meeting the minimum monitoring requirements but had not undertaken any additional monitoring. As a result of this incident, continuous monitoring was implemented at the source and water treatment plant. By December 2025, the council had completed works to connect to the supply to Jacobstown bore, a source with much lower levels of nitrate. The measures taken by the council in response to this incident have considerably reduced the risk of another nitrate exceedance.

Chemical monitoring at treatment plants

Suppliers with large supplies must monitor for chemicals that are used in drinking water treatment processes. The Rules require that suppliers monitor for these chemicals in drinking water to ensure that the treatment processes have sufficiently removed these chemicals. Where chemicals are detected above 50% of the drinking water MAV in source water, suppliers are also required to monitor for these determinands in treated water.

Chemical monitoring at large treatment plants has seen a significant improvement in 2025. Eighty-one percent of supplies met or almost met their monitoring requirements, an increase from 65% in 2024. We have also seen a decrease in the number of supplies that either did not submit reports or submitted invalid reports.

Chemical monitoring in distribution zones

The concentration of chemicals can change within distribution systems, as some chemicals can enter the treated water from the network, and others can form within the network as a result of the treatment processes. The Level 2 and 3 distribution rules require suppliers to monitor distribution networks in medium- and large-sized zones for metals, such as copper and lead. Metals may be present in the distribution network depending on the types of materials that the pipes and fittings are made of. The Level 3 distribution rules also require supplies to monitor for disinfection by-products, which are chemicals that can form after treatment in distribution networks due to reactions with residual disinfection compounds, including FAC.

Figure 23: Council supplies meeting treatment chemical monitoring requirements

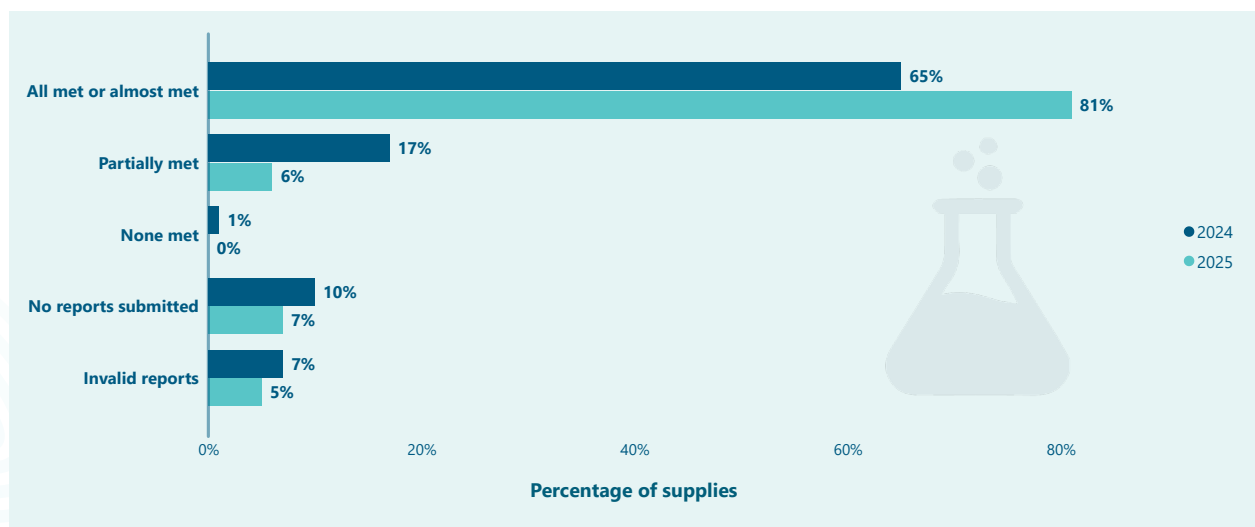


Figure 24: Council supplies meeting distribution zone chemical monitoring requirements

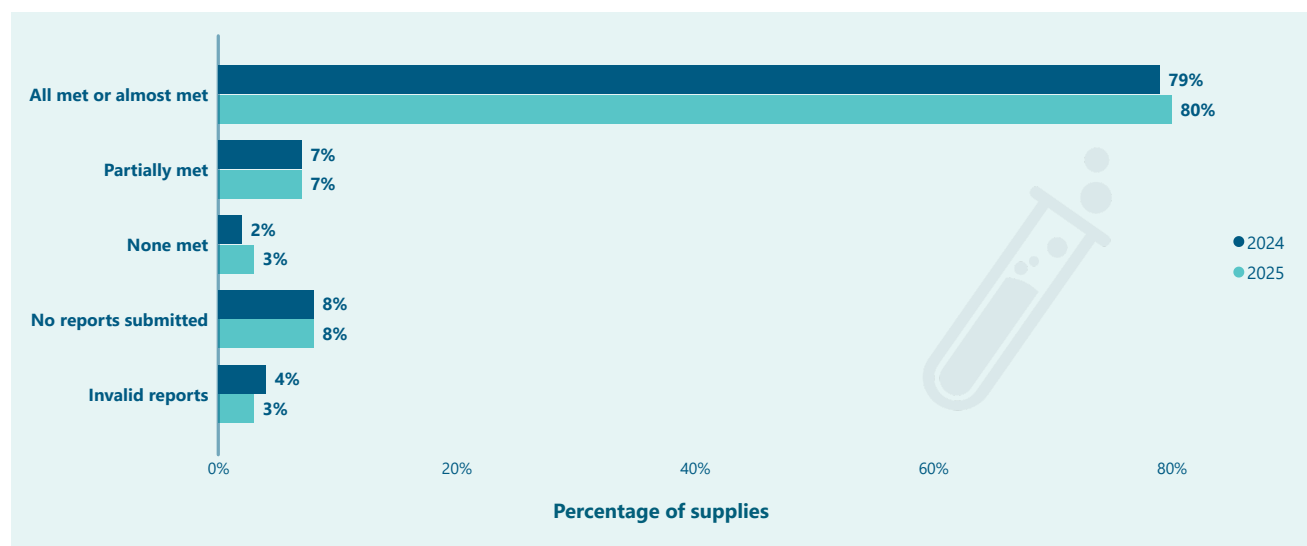


Figure 25: Population of council supplies meeting distribution zone chemical monitoring requirements

