

# TAPPED IN

Bringing you news, updates and information from Watercare

Autumn 2023



*Waitākere Dam after the storms.*

## The road to recovery

**In our last issue of *Tapped In*, we encouraged customers to 'make every drop count' over summer by using water wisely. Little did we know then that Auckland was about to experience its wettest summer on record, with two destructive weather events back-to-back.**

Both the January storm and Cyclone Gabrielle had a significant impact on our water and wastewater networks, from our treatment plants through to our pipes on residential streets. It has been a challenging start to the year, but we are on the road to recovery.

### Our immediate emergency response

After the weather events, our immediate priorities were to ensure all our customers had water flowing through their taps and to protect the health of our customers and the environment by responding to wastewater network issues. This saw us put in place a number of temporary fixes. For example, several landslides wiped out sections of wastewater pipes. These are difficult to repair because the ground has fallen away or is unstable. Therefore, we have installed overland hoses and pumps to transfer wastewater between

manholes. This is a good short-term solution in terms of managing sewage, but it can have an impact on people living nearby because we have to use generators to run the pumps.

### Our long-term recovery response

We have a team dedicated to delivering our long-term recovery response, from assessing the damage to carrying out permanent repairs. Based on initial estimates, we believe it will take up to two years to fix over 150 issues. We'll be asking communities for patience as we plan, consent and develop the permanent solutions. In some cases, we will not replace like-with-like. Instead, we will take the opportunity to build back better – with infrastructure that can withstand more severe weather events.

Given the scale of the damage, this is a long and complex process. In the interim, repair costs are coming out of our \$13-billion capital budget that spans 10 years. The storms have not had an impact on our customer pricing.

**[Find out more about our storm response and how you can prepare for extreme weather events in this issue of \*Tapped In\*.](#)**

# Supporting our customers in their time of need

The storms had a devastating impact on thousands of Watercare customers. In the weeks that followed, we rolled out a range of support, depending on their needs.

## Muriwai



Up until Cyclone Gabrielle hit, we provided water to **211** properties in this coastal community. Today, our water treatment plant is red-stickered and out of service, sitting at the foot of a major landslide.

In response, we have stood up a temporary supply that involves pumping water from a tanker directly into the local network. We are now scoping a medium-term fix to ensure the community has a reliable water supply that is easier and less expensive to maintain.

## Auckland-wide



**1,702** properties across the city were red or yellow-stickered following the storms.

We reached out to these property owners to offer our sympathy and support. This took the form of a \$50 credit (which is the equivalent of 27,000L of water) on their account to assist clean-up efforts and a temporary hold on monthly fixed charges.

## West Auckland



A landslide on Scenic Drive washed away a major watermain that served around **3,000** homes. This left homes without running water for up to five days while we reconfigured our water network. We sent tankers to the area to provide emergency water.

We also phoned dozens of customers who undertake home dialysis, or who have registered for priority assistance, to check they were okay and to ask if they needed special assistance.



# Understanding water in Auckland

In the weeks following the storm, we noticed that some of our customers were unsure of the services we deliver or the role our infrastructure plays in their communities. Here are a few key things to know:

## Floods versus wastewater overflows

Floods occur when a lot of rain falls in a short timeframe. The rain overwhelms the stormwater network and does not soak into the ground straight away. Auckland Council manages the stormwater network and responds to flooding.

In wet weather, wastewater overflows occur when rain gets into the wastewater network and causes it to spill. For example, rain can enter the network through wastewater manholes. The network's pipes fill up and spill out through manholes, engineered overflow points or private gully traps. There is always a risk that flood water will contain wastewater, therefore we discourage customers from playing in it. We manage the wastewater network and respond to overflows.

