



Wastewater Environmental Performance Standards

Webinar - 11 December 2025



The Authority's role

- We have a **system oversight role** for wastewater and stormwater.
- Our responsibilities for wastewater and stormwater went live in October 2023
- Many of our wastewater tools are **implemented through the resource management system** – including wastewater standards.
- **Regional councils remain the primary regulator** for wastewater and stormwater discharges, primarily through granting and enforcing resource consents.

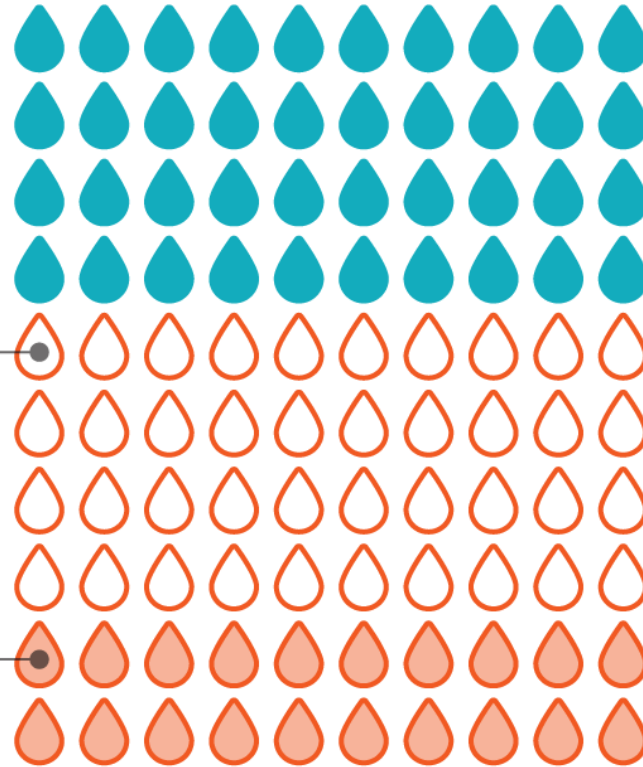
Rationale for change



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

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



KEY:

- Current
- Due to expire
- Expired

What are the benefits?



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Standards are designed to:

- provide the consistency and certainty needed to enable wastewater infrastructure improvements
- improve public health and environmental outcomes
- create cost efficiencies for councils and communities
- support improved performance through increased transparency
- ensure communities have access to better information
- ensure that overflows are better understood and managed
- make compliance and enforcement for regional councils easier





How were the standards developed?

The standards draw on analysis of existing consent arrangements, wastewater sector feedback and independently developed technical advice.

Initial proposals were tested through public consultation in early 2025. We received over 150 submissions from councils, industry stakeholders, iwi / hapū and individuals.

Refinements were made based on the feedback received through consultation, along with further technical advice and engagement with iwi and individual operators.

The following slides summarise key themes from consultation, and subsequent updates to the standards.



Key changes following consultation

- **Discharge to water**
 - Very low dilution rivers and high-energy coastal receiving environments added
 - 90th percentile limits added for TSS and cBOD5
 - Periphyton risk assessment and QMRA requirements further developed
 - Mixed discharge schemes enabled through alternative dilution ratio calculation
- **Discharge to land**
 - Standards for rapid infiltration schemes included
 - Site assessment requirements further developed
- **Overflows and bypasses**
 - Discharges from existing engineered overflow points, uncontrolled overflow points, and new engineered overflow points split into separate activities
- **Discharge of biosolids to land**
 - Based on existing guidelines, no significant changes



When do the standards apply?

The standards apply to publicly owned wastewater plants and networks. This is set in the primary legislation (the Water Services Act 2021).

The standards are not intended to apply to private networks or onsite wastewater treatment systems. This is defined as arrangements that meet the parameters of *AS/NZS 1547:2012 On-site domestic wastewater management*.



Standards and Treaty settlement obligations

Under the Water Services Authority – Taumata Arowai Act 2020 and the Water Services Act 2021, the Authority has specific Treaty settlement obligations we must uphold in the Waikato-Waipā, Whanganui and Whangaehu catchments.