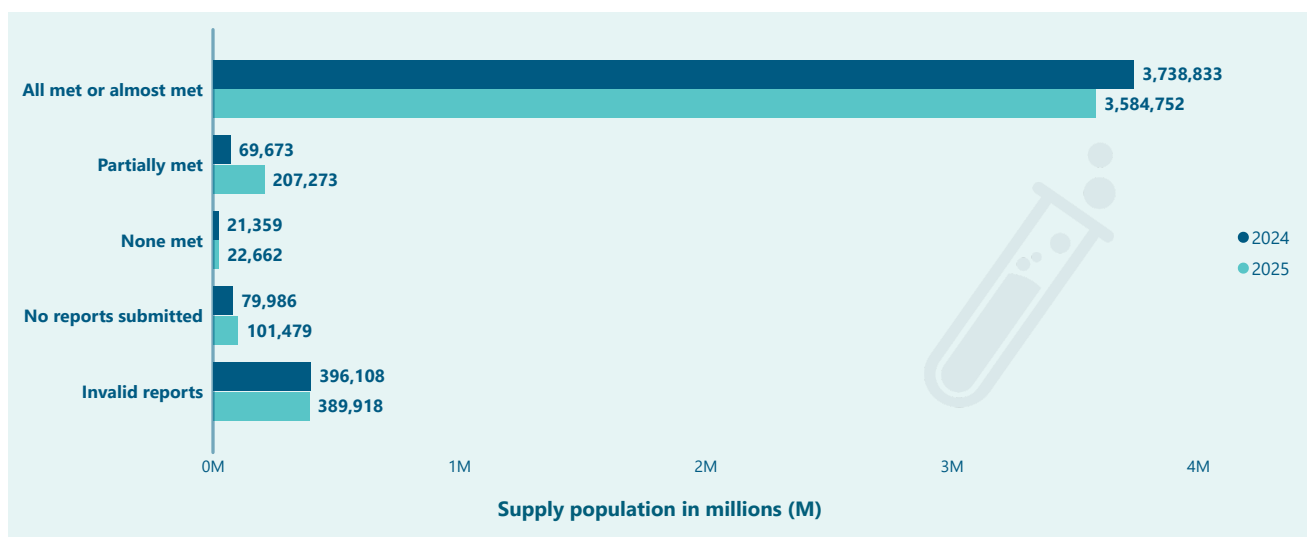


Figure 24 shows that there were no significant changes in the performance of supplies with chemical distribution zone monitoring requirements. However, Figure 25 notes that the population served by supplies that either met or almost met these requirements decreased by more than 150,000 people.

Along with the increase in population served by supplies that only partially met these requirements, or did not submit reports, this data shows us that suppliers need to continue to improve their performance to meet the Rules requirements of chemical monitoring in distribution zones.

Physical Contamination and Ineffective Treatment

The Rules require suppliers to test for determinands, such as *E. coli* and arsenic, which are commonly found in source water. Source water monitoring requirements are proportionate to the population supplied, so the smaller the supply, the less source water monitoring is required. The Rules also require suppliers to consider whether any other determinands could pose a risk to their supply, and if so, to carry out monitoring of these determinands as part of their ongoing risk assessments, such as those detailed in their risk management documents (SWRMPs and DWSPs).

Source water monitoring for supplies serving fewer than 500 people is generally achieved by taking water samples that are then sent to laboratories for analysis. Most large supplies are also required to conduct continuous monitoring of conductivity, pH and turbidity in their sources.

Sampling provides information on hazards in the source water and allows changes over time to be detected. It has limitations, including the relatively small sample volume and the delay in receiving results. Continuous monitoring provides real-time information on the composition of the water and can be linked to treatment systems, allowing dosing and other treatment processes to be tailored to the water quality of incoming raw water.

Figure 26 shows that the number of council supplies meeting their source water sampling and testing rules continues to trend upwards. In 2025, 3.8 million people were supplied water from supplies with source water monitoring, an increase of almost one million from 2024.

