

Eugene Doyle presentation to Mayoral Taskforce 20 July 2020

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Introduction

The Citizens of Wellington will judge us poorly, the media will shred us and history will condemn us if, after all these months, we do not return a report that powerfully sets forth the path that the City needs to take to address the issues facing the FIVE WATERS.

Once the Taskforce's report is released, Urgency and Action need to be the by-words.

We do, however, need to be confident that our discussions have taken us to a place that we are confident will lead to powerful, positive and transformative action for the 5 Waters and that we have a strategy to sell these important messages to the public, to the media, to Councillors, powerful officers, other Councils, including GWRC.

I will focus on one central challenge: the need to task and fund Wellington Water to address the contamination of the fresh waterways and bays of Wellington and how resolving these issues will resolve a large number of issues relating to the 3 Waters. As we know, all of Wellington's streams are seriously contaminated (rated E or F).

Having listened to the speakers and spent time with all but two of the Taskforce members – and thank you very much to all those members who shared their time and really valuable insights with me – I believe we need to clearly advise the City to take the following actions, many of which will require buy-in from other councils and central government:

Ten Transformative Actions

1. This Taskforce is unanimously committed to a publicly-owned water infrastructure. The recommendations we make should be fully in line with this. Public ownership should be entrenched and require super-majorities or a public referendum to change.
2. Wellington Water must be funded and tasked to meet the Government's requirements under the National Policy Statement on FreshWater - and energetic action must start in 2020 to address the contamination of our freshwater and coastal marine environments. Doing this will remedy many of the water infrastructure issues the City faces. Serious planning and resources need to be committed to this project.
3. Public access to water-related information must undergo an enormous expansion. The public have a right to have ready access to machine-readable data on the state of their streams and bays. Monitoring data for all the major streams and, particularly stream outlets into Wellington's bays, needs to be immediately made available to the public.

WCC needs to ensure there is a comprehensive review by GWRC and all related agencies of the LAWA process to ensure Baywatch sites take into account water quality at stream outlets and the Regional Public Health Officer decisions around safe-to-swim are adjusted accordingly.
4. Wellington City Council needs to ensure it has the staff and resources necessary to meet these historical challenges, including for prioritising water sensitive urban design, lobbying for central government funding, including Green projects and government infrastructure funds, and providing a higher level of planning and oversight if water remains within Council control.
5. The Taskforce supports changing the ownership and Governance model for Wellington Water and the Government's move towards a bigger

super-regional entity to manage water. The company needs one master, not many. A depoliticised structure that isn't subject to election cycles will help drive change.

6. In line with this, and in contrast to the past, all revenue collected nominally for water must be ring-fenced, to ensure that repairs, renewals and upgraded levels of service are achieved. This funding base will be supported by necessary rates increases, cost savings and access to central government funding.
7. The current massive levels of potable water being lost through private and public infrastructure failure is unacceptable. Move immediately to introduce water metering to address the unacceptably high levels of water loss and over-consumption compared to cities with water meters. What isn't measured can't be improved. Volumetric charging is essential for communities to understand and value their water and for the water company to source and fix leaks.
8. Immediately establish a working group within WCC, with outside expertise, to urgently tackle the legal and operational requirements to address failing private water assets, illegal connections, and all the necessary mechanisms to progress remediation in phases, catchment by catchment. Develop mechanisms, such as targeted rates at low interest, to help private property owners to make necessary repairs. This requires a focus and urgency that has to date been absent.
9. Communicate with the people. Lead the people. Many of these topics and recommendations are familiar and accepted by people active in this field. Wellington has a poor recent record in building consensus around significant change or projects. Water is too important to the City for these proposals to fail due to poor communication and consensus building. This will require both transparency and strong political leadership, involving excellent communication, engagement with mana whenua, communities, business, media and political stakeholders, including from other councils.

10. WCC needs to work closely with GWRC to ensure they are more active in their regulatory role, particularly in respect to freshwater and coastal marine. Polluters are seldom challenged effectively and this has to change.