The standards will apply to wastewater treatment plants in these catchments, unless there is an inconsistency with relevant Treaty settlement Acts. Where an inconsistency is raised, the relevant iwi and hapū will work with the consent applicant and consenting authority to consider whether the standards apply.

For the Waikato-Waipā catchment, section 58JB of the Resource Management Act 1991 and section 12 of the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010 provides that Te Ture Whaimana (the vision and strategy for the Waikato River) prevails over any inconsistent provision in a wastewater standard. These Acts were recently amended by the Local Government (Water Services) (Repeals and Amendments) Act 2025.

The Regulations enacting the standards apply an equivalent approach to the Whanganui and Whangaehu catchments.

What tranche one standards cover



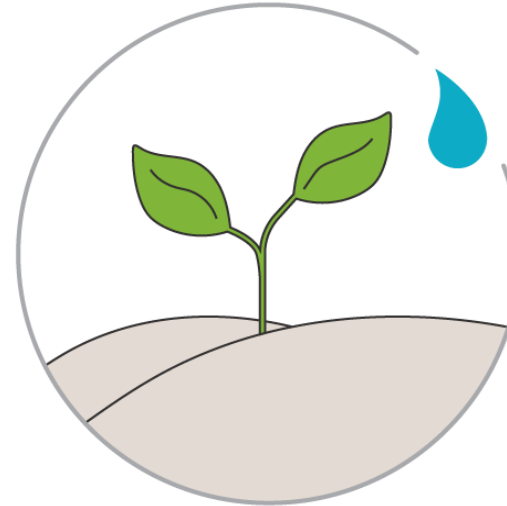
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Discharges to water



Discharges to land



Beneficial
reuse of
biosolids



Overflows and
bypasses



Discharge to water standard

Sets treatment requirements for the main contaminants released from wastewater treatment plants into waterbodies.



Three steps to follow.

1. Identify the type of receiving waterbody the wastewater is discharged to.
2. Check the concentration limits for each contaminant and what monitoring and reporting is needed.
3. Include and implement the requirements in the resource consent conditions.

Contaminants covered by the standard include organic matter, Total Suspended Solids, Total Nitrogen and Phosphorus, ammonia, *E. coli* and enterococci.

The treatment requirements depend on how sensitive the receiving waterbody is and the level of environmental risk.

Small wastewater treatment plants that discharge to water have different discharge requirements.

There are very few exceptions permitted for discharges to water.

Features of the Standard:

- Exceptions
- Receiving environments
- Concentration limits
- Periphyton and QMRA
- Monitoring requirements
- Reporting requirements
- Small plant standard
- Upgrade timeframes



Discharge to land standard

Provides a framework to check if land is suitable for receiving treated wastewater and then sets discharge limits based on the specific risks at that site.



Three steps to follow.

1. Assess the site capability, including the environmental and public health risks, to classify the site.
2. Check the contaminant limits and what monitoring and reporting is needed.
3. Include and implement the requirements in the resource consent conditions.

Loading limits and treatment requirements are set for Total Phosphorus, Total Nitrogen and *E. coli*.

Minimum requirements for monitoring and reporting are set, based on expected environmental effects.

Discharges of wastewater to land must have a management plan and an operations and maintenance plan.

There are limited exceptions for discharges to land.

Features of the Standard:

- Exceptions
- Site classification
- Application and concentration limits
- Monitoring requirements
- Reporting requirements
- Management plan requirements
- Upgrade timeframes



Reuse of biosolids standard

Ensures biosolids are appropriately treated so they can be safely reused and applied to land.

Four steps to follow.

1. Assess the stabilisation and contaminant grades of the biosolids.
2. Determine the activity status based on the grades to identify how and when biosolids can be reused or stored.
3. Check monitoring and reporting requirements – these align with the biosolids' grade.
4. Include and implement the requirements in the resource consent conditions.

Monitoring and reporting requirements reflect the grade of biosolid.

Where the standards apply, a biosolids application management plan must be developed and submitted to the relevant consenting authority.