Figure 26: Council supplies meeting source water monitoring requirements

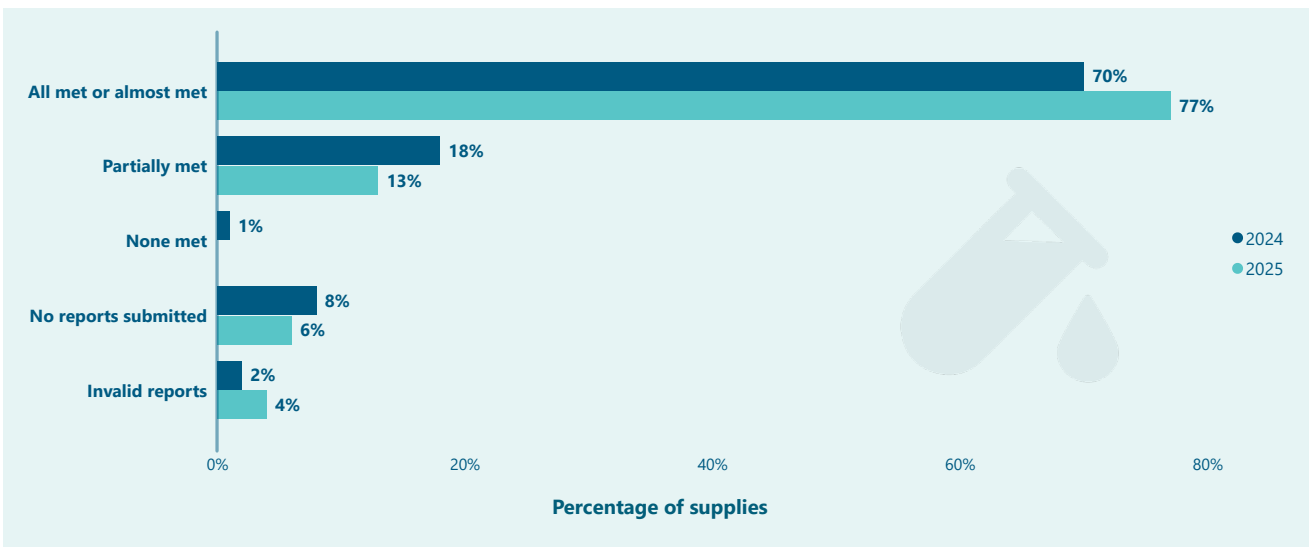
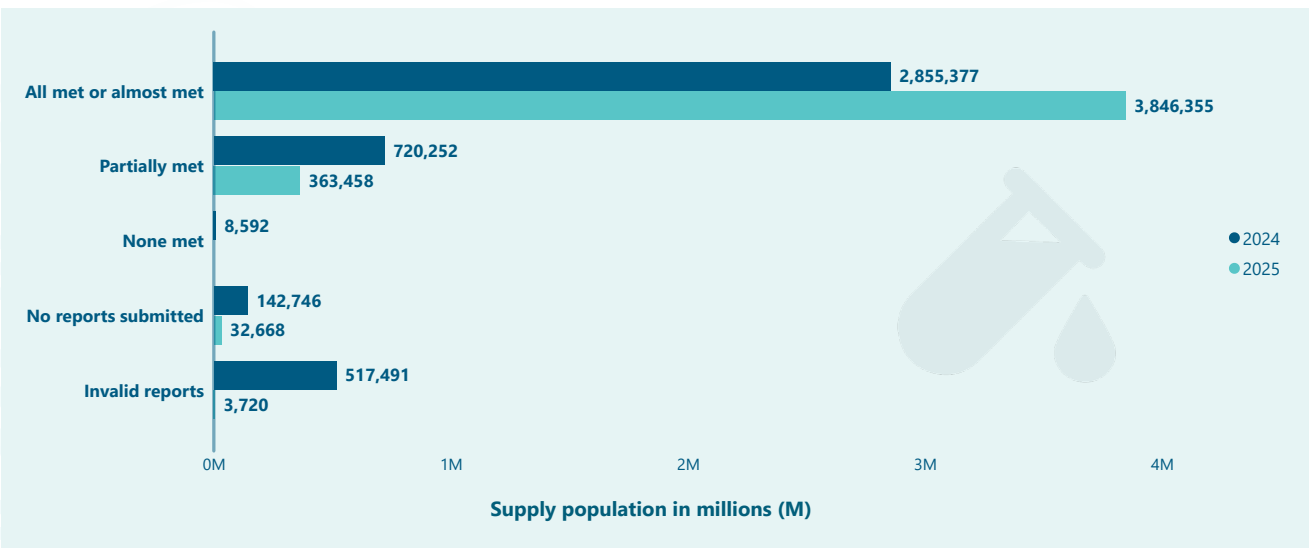
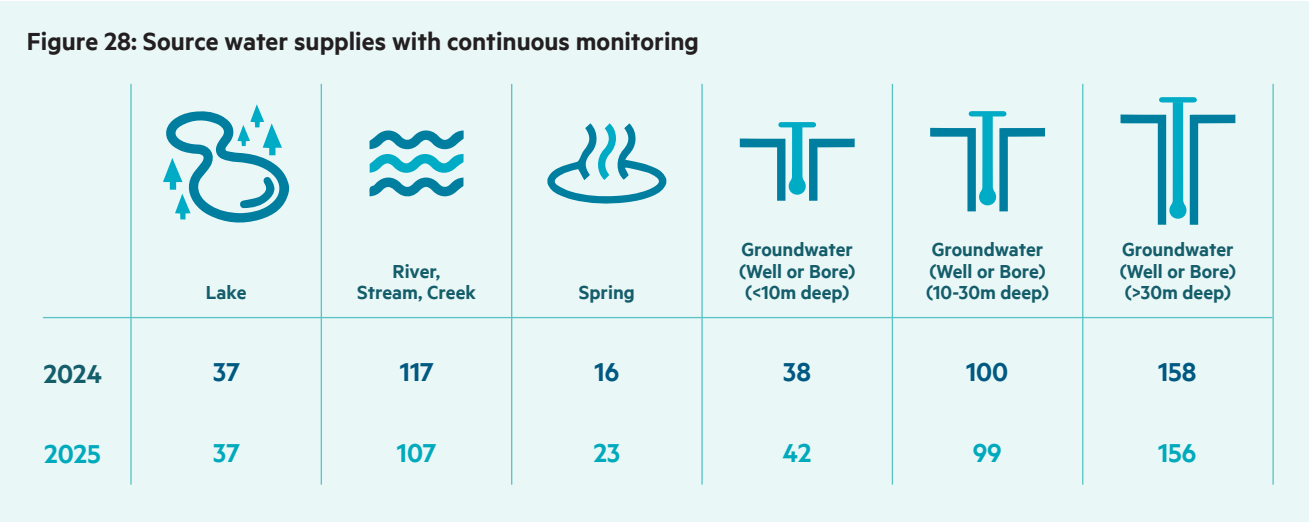


Figure 27: Population of council supplies meeting source water monitoring requirements



The Rules require large supplies with Class 2, 3 or 4 source water supplies⁶ to continuously monitor the conductivity, pH and turbidity of raw water arriving at the treatment plant. Continuous monitoring provides drinking water suppliers with up-to-date information on their supplies, which can be beneficial when conditions change rapidly and affect treatment processes. Continuous monitoring of source water requires that data is logged at least once every 30 minutes.

