

28 September 2023

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Kia ora Ethan,

### **Porirua Stream**

Thank you for your request made under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (the Act), received on 5 September. You requested the following information:

- The number of incidents relating to debris or blockages in the stream that have been cleared by WCC, broken down year-by-year, for each of the past five years.
- Any email correspondence relating either to blockages or debris in the stream - including correspondence that was forwarded on from a different agency or needed to be redirected to a different agency - dating back to the beginning of 2021.

Wellington City Council has partly refused your request for information.

### **Porirua Stream Responsibilities**

I'd like to take this opportunity to clarify the role and responsibilities of the Wellington City Council with respect to the Porirua Stream.

It is the responsibility of the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) to ensure Porirua stream is clear of blockages, such as trees. In the event debris or blockages in Porirua stream occur on privately owned land, the landowner is generally responsible for normal maintenance of watercourses on and around their property.

This includes maintaining the watercourse free from obstruction so that water can drain away quickly.

Attached to this response is the following information which provides further detail regarding the roles and responsibilities of Council's regarding Porirua stream, alongside further information for landowners:

- Watercourses and you - A landowner's guide (GWRC)
- Looking after Porirua Stream (GWRC)
- Managing streams and open drains on private property (Wellington Water)

When taking into consideration the information above and attachments provided, please find below your questions raised in bold, followed by our response to each:

**The number of incidents relating to debris or blockages in the stream that have been cleared by WCC, broken down year-by-year, for each of the past five years.**

I can confirm Wellington City Council have not attended to any incidents relating to the clearing of debris or blockages in Porirua Stream. We are therefore refusing your request under section 17(e) of the Act because the requested information does not exist.

**Any email correspondence relating either to blockages or debris in the stream - including correspondence that was forwarded on from a different agency or needed to be redirected to a different agency - dating back to the beginning of 2021.**

Following the information outlined above, the Council's Transport & Infrastructure Team have confirmed they hold no information relating to the clearing of blockages or debris in Porirua stream.

However, in the event a member of public was to contact the Council's Contact Centre to raise a request of this nature, this information is passed on to GWRC for action, therefore Business Units such as the Council's Transport & Infrastructure Team would not be included.

The data we hold is not detailed enough to easily confirm the number of requests made through the Council's Contact Centre for the clearing of blockages or debris in Porirua stream.

I can confirm from the beginning of 2021 to the date of this request, a total of 116 tickets have been raised with the words "Porirua Stream" included. Early investigations show a majority of these requests are using Porirua steam as a location point of reference.

To confirm any correspondence logged with the Wellington City Council relating to the clearing of blockages or debris in Porirua stream, each ticket would need to be manually checked for validity. If you would like this level of detail, please let me know and we can assess this.

**Right of review**

If you are not satisfied with the Council's response, you may request the Office of the Ombudsman to investigate the Council's decision. Further information is available on the Ombudsman website, [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz).

Please note, we may proactively release our response to your request with your personal information removed.

Thank you again for your request, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Kind regards

Ollie Marchant  
**Official Information**

Rivers and streams are natural features in our landscape and have historically occupied large areas on our floodplains. The development of cities and infrastructure on these floodplains has confined these streams to an un-naturally small space. They will try and occupy greater areas through erosion, particularly in times of flood.

## Who's responsible for looking after watercourses?

In short, it's complicated. There are several parties, with different, and sometimes overlapping responsibilities. We'll summarise the key points here.

### Greater Wellington

As your regional council we're responsible for helping minimise the effects of flooding by:

- Keeping Porirua stream clear of blockages, such as trees.
  - As needed, for several streams, including parts of Porirua stream. This is often the responsibility of landowners. Have a look at this map of [watercourses we manage near Tawa that shows where we clear blockages from](#).
  - Annual inspections of streams, including a clearing run to remove blockages.
  - Inspections at key trouble spots before and after major flooding events.
  - We cleared Porirua Stream most recently on 21 January 2022.
  - We look after 800km+ of waterways in the region. After a major flooding event, depending on how many urgent jobs there are, it could be some weeks before we get to all areas.
  - If you have concerns about stream blockages, contact us on 0800 496 734 or [info@gw.govt.nz](mailto:info@gw.govt.nz)
- Maintaining the Stebbings and Seton Nossiter flood detention dams, both of which provide additional flood protection for Porirua Stream in very significant flood events. This is part of the comprehensive overall Porirua flood protection scheme.
- Flood protection and erosion protection works for Porirua Stream between the mouth and Wall Place to protect the Porirua CBD only. That is, we do not provide flood protection and erosion protection works upstream of Wall Place.
- Advising City Councils on avoiding developments too close to stream banks and controlling additional stormwater runoffs.
- Providing advice and consents needed for activities such as erosion protection works, building or repairing bridges.

## Wellington City Council & Porirua City Council

City councils are responsible for the repair to damage to their assets (e.g. roads, bridges, pipes and council property). They are also responsible for ensuring that future developments are kept back a safe distance from the stream edges and do not increase the risk of flooding. For example, under the Wellington City Council district plan “no building or structure, including a fence or wall, shall be located closer than 10 metres to the Porirua Stream (and its tributaries)”.

The boundary for Wellington City Council ends, and Porirua city Council begins, at Linden Park. Refer to [this map for more details](#).

## Landowners

If a stream passes through, by, or abuts your property, you are responsible for the following:

- **Maintaining safe structures.** This includes maintaining any buildings or bridges on your property and repairing any flood damage on your property.
- **Carrying out any erosion protection or remediation work that you would like done on your property.**
  - Note: while you are responsible for carrying out erosion-related works, you are not legally obliged to do so. However, we kindly ask that you consider the impact that any action (or inaction) could have on your neighbours.
- **Keeping structures a safe distance from the waterway.** Structures must comply with distance requirements in district plans.
- **Following the rules,** such as the Natural Resources Plan, when carrying out any erosion protection or construction works. For example, you may need a resource consent.