## Groundwater

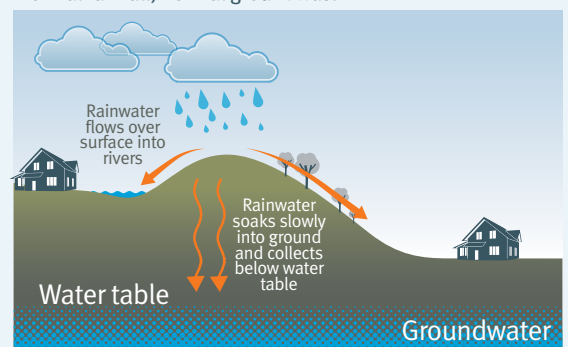
Groundwater is the term given to water that is present beneath the Earth's surface. Rainwater naturally soaks into the ground across Auckland and travels from high areas through layers of soil and rock, down towards the coast. The layer of rocks containing the groundwater is known as an aquifer.

Groundwater flooding can happen after wet weather. The aquifer fills with water and the water table rises, eventually reaching the surface. There are natural aquifers underneath Auckland including in Mount Eden, Ellerslie, Onehunga and Mount Albert. Auckland Council responds to groundwater flooding.

## Water storage dams

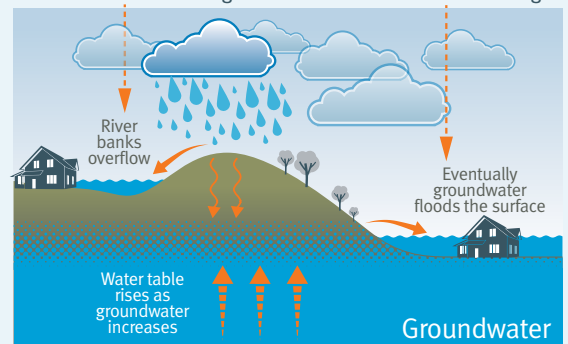
We have 11 water storage dams in the Hūnua Ranges, the Waitākere Ranges and Helensville. When they are not full, they store rainwater that falls within their catchments. But once they are full, excess water flows through their manmade spillways to the streams below. This is what would happen naturally, if the dams were not there. We do not actively release water from the dams during storm events.

Normal rainfall, normal groundwater



Surface water flooding

Groundwater flooding



# Help us help you

## Communicating with our customers during a crisis

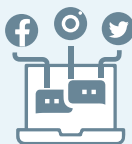
When the storms hit, our network maps lit up with alerts to overflows and watermain breaks. This meant connecting with our customers and proactively updating them was essential. We provided daily updates by:



**Texting** customers in impacted communities with updates on water or wastewater issues, and field crew status.



**Emailing** customers in areas where we needed people to reduce their water use.



Targeting **social media** posts to relevant community pages, with updates on tanker locations, repair progress and timeframes.



Providing rolling updates on our **website**.

The best way to ensure we have your email address on file is to sign up for e-billing. It's easy to do and it will save you postal charges. Go to [watercare.co.nz/createaccount](https://www.watercare.co.nz/createaccount) and register for MyAccount, then select 'e-billing' in the top menu. There's a short form to complete. If you're a landlord, you can sign your tenants up to receive e-bills too.

Follow us on social media



@WatercareNZ



@watercare\_nz



@watercare\_nz

## Uncover hidden leaks while you sleep



Ground movement and landslips from the storms may have damaged your private water pipes. We encourage you to do a test to find any hidden leaks on your side of the meter – that's your private network. The leak test doesn't take long, and it can be done while you're sleeping. Here are the steps below:

- Pick a time when water isn't being used on your property – overnight is best.
- Before you go to sleep, read your water meter and write down all the numbers from left to right.
- After at least four hours, read the meter again and compare the numbers with the first reading.
- If the meter numbers are higher than your initial read, you have a leak.



To ensure you get accurate readings, make sure you don't use any water during the test and don't turn off the tap on the meter.

There are videos at [watercare.co.nz](https://www.watercare.co.nz) on how to check for a leak. Search for 'check for a leak'.

## Preparing for emergency situations



The recent storms are a reminder that natural hazards can happen any time and without warning. The National Emergency Management Agency provides simple steps you can take to make sure you and your whānau are ready to get through. Here are a few below:

### Talk about the impacts

Understanding the impacts of an emergency can help you get through. Have a chat with the people in your household and work out what you'll do if you're stuck at home, can't get home, need to evacuate, or are without power, water, internet or phone.