Figure 28 presents the number of source water supplies that have continuous monitoring for at least one parameter. This shows that the distribution of source water types with continuous monitoring is similar to that in 2024. Minor changes to the number of sources being monitored may indicate either that continuous monitoring has not been undertaken as required or that sources are no longer in use.



Loss or Interruption of Supply

With the exception of water carriers, drinking water suppliers are responsible for providing a sufficient quantity of drinking water to meet the ordinary drinking and sanitary needs of the consumers of their supplies.

If a supplier plans to interrupt the supply of drinking water for more than eight hours, they must obtain prior approval from the Authority and take all practicable steps to advise affected consumers. The supplier must also make arrangements to ensure that a sufficient quantity of drinking water is available to affected consumers via an alternative supply (e.g. by providing consumers with bottled or tankered water).

While alternative water supplies can present additional risks that also need to be managed, their availability helps to ensure that consumers have ongoing access to safe drinking water while their regular supply is restricted or interrupted.

In 2025, we received eight notifications of planned restrictions lasting for more than eight hours but less than 12 hours, and three notifications lasting more than 12 hours.

Unplanned outages

Unplanned restrictions or interruptions to supply for long periods of time may result in a significant burden to a community. Suppliers must also notify us if, due to unforeseen circumstances or an emergency, the supply of drinking water will be interrupted for more than eight hours. Suppliers must advise us of the reason for the interruption no later than 24 hours after the supply was interrupted, and take all practicable steps to advise the affected consumers. The supplier must also ensure that a sufficient quantity of drinking water is available to affected customers via an alternative supply.

Suppliers are required to notify us of unplanned outages lasting for eight hours or longer. In 2025, we received 213 notifications of unplanned outages. Of these, six were from government suppliers and 207 from council suppliers. These outages affected 78 different supplies across 35 different councils.

⁶ Source water classes set out the level of protozoa treatment required based on the characteristics of the source water supply. The Rules do not currently include continuous monitoring requirements for Class 1 and Interim Class 1 sources, but the revised Rules that come into effect from 1 July 2027 will require all class types to have continuous monitoring.

Most of these council supplies had five or fewer unplanned outages, but two large metropolitan suppliers – Wellington Water and Watercare (Auckland) – had 43 and 22 unplanned outages, respectively. While this reflects the size of the distribution networks managed by these two suppliers, we note that having planned responses to mains breaks and other urgent repairs can support the efficient restoration of the normal supply of drinking water, limiting the impact these events can have on communities.

Case study: Preserving water quality during severe weather events

On 23 October 2025, a severe windstorm caused widespread power outages across the South Island, significantly affecting drinking water supplies in the Southland District Council area.

Treatment plants in Tuatapere, Ohai/Nightcaps and Mossburn lost power, which resulted in normal water production ceasing and reduced water storage in the networks. Routine sampling programmes could not be completed due to access limitations and low water availability.

The Authority was sent multiple notifications outlining the risks to supply continuity and the emergency measures implemented by suppliers. Southland District Council responded to the event with emergency provision of water via water tankers to affected townships, along with a communications programme to notify the public of boil water notices and water conservation measures.

Two days later, on 25 October, all affected plants were operating normally. The sampling programme resumed on 28 October, with all results returning compliant results. Our review of the documentation and responses provided by Southland District Council found that risks were appropriately managed and public health was protected.

Consumer advisories

Consumer advisories are used to provide advice to the public when there is a risk to the safety or sufficiency of a drinking water supply. They are designed to raise awareness and provide information on any steps consumers should take to protect their health while the supplier works to remedy the problem. There are four common types of consumer advisories..

- A boil water advisory is issued in response to the detection of a contaminant or potential contaminant that can be removed or inactivated by boiling the water before use (e.g. *E. coli*). These are the most common consumer advisories.
- A 'do not drink' advisory is issued in response to the detection of a contaminant that will not be removed by boiling the water (e.g. heavy metals), or where it is not practical to boil water (e.g. in schools). In these instances, consumers will need to use an alternate source of water (tankered or bottled) for drinking and food preparation but may continue to use the water for bathing.
- A 'do not use' advisory is issued in response to the detection of a chemical contaminant that can cause public health risks through general contact with the water, including through bathing (e.g. cyanotoxin). These advisories are rare.
- An informational notice is a consumer advisory issued by a supplier to provide information about a range of events (e.g. unplanned interruptions to supply, water restrictions and some chemical exceedances).

During 2025, there were 145 temporary and 88 long-term consumer advisories active. Temporary consumer advisories are used to manage specific risks where the supplier has action underway to address this risk. Long-term consumer advisories are generally used when there is an ongoing risk associated with the supply (e.g. when the supply lacks a required bacterial or protozoal treatment barrier).

Figure 29: Number of consumer advisories



	Boil Water	Do Not Drink	Do Not Use	Informational Notice	All
Long-term 2024	76	13		5	94
Long-term 2025	79	6		3	88
Temporary 2024	48	46	6	9	109
Temporary 2025	76	53	5	11	145

Most (131) of the temporary consumer advisories active in 2025 were closed by the end of the year. More than half (81) were in place for two weeks or less.

Table 15: Temporary advisories notified in 2025 by supplier type

Supplier type	Number of temporary advisories	Number of supplies with at least one temporary advisory
Council	65	47
Department of Conservation	2	2
Department of Corrections	1	1
Ministry of Education	61	51
New Zealand Defence Force	1	1
Private and Community	15	13
Total	145	115

Of the 88 long-term advisories active in 2025, 69 were started prior to 2025 and 19 were closed by the end of 2025. At the end of 2025, there were 31 active long-term advisories that had been in effect for more than three years.