New Catchment Management Team and Freshwater & Coastal Marine Strategy

This paper outlines a programme for Wellington to achieve its obligations under the National Policy Statement 2040 Fresh Water and the Whaitua Project. I think it is important that the Taskforce makes a very clear statement regarding the necessity of adequately resourcing Wellington Water to achieve the NPS-FW 2040 objectives set by the Ministry for the Environment.

Goal

Our streams and rivers should be swimmable or wadeable by 2040. All super-catchments need to be at less than 280cfu/100ml of enterococci at stream outlets by 2040. **This goal is entirely consistent and co-reliant on addressing the challenges that are the focus of the Mayoral Taskforce on the Three Waters.**

Achieving the goal requires real action

Current arrangements will not achieve the National Policy Statement goal. The way we are heading – including the current level of commitment to the Roving Crews – means we're not going to be able to achieve anything like the 2040 target.

What would a realistic programme look like?

1. Councils need to fund and task this project or it needs to be part of the Statement of Corporate Intent if Wellington Water moves to an Asset-owning model. In either scenario, funding must be commensurate with the task. Regardless of the future service delivery model, the organization responsible needs to be funded to get this job done.
2. The creation of a Catchment Management Team within Wellington Water that is funded and tasked to a level commensurate with the challenge of bringing the City's super-catchments up to NPS 2040 -FW standards. Achieving higher levels of service focussed on freshwater and coastal marine water quality would be key indicators of their performance. A senior Project Manager/Leader would lead this unit and have all necessary administrative and operational support.
3. The Roving Crews would sit within this Unit and would need to number at least six different crews in Wellington from 2022. Other councils would need to similarly scale up their participation.
4. The creation of joint Wellington Water and Community taskforces for each super-catchment. Whaitua would be a key link to participation from other stakeholders, including GW, WCC, Whaitua, Mana Whenua, landowners and business.
5. A Catchment Plan would be developed for each of the super-catchments and these would guide action. The Whaitua will set the catchment level targets and WCC needs to help the Whaitua move forward.
6. Funding needs to be allocated for network upgrades that progressively cover every super-catchment. The current limited knowledge of the state of the assets needs to be greatly improved.
7. The Council needs to create the policy and by-law framework to effectively drive improvements/remediation on private properties. Issues like the WOF concept, targeted rates, building consents, etc, need to be addressed now, not later. WOF exists overseas and in the building sector - for example, with fire escapes, hygiene for grease traps, back flow certification, etc, which could model different forms of compliance. What needs to be done to speed this plan up? Regional plans are reviewed once every 10 years. Is this a problem that needs addressing?
8. A strategy to attract central government funding needs to be addressed, possibly as part of the move to a new organisational model. Capturing funding that is available - for example our share of the \$761M in the first tranche.
9. Filling the skills gap. There are only so many contractors out there. Building a skilled workforce and attracting talent is essential. What work is being done on this? What needs to happen?
10. An effective communication programme to ensure buy in from all stakeholders.

Catchment Management Team: a rational model

This is project management. Currently, we do not have a project manager in place. This is about mapping the approach, a process, a project. It requires a timeline, it requires a map and from my discussions with people, none of this work has been done.

The first couple of years from now will go very quickly. Neglecting to do this work will mean the financial and political consequences will be shunted off to the next generation forcing them to throw double or triple the resources at the problem.

Realistically it will take 1-2 years to gear up the project team and start pulling in results from the first catchments.

From there, resolving the issues in one catchment per year to the point of sign-off would be a big ask. Some catchments will be more challenging than others. By 2037, however, you theoretically have three years up your sleeve.

Not getting started now is inviting, in fact planning, for failure.

A system needs to be put in place, a plan needs to be put in place, with measurable goals.

Publicly available interim reports every half-year and a fuller report to stakeholders every year would allow people to see progress and whether milestones have been met?

This requires good project management and public accountability: what impact does missing a particular target have on the roadmap? How many years do we now have up our sleeves?

The Catchment Team

The project manager needs to be the one person whose responsibility is to report back to the community or the stakeholders about where we are on the timeline.