### Work out what supplies you need

In an emergency, you may be stuck at home for three days or more. Figure out what supplies you need.

### Make a plan

Make a plan with your household to get through an emergency. Think about the things you need every day and work out what you would do if you didn't have them. Remember to include everyone. Think about the requirements of disabled people, older people, babies, young children, pets and other animals.

Visit [getready.govt.nz](https://getready.govt.nz) for more information on how to get through emergency situations.



## Our prices are changing on 1 July 2023

Our water and wastewater service prices will increase by 9.5% from 1 July 2023. This means households with average water use will pay about \$2.20 more per week.






This follows the price path approved by the board of directors in December 2020 and included in Auckland Council's Long-Term Plan which was formally adopted in June 2021, after public consultation.

Since then, we've faced significant challenges, including very high rates of inflation and extreme weather events ranging from drought to the recent floods.

However, we understand many people are facing financial strain, so it's important to us to keep price increases as low as possible. This is why we're sticking with the price path.

### Understanding the cost of residential water use

The price for 1000 litres of water will go from \$1.825 to \$1.998, while 1000 litres of wastewater will go from \$3.174 to \$3.476. The fixed wastewater charge will go from \$264 a year to \$289.

Activity	*Estimated water use	Price per activity (includes water and wastewater cost) – new charges effective 1 July 2023
 Using a hose for 10 minutes	150 litres	\$0.71
 Having a bath (half full)	80 litres	\$0.38
 Having a shower (4 minutes)	48 litres	\$0.23
 Having a shower (8 minutes)	96 litres	\$0.45
 Running a washing machine (6kg front loader)	60 litres	\$0.28

\*Actual water usage will vary.

Residential wastewater volume is calculated at 78.5 per cent\* of the incoming water volume, as measured by the water meter. This assumes that, on average, 78.5 per cent of the water that enters the home goes down the drain via showers, baths, washing machines, dishwashers, toilets, sinks, etc.

### What the money is spent on

All of the money you pay us in your water and wastewater bills goes towards delivering those services safely and reliably and investing in our networks so we can continue to do so.

A recent review of our Asset Management Plan has identified a forecast capital expenditure increase of \$3.6billion over the next 10 years. This takes our forecast capital expenditure to more than \$13billion over the next 10 years. To fund this, we'll need to increase the amount we borrow.

In the next financial year alone we'll be spending more than \$1b on infrastructure projects that cater for growth, replace ageing assets and deliver better outcomes for the environment. These include completing a new 45-million-litre water storage reservoir at Redoubt Road, which significantly boosts our water supply resilience, and continuing to tunnel our Central Interceptor wastewater pipe between central Auckland and our Māngere Wastewater Treatment Plant.

These price increases are necessary to ensure we can continue to provide the high-standard water and wastewater services you expect from us. Visit [watercare.co.nz](https://www.watercare.co.nz) for more information.



## Our priority assistance programme offers customers extra support

If you are sight or hearing impaired, require a translator, or have a medical condition or disability that makes you feel vulnerable when there is a lack of water, we can offer some support. For example, after the recent storms, we phoned priority assistance customers in areas experiencing water outages to check on their welfare and to ask if they needed bottled water delivered.

To find out more about the service and to register, visit our website [www.watercare.co.nz/priorityassistance](https://www.watercare.co.nz/priorityassistance). You can also register on behalf of someone else.

If you are facing financial hardship, we can help you set up payment arrangements that are within your budget or we can put you in touch with the Water Utility Consumer Assistance Trust. Other organisations such as Work and Income NZ and Citizens Advice Bureau may be able to assist as well.

## KEEP IN TOUCH

*Tapped In* is your newsletter. If you would like to talk to us about any stories from this edition or your ideas for future issues, we'd love to hear from you. To get in touch, please email our communications team at [communications@water.co.nz](mailto:communications@water.co.nz). You can learn more about what we do at [waterforlife.org.nz](https://waterforlife.org.nz)