Table 16: Long-term advisories notified in 2025 by supplier type

Supplier type	Number of long-term advisories	Number of supplies with at least one long-term advisory
Council	52	49
Department of Conservation	16	15
Department of Corrections	0	0
Ministry of Education	7	6
New Zealand Defence Force	0	0
Private and Community	13	13
Total	88	83

At the end of 2025, there were 24 active long-term advisories across 14 different councils that had been in place for three or more years. Nineteen of these council supplies lacked one or more basic safety barriers. In Part One of this report, we discuss how the CME continues to prioritise the uptake of safety barriers by water suppliers.

These long-standing advisories often reflect deeper structural challenges, including funding constraints, technical capacity limitations and governance issues, particularly in

smaller communities. As we work towards the resolution of these cases, the Authority will balance firm timelines for the implementation of permanent solutions with pragmatic recognition of capacity constraints. We will continue to support smaller communities to understand what is reasonable and achievable for them. However, where there is no clear pathway to resolution, we may use our enforcement tools to require action from suppliers.

Part Four:

Supporting Sector Improvement

The CME signalled a shift in the Authority's regulatory approach from establishing the regulatory system and collecting information towards using regulatory information to reduce risks to public health. The findings presented throughout this report indicate that this shift is underway.

During 2025, the Authority increasingly targeted its activities towards the areas of greatest risk, including treatment barrier performance, supplier risk management, schools, long-term consumer advisories, and suppliers demonstrating persistent compliance concerns.

The Authority used information obtained through notifications, reporting, DWSPs, inspections and supplier engagement to identify risks, prioritise regulatory effort, and support improvements in drinking water safety.

This section explains how the Authority responded to the findings presented throughout this report and how those actions support the objectives of the CME Strategy.

Monitoring and Responding to Drinking Water Safety Issues

Monitoring activities provide the Authority with visibility of emerging risks, supplier behaviour and system performance. Information obtained through notifications, reporting, inspections and supplier engagement helps identify where intervention may be required.

As suppliers monitor their data to understand the quality of the water being supplied to consumers, we monitor the data that suppliers send to us to understand the way they are managing their supplies, and whether they are reacting to risks appropriately.

The following case studies present instances in 2025 where the data submitted to us resulted in more hands-on work to ensure any possible risks to public health were managed adequately.

Case study: Drinking water safety risks in unregistered supplies

The Hanmer Springs Forest Camp supply is an unregistered drinking water supply operated by a charitable trust. The camp primarily hosts school groups and appears capable of accommodating at least 200 people. The supply used a creek source with water being treated through filtration and UV disinfection. On 17 September 2025, the Authority was notified by the National Public Health Service that an STEC (Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli*) outbreak had been linked to the camp, with drinking water identified as a possible source. While many types of *E. coli* are harmless or even beneficial to humans, STEC is a group of pathogenic *E. coli* that can cause serious gastroenteric illness, and with complications that can result in organ damage and become fatal.

The notification was assessed and the Authority contacted the supplier to ensure that a boil water notice was issued for the drinking water supply. While the water supply was not registered with the Authority, the campsite was registered with Hurunui District Council under the Camping-Grounds Regulations 1985. A multi-agency response was coordinated by the National Public Health Service and included the Authority, the council and other agencies.

The available evidence indicated that the camp's treatment system and source water quality did not provide sufficient ongoing assurance of safe drinking water. A joint site visit undertaken by the Authority and the council confirmed that while there was UV treatment in place, the turbidity of the source water meant that this treatment process may not always be effective. A change of land use upstream had also increased the risk of faecal contamination in the source water.

Unregistered drinking water suppliers do not have the same duties under the Act as registered supplies, but they are required to provide safe drinking water and comply with certain directions. The Authority issued a direction under section 104 of the Act requiring ongoing consumer protection measures and regular reporting. We then continued to monitor compliance, provide feedback on risk controls and consumer communications, and oversee the camp's longer-term move toward connection to the Hanmer town supply (HAN001). At the time of writing, the camp is now supplied by the Hanmer town supply.

As a result of this event, we developed a campaign to increase campground and campsite operators' awareness of their responsibilities if they supply drinking water. It also provided guidance to help them meet those responsibilities. This guidance is available on our website.⁷

Case study: The effects of changes to water chemistry in the Waikato River

Arsenic can be present in source water and is often associated with areas of geologic volcanic or geothermal activity, which means that it is a risk for some supplies in Aotearoa. It is well established that the Waikato River has arsenic levels consistently close to or above the MAV. Drinking water suppliers that use the Waikato River as a source manage this through treatment processes which, in addition to their main function, also reduce the arsenic concentration below the MAV.

In November 2024, we were notified of an arsenic exceedance in a supply that uses source water from the Waikato River. An investigation by the regional council found that although the total arsenic level had not varied, a change in the water chemistry meant that arsenic started to convert to a form that is more difficult to remove from water. Further research indicates that this change in water quality appears to be linked to the invasive species *Corbicula fluminae* (the Asian gold clam), which has become established in the river. This highlights the vulnerability of surface water sources to sudden changes in chemistry.

Suppliers abstracting from the Waikato River need to actively manage this risk and be prepared to respond to a change in the source water in the event of another chemistry change or arsenic event. This includes tighter control over raw water chemistry adjustment upstream of coagulation and flocculation.

To assess the preparedness of suppliers extracting from the Waikato River, DWSP reviews were undertaken by the Authority. These reviews focused on the effectiveness of treatment barriers for arsenic, monitoring programmes, emergency responses and communications plans for MAV exceedances, including engagement with the Waikato Regional Council and other suppliers using the Waikato River as their source water supply. We found that suppliers have adequately identified the risk of arsenic species to their supplies, and have put in place methods to manage, monitor and/or mitigate the risk of arsenic to their drinking water supplies.

