Water Services Authority
Taumata Arowai

Factsheet: Network Environmental Performance Report 2024/25

The 2024/25 report draws on data from 559 public drinking water networks and more than 320 public wastewater networks.

About our assets

- Publicly owned services run by councils, water organisations and the government cater for 84% of the population. This includes 331 wastewater networks and 559 drinking water networks.
- Network operators reported on 973 consents held for wastewater treatment plants.
- 15% of drinking water and wastewater pipes are reportedly in poor condition. However, given the reliability of assessment methods used and the relatively low levels of regular physical and/or CCTV inspections, the actual percentage of pipes in poor condition is likely to be higher.

Drinking water network performance

Protection of environmental and public health

- Many drinking water take consents are due to expire soon, with over 240 water-take consents due to expire in the next 10 years.
- For the first time, operators reported the volume of water taken above consented limits. While most operators did not exceed their consented limits, twenty-one network operators reported a combined total of 644,810 m^3 of water abstracted beyond what consents allow - similar to 258 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Efficiency of services

- Median household water use across New Zealand was 678 litres per connection per day in 2024/25, compared with 604 litres per connection per day in 2023/24.
- While 27% of drinking water networks reported an Infrastructure Leakage Index below 2 indicating little room for improvement, 32% had an Infrastructure Leakage Index of 4 or higher, indicating poor leakage management or very inefficient use of resources.
- Areas with high residential metering generally use less water than the national median, showing that metering can support efforts to reduce water demand and loss. However, metering uptake is uneven across the country.
- Overall, there are 980,273 residential meters in drinking water networks across New Zealand. Nineteen councils and crown-owned operators have water meters fitted on at least 90% of residential connections.

Reliability of services

- Compared to last year, councils reported the total length of drinking water pipes that have had their condition graded increased from 81% to 84%.

Economic sustainability of services

- The funding challenge is greater in rural areas; the annual drinking water network cost per person is 2.9 times higher than in metropolitan areas.
- The quality of data available on financial performance is poor. We have shared the financial data in this report with the Commerce Commission, so they can support the improvement in data quality as the economic regulator for water services.

Wastewater water network performance

Protection of environmental and public health

- Operators reported 11,535 wastewater overflows in 2024/25, around 31 each day.
- Overflows can discharge untreated wastewater to land or water, creating risks for public health, recreation, food gathering and the environment.
- Overflows are most frequent in urban areas, where stormwater and groundwater can infiltrate and overwhelm networks in heavy rain. This figure is likely to under report the number of overflows actually occurring as the ways that councils collate and report overflows information is highly variable.
- Capacity constraint and blockages are the leading causes of overflows.
- Metropolitan areas experience 17.67 blockages per 100km of pipe, nearly three times the rate of provincial (6.19) and rural (5.54) areas.
- Only 10% (3,370km) of the total wastewater network (34,890km) has been CCTV inspected in the last five years.

Wastewater treatment

- Approximately 22% of wastewater treatment plants are operating on expired consents, with 48% of plants requiring re-consenting within 10 years. The bulk of these expiring consents will now be managed under the wastewater environmental performance standards.
- Most wastewater (more than 99.6% of discharge volume) produced in metropolitan areas is treated to a tertiary level.
- 74% of wastewater treatment plant discharges go into marine and estuarine areas.

Date completeness

- All 71 network operators submitted data for this year's report
- While data completeness improved markedly, the Authority has concerns with data reliability
- drinking water *data completeness* reaching 99% for provincial councils and 96% for rural councils, and all wastewater results above 90%.
- However, *data reliability* is of concern in many areas including wastewater asset condition, water loss, overflow monitoring, bypass reporting and financial information.

The Authority's priority work to support the sector

The Authority has a significant work programme underway to support the sector in improving water services infrastructure across New Zealand. Key areas of focus over the next few years are outlined below.

Wastewater environmental performance standards

- Four initial standards, announced in late 2025, are currently being implemented through new resource consents for treatment plants and networks and will be a step change in how wastewater services are managed and publicly reported.
- The Authority is also providing guidance to councils to make consenting processes more consistent.
- Further wastewater standards are being developed.

Overflows standard

- This will improve reporting by requiring wastewater overflows to be reported in a clear and consistent way based on their level of risk.

National Engineering Design Standards

- The development of these will improve consistency in the way new water infrastructure is designed, built, renewed and maintained across the country for drinking water, waste and stormwater networks.

Infrastructure design solutions

- The development of these will make it easier to upgrade smaller wastewater treatment plants by streamlining the consenting process through modular solutions.
- This work is focused on plants serving communities of 5,000 people or fewer, where consent renewals can be particularly challenging.

Benchmark information for water meters

- Water meters can help reduce water loss and encourage more efficient water use.
- Benchmark information will support the rollout of water meters by water service providers.