While it's not possible in every case, you can reduce flood and erosion risk by:

- Locating assets outside of the flood and erosion risk area.
- Flood-proofing buildings.
- Keeping the watercourse free from obstruction.
- Bank-edge planting with appropriate species.
- A range of other techniques for bank stabilisation.

## Further help

We fully understand that situations involving erosion on your property must be very distressing. Please call us if you:

- are concerned about blockages in the stream.
- need advice about the rules for building or repairing a bridge (we'll tell you if you need a consent).
- would like advice on how to reduce flood and erosion risk, and what the rules are.

# **Managing streams and open drains on private property**

Your responsibilities







## Managing streams and open drains

Council is responsible for the piped stormwater network and associated infrastructure; maintaining the network involves regular inspections and maintenance to ensure that the network works as it should. However as a homeowner you are responsible for maintaining streams and open drain that pass through your property. Regular maintenance of the stream and its banks or open drains not only keeps the waterway and aquatic life healthy but can also protect your property by helping reduce any potential flood risk. It is vital that waterways are kept clear and this is an ongoing joint effort between you and your council.

## What is the risk?

During heavy rain events the volume of water flowing through streams and open drains increases. If the flow of water is obstructed then flooding may occur.

Flooding not only increases the risk of damage to your property but also the land around your property as this may become unstable and results in subsidence.

## What can you do to protect yourself?

- Remove any debris, overhanging branches, fallen trees or vegetation and clear away any bank collapses to ensure water can flow freely.
- Make sure any pollutants on your property cannot find their way into the stream or open drain. This is particularly important during heavy rain events.
- Any private structure that crosses the stream or open drain needs to be fixed securely to stop it breaking free and floating away during increased water flow.
- The natural route that water runs off your land is the "overland flow path". Landscaping, buildings, sealed driveways and pathways all affect the flow of water through your property. Water courses are best left open allowing water to flow freely.
- Please contact us if you are considering piping a water course on your property as we are more than happy to discuss this with you. However, this may not be permitted in some areas.
- Obtain sandbags and store them ready for use. Sandbags placed in strategic areas can help reduce potential flood risk.
- Regularly check your local weather information via MetService and social media to be aware of any weather events that may affect water courses on your property. Pay particular attention to heavy, localised rain events. These are typically short, intense events that have the potential to result in flooding.





**Let's all do our part to  
protect our waterways.**

**Wellington Water**

**Phone:** 04 912 4400

**Email:** [info@wellingtonwater.co.nz](mailto:info@wellingtonwater.co.nz)

**Web:** [www.wellingtonwater.co.nz](http://www.wellingtonwater.co.nz)



## Minimising risk

A stream or river may damage your land or property, particularly during a flood event, by:

- Flooding land
- Eroding land or causing washouts at structures
- Causing loss of bankside vegetation
- Depositing debris
- Gravel or sediment building up in the channel

There are measures you can take to reduce the risk of flooding and erosion or to repair the damage. These include:

- Locating assets outside of the flood risk area
- Flood-proofing buildings
- Keeping the watercourse free from obstruction
- Bank-edge planting with appropriate species
- A range of other techniques for bank stabilisation

Greater Wellington provides free advice to help landowners mitigate and repair damage from watercourses on their properties. Contact Greater Wellington Environmental Regulation helpdesk. Telephone: 0800 496 734

# Watercourses and you

A landowner's guide

Water, air, earth and energy – elements in Greater Wellington's logo that combine to create and sustain life. Greater Wellington promotes **Quality for Life** by ensuring our environment is protected while meeting the economic, cultural and social needs of the community



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## The purpose of these guidelines

These guidelines are intended to provide advice on what you can do to manage your watercourse (river, stream, creek or drain)

## What are your responsibilities?

As a landowner, you are generally responsible for normal maintenance of watercourses on and around your property. This includes maintaining the watercourse free from obstruction so that water can drain away quickly. For example, removal of fallen trees blocking a stream.



All landowners need to be aware that 'drains' are also watercourses.

Some watercourses, particularly in urban areas are maintained by your regional or local council. Check this with Greater Wellington or your local council when considering any work.

## Watercourse management

Good watercourse management will help to protect your property and land from damage while providing for a sustainable environment.

Good practices for managing watercourses include:

- Stock management/exclusion
- Pest (plant and animal) control
- Riparian set-back, planting and fencing
- Clearing obstructions
- Allowing room for watercourses to meander

Greater Wellington has people with the expertise and experience to help you manage watercourses on your property. We offer advice and, where available, links to funding.

You may also find useful information on looking after urban and rural streams in Greater Wellington's booklet *Mind the stream*



## Resource consent required for work in watercourses

If you are planning work that may affect the banks or bed of a watercourse, including repairing flood damage and making improvements to your property, you will probably need resource consent.

Examples of works that will need resource consent/s are:

- Forming a crossing or disturbing the watercourse e.g. to place a culvert
- Extracting, damming, or diverting water e.g. damming a stream to make a pond or straightening a channel
- Clearing vegetation and/or gravel and sediment from within the channel of a watercourse

Examples of works not likely to need resource consent are:

- Minor maintenance of an existing lawful structure
- Removing fallen trees or removing vegetation outside the channel of the watercourse

**Check your consent requirements with Greater Wellington Environmental Regulation**

Some local councils also require resource consent for work in or next to watercourses. Check directly with your local council.