Increased engagement and monitoring by school supplies

The compliance data submitted by the Ministry of Education suggests that increased engagement, monitoring and support are improving visibility of drinking water risks and supplier responsiveness in schools across New Zealand. Of the 423 schools active in 2025, 47 indicated that they had adopted an Acceptable Solution, demonstrating growing uptake of Acceptable Solutions as a compliance pathway.

While the number of temporary advisories increased from 54 in 2024 to 61 in 2025, this is considered a positive indicator of schools proactively identifying and managing risks as they arise. At the same time, long-term advisories decreased significantly from 17 to seven, with only three advisories remaining active across both 2024 and 2025.

Taken together, these trends suggest stronger engagement with the regulatory framework, an increase in water quality monitoring, prompt management of drinking water incidents, and continued progress towards more sustainable and compliant drinking water systems in schools. Since the end of 2025, the Ministry of Education has carried out significant work with schools to improve their drinking water systems. Alongside this, building the capability of school staff operating these systems remains a key priority into the future, as highlighted in our guidance and sector plan for schools⁸. This capability uplift involves a collective effort from the Authority, the Ministry of Education and schools.

7 <https://www.taumataarowai.govt.nz/drinking-water-suppliers-and-operators/for-drinking-water-suppliers/camping/camping-campaign>

8 <https://www.taumataarowai.govt.nz/drinking-water-suppliers-and-operators/for-drinking-water-suppliers/schools>

Enforcement

Enforcement is one component of the Authority's broader regulatory approach and is used alongside guidance, monitoring, education and engagement to support compliance and improve outcomes. This reflects the principles set out in the CME Strategy, which emphasises a proportionate, risk-based and graduated response to regulatory issues.

Most drinking water suppliers respond appropriately when risks are identified and work constructively with the Authority to address concerns and strengthen public health protections.

We take enforcement action when it is needed to protect public health or to deter future offending, especially where behaviour is reckless, people have been harmed, or there is a serious risk that they could be. During 2025, the Authority issued four directions to drinking water suppliers to ensure certain actions were being taken to ensure safe drinking water.

Of the four directions issued, one of these was issued to a council as part of the ongoing work on treatment barriers, and to ensure that when these barriers were absent consumers knew what to do to make the water safe for drinking. Three directions were issued in response to incidents when drinking water was unsafe and boil water notices were required. Two of these were issued to councils and one was issued to the operators of a private supply.

The investigation by the Authority into failures in the Greater Greymouth drinking water supply in 2025 has resulted in the Authority filing charges in the Greymouth District Court against Grey District Council and Westroads Ltd, alleging failure to comply with the duty to supply safe drinking water. This is the Authority's first prosecution since it came into existence in 2021.

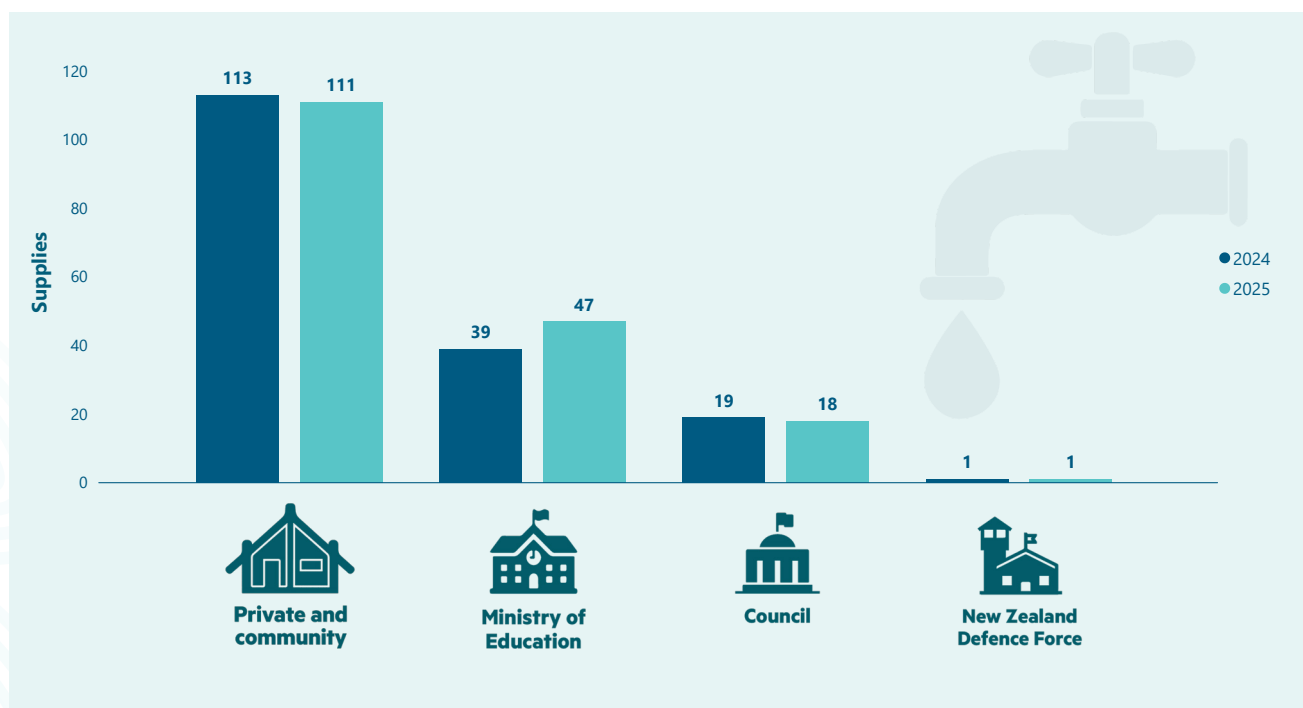
Acceptable Solutions

Acceptable Solutions provide a practical and cost-effective compliance option for some drinking water supplies. Some allow for water to be treated for bacteria, protozoa and viruses at the endpoint of a supply (often at each house or building), which removes the need for residual disinfection as well as centralised treatment. However, this may not be a cost-effective solution for small supplies. At the end of 2025, the combined population of supplies using an Acceptable Solution was 16,370.