Features of the Standard:

- Grading framework for biosolids products
- Permitted, Controlled, and Discretionary activity rules



Management of overflow and bypasses standard

The standard:

- creates a nationally consistent consenting pathway for overflows and bypasses, based on a risk assessment framework
- requires all existing overflow points and treatment plant bypasses to be mapped and consented
- standardises monitoring and reporting for overflows and bypasses from wastewater networks
- comes into force 19 December 2028.

Will build a clearer picture of local and national performance to support efforts to reduce the frequency and impact of overflows and bypasses.



Features of the Standard:

- Controlled activities – existing engineered, uncontrolled overflows, WWTP bypasses
- Information requirements
- Monitoring requirements
- Reporting requirements

Come into force December 2028

Implementing the standards

- Standards will be implemented **through future resource consents**: they do not apply retrospectively.
- **Activity status** for discharges to land and water will continue to be set through relevant regional plan rules.
- Where something is prescribed in the standards (e.g., treatment limits), consent authorities **cannot impose contrary conditions**.
- Consent authorities maintain discretion over matters that fall outside the standards (e.g., PFAS and heavy metals).
- Proposed changes to regional councils may impact how the standards will be implemented, alongside the replacement RMA legislation. We are working with DIA and MfE to understand what these changes mean for how standards will be implemented in future.



Operating on expired consents

- Over **20 percent** of publicly owned and operated WWTPs are **operating on expired consents** (enabled by section 124 of the RMA).
- The standards introduce a **2-year time limit** for operating on an expired consent.
- This time limit will **come into force on 19 December 2028**: this means operators currently relying on s124 will have up to 5 years to obtain new consents.

Transition arrangements

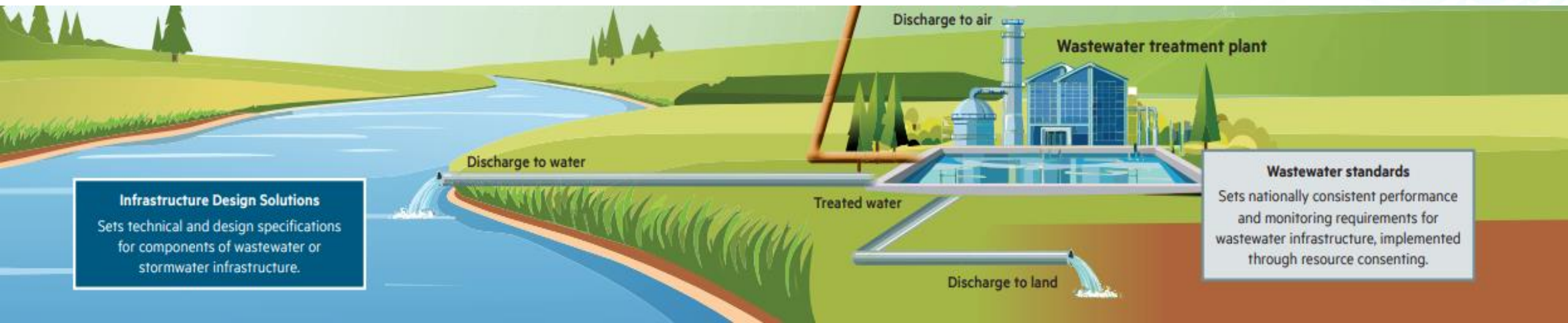
- For live consent applications, **notification impacts whether the standards apply:**
 - Where notification decision made: the standards do not have to apply; and
 - Where notification decision not made: the standards do apply.
- Extant consents that **are due to expire – extended until August 2028:** to give operators time to plan upgrades and apply for new consents.

What is next?



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- Implementation support: Roll-out of guidance for discharge to land
- Development of sector-wide performance reporting and benchmark data
- Continued engagement with iwi/hapū, communities, and regional authorities
- Regulatory refinement: Evaluation of how the Standards perform in practice to identify potential gaps and consider future updates or extensions.
- Future work programme





FAQs





For ongoing dialogue, questions and answers, email us

stormwater_wastewater@taumataarowai.govt.nz

We will continue to update guidance on our website.