In September 2025, we published updates to the Acceptable Solutions to reflect three different types of supplies:

- (i) Mixed-use rural, where at least 50% of the water is supplied for farm use;
- (ii) Small-to-medium networks, which provide drinking water for up to 500 people; and
- (iii) Self-supplied buildings, where water can be provided to up to 10 buildings on one or more neighbouring properties with the same owner.

Figure 30: Supplies with an Acceptable Solution



The updates to the Acceptable Solutions demonstrate how the regulatory framework is being adapted to improve accessibility and uptake while maintaining appropriate public health protections. Figure 30 shows the number of supplies by supplier type that have identified they are following an Acceptable Solution. Notably, the number of school supplies that have nominated to follow an Acceptable Solution has increased from 39 schools in 2024 to 47 in 2025. We expect to see an increase in the number of private and community supplies following an Acceptable Solution as these suppliers progress along the pipeline to safe drinking water outlined in the CME.

Supplies with a mixed-use rural Acceptable Solution

Mixed-use rural water schemes are supplies that provide drinking water via a network to consumers, where at least 50% of the water supplied is intended to be used for commercial farming purposes (e.g. agricultural or horticultural) instead of domestic purposes. In response to industry requirements for a more cost-effective, safe Acceptable Solution, we developed the mixed-use rural Acceptable Solution, which came into force on 5 September 2025. A drinking water supplier who meets the criteria and requirements of this Acceptable Solution is not required to comply with compliance rules made under the Act or to prepare a DWSP.

In 2025, there were 16 suppliers following the mixed-use rural Acceptable Solution. Two of these suppliers were newly registered with us. As our expectation of private and community suppliers is to ensure they are registered and have identified their compliance pathway by November 2028, we expect to see the number of suppliers registering to comply with the mixed-use rural Acceptable Solution increasing year-on-year.

We understand that there are a number of private and community suppliers that are investigating if the mixed-use rural Acceptable Solution is the right option for their supplies. We encourage suppliers to register with us as soon as practicable, as this helps us to understand what supplies they have, and what guidance we can provide to them as they progress along their compliance pathway.

Guidance

Water safety and compliance is highly technical. Throughout 2025, we continued to support the development of the knowledge and capabilities of suppliers through research and education. We have shifted the way that the Authority develops, communicates and shares guidance to communities and the wider sector. We are also taking a human-centred design approach prioritising plain language, simplified messages, insights gathering and variations in formats to meet suppliers where they are at.

We've prioritised clear, easy to understand guidance to ensure people are receiving the critical information they need when navigating water compliance. This has included the development of a series of videos and animations to help suppliers navigate common issues and scenarios easily, and these are available to the public via our website.⁹

Exemptions

Exemptions are part of the Authority's risk-based regulatory approach. A drinking water supplier can apply for a general exemption to become exempt from one or more of a list of requirements in the Act. General exemptions are intended for situations where it may be unreasonable or impractical for a supplier to comply with legislative requirements (e.g. where a supply may not have sufficient road access or electrical power to install and run treatment equipment). General exemptions may include conditions, such as implementing signage and boil water notices to inform consumers that the water is not safe to drink.

In 2025, we granted one exemption (Exemption No. 004) to the Department of Conservation regarding the Makarora Field Base and the Pipiriki Field Base supplies. This exemption requires the Department of Conservation to ensure that there is adequate signage at each site advising consumers to boil drinking water, and to carry out annual maintenance checks to ensure that any water tanks are secure and prevent animal ingress. This exemption took into account the risk profile of these two supplies, and was considered to be consistent with the main purpose of the Act.

⁹ <https://vimeo.com/reviews/3240047b-e8b1-4ad2-8b61-784d536296a2/users/104023205/folders/28583741>

Conclusions and Future Direction

The findings throughout this report demonstrate that the drinking water system continues to mature. Improvements are evident in treatment barriers, supplier reporting, monitoring performance and engagement with regulatory requirements. However, progress remains uneven. Significant risks remain where basic treatment barriers are absent, risk management practices are immature, or supplier performance remains inconsistent.

The Authority's role is to use information from across the regulatory system to identify these risks, influence supplier behaviour and target regulatory effort where it will have the greatest impact on public health. The findings of this report reinforce the importance of the risk-based approach set out in the CME Strategy and provide direction for future regulatory activity. This includes strengthening supplier risk management, supporting progression along the pathway to safe drinking water, and ensuring that regulatory interventions remain proportionate and effective.

Changes to the Rules

The Rules are being updated to ensure they continue to support safe, reliable drinking water and reflect current regulatory expectations. The changes strengthen monitoring, reporting and risk management requirements, improve the quality and consistency of information provided by suppliers, and align reporting arrangements with the needs of the modern water sector. Together, these updates will help drinking water suppliers better demonstrate compliance and provide greater assurance that risks to drinking water quality are being effectively managed.

The proposed changes to the Rules were informed by consultation with drinking water suppliers and other sector stakeholders. This review sought to streamline and simplify the Rules, ensuring that the requirements remain proportionate to the risks being managed while supporting consistent implementation across a diverse range of drinking water supplies. Feedback received through the consultation process has helped to ensure the updated rules support the goals of the CME Strategy by promoting greater regulatory certainty, improving the quality of information available to inform regulatory decisions, and supporting a more consistent and transparent approach to compliance across the drinking water sector. The revised Rules will come into effect on 1 July 2027 for large supplies (supplies serving more than 500 people).

Councils transitioning to water organisations

Since 2024, local authorities have been transitioning their drinking water, wastewater and stormwater services to larger water organisations established under the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025. These changes are intended to support more sustainable and efficient delivery of water services by providing access to greater scale, capability and investment. During this transition, the Authority will continue to work closely with drinking water suppliers to provide guidance and support, helping them to understand and meet their regulatory obligations while maintaining safe and reliable drinking water services.

Improving compliance with the Rules

Many of the graphs presented in Part Three of this report include a percentage of supplies that either did not report on the compliance measures, or submitted invalid reports. Our expectation is that all registered suppliers should be meeting their compliance reporting requirements and all reports submitted to us should be valid.

We acknowledge that sometimes there will be circumstances where this will not be possible, but water suppliers should have 100% compliance with reporting requirements as their target and intention.

Prioritising good quality data

To ensure that our regulatory activities are evidence-based and targeted towards risk, we need to prioritise the collection of good quality data. The completeness, accuracy and consistency of the compliance reporting data provided by suppliers and presented in this report affects our understanding of the risks present to drinking water supplies across New Zealand.

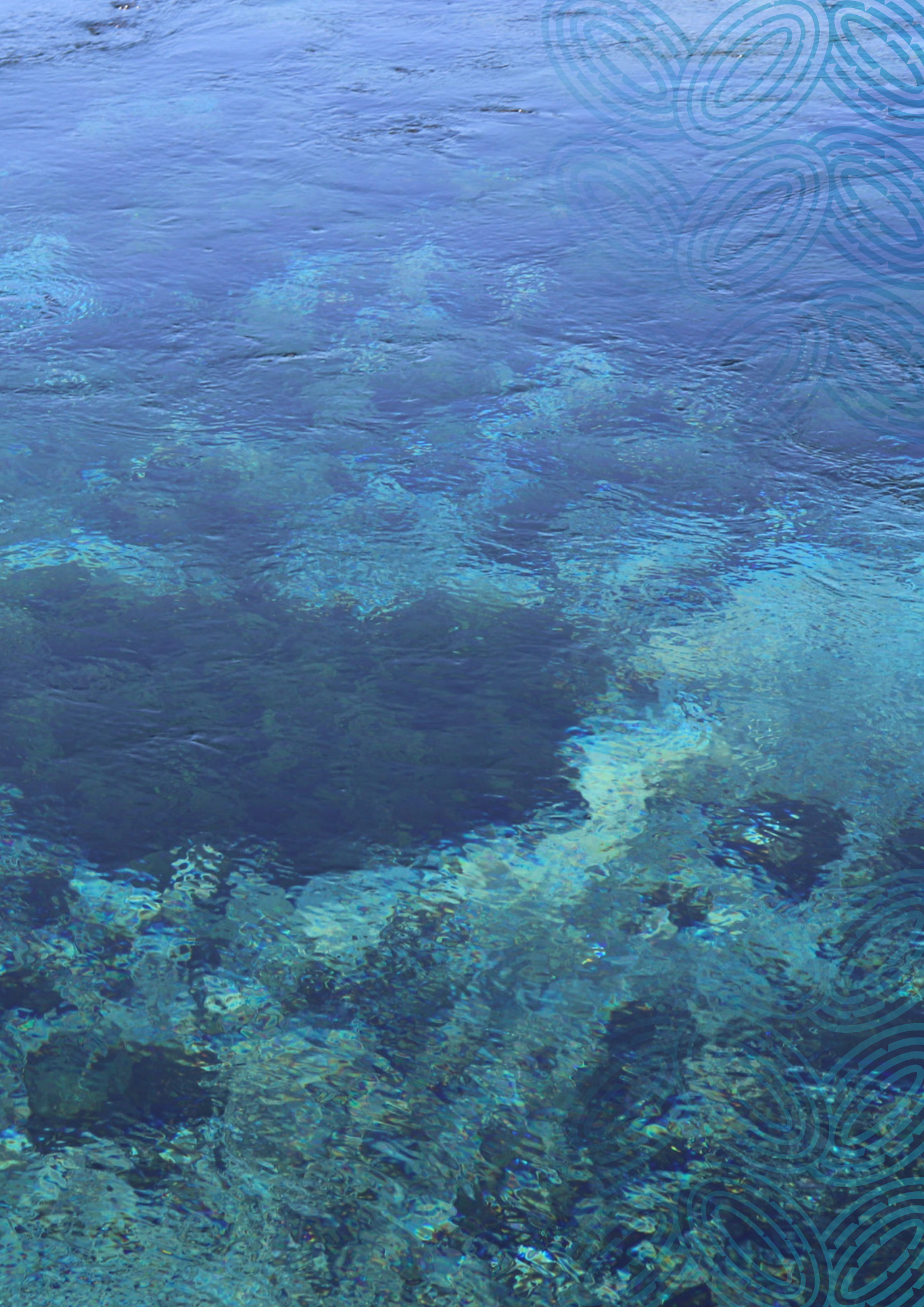
While we have seen improvements in the rates and quality of reporting, data quality issues continue to be identified. The Authority will continue to work with drinking water suppliers and the wider water industry to improve the quality of compliance reporting data submitted to us. This will in turn provide us with greater confidence in the information we have available as part of our regulatory oversight role.

Summary

Taken together, the trends presented in this report show practical movement along the pipeline to safe drinking water. More suppliers are putting basic treatment barriers in place, source water monitoring and treatment performance have improved in several areas, and there are signs of stronger engagement from suppliers, such as schools. These improvements provide greater assurance that risks are being identified and managed before they result in harm, while also highlighting the areas where further action is needed to meet the expectations set out in the CME.

The report also reinforces that effective regulation depends on the quality of the information available. Improved reporting, clearer notifications, and more consistent supplier data help the Authority to understand where risks are changing, where progress is occurring, and where regulatory effort should be focused. Continued improvement in data quality will therefore remain central to our ability to support better decision-making, target engagement and intervention, and maintain a clear focus on protecting public health.







Water Services Authority
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