To tackle the problem in a real way, the Unit within Wellington Water would require the following:

- A dedicated Senior Manager, responsible for the Catchments, with a special focus on Freshwater and Coastal Marine
- Six Roving Crews for Wellington City [scope the other councils needs]
- Administrative support

- Analytical resources
- Freshwater and Marine science capability within or contracted to Wellington Water
- Budget to cover all this, from various sources including GWRC.

APPENDIX

What follows provides a bit more detail around my thinking/what I have learnt on this issues raised above.

Roving Crews

The region is gearing up for three roving crews. The plan is they will tackle Owhiro Bay, Wainuiomata and Titahi Bay, starting this year. It will take time to train and organise teams and that should be a major focus right now.

Scaling up the Roving Crew model

This is the only way we can meet the Government's 2040 objective. If that's what's required: how are we going to get there? First be rational about what is required, then figure out how this can be funded (rates, green funds, other central government incentives and subsidies, what else?)

If we develop a rational plan and a structure, the government will need to help us get to that 2040 target.

It is estimated that should be three crews working in the Wellington Catchments by 2022, building to six in 2023.

Accountability

The Catchment governance team described here needs to be responsible for bringing all relevant parties together to address major issues including contamination. PHO, LAWA, GWRC, WCC agencies as part of any major contamination or remediation issues ... eg LAWA, PHO, DOC,

Super-catchment Governance

Replacing assumptions with facts

A year down the track when the Governance Team, comprising Group Manager Network and the Community representative for each catchment meet they will have to plan next actions.

Why the Owhiro Catchment is important as a beta test

The reality is we don't have good data. Wellington Water have told me they don't have good enough data to build a model which is why the Owhiro Catchment will be such a central part of the process of developing a programme that will actually achieve our goals.

Our job is to make the waterways of the region swimmable again. Currently, all that is being done is Wellington Water responds to spikes. They react to problems and try to find sources of spikes. As a model it has nothing to do with achieving real change.

Hypothetical scenario to explain the process and timing:

1. **In 2020, the first crews kick manhole covers and knock on doors.**
2. By the end of the 2020-2021 financial year 10% of catchment has been thoroughly audited by the Roving Crews and they find:
 - Of 37 private houses, 23 of them had issues with their stormwater or sewage.
 - 14 of them have interface issues with the network under the road.
 - One Council main is damaged and leaking
3. From this data, Wellington Water will be able to estimate the cost of all of that and we will be able to start to scale up the project. This would be the first time we'll be able to create a decent estimate of the scale of the issues in a catchment.
4. **Remediation 2021-2022**

On 30th of June. 2021, the Governance team sits down and reviews this data.

- Average cost of repair for private properties: \$10,000
- \$10,000 x 23 properties = \$230,000 of private property repairs required.
- 14 interface issues between private and Council assets: \$500,000.
- Replace one damaged main: \$1million.

Total cost of required repairs + \$1.73m

5. This remediation work to be carried out in 2021-2022.

As a consequence of that work the average cfu count in the stream outlet into the bay drops from 2000 cfu/100ml e-coli to 1700. Target: 280 .

From this we see that, in this case, an investment of \$1.7 million delivered a drop in enterococci of 300cfu. Whilst the data is far from perfect it provides a first case we can extrapolate from and build a better model.

Multiply this 10% by it by 10 and the NPS 2040 target should be achievable at a cost of \$17 million in this catchment.

It may be that we learn that the first 80% of improvement is achieved with only 20 or 30% of the investment. Wellington Water's rough estimate however is that roughly 70% of the contamination issues are in the private network and around 30% in the public. Public assets, however, are big ticket items.

Why is there no data?

The reason this has never been structured before, is because the City has never tasked Wellington Water to do this. Greater Wellington and Wellington City Council have traditionally been complacent at best when it came to contamination of freshwater streams and coastal marine. Nobody did anything about it because nobody in power considered it necessary.

Nationwide, citizens are waking up to this desecration of our country's environment. Research shows New Zealanders consider it one of the most important issues that need addressing.

Funding. Addressing the real challenges.

The Taskforce learnt that there had been a failure year after year by successive Councils in Wellington City to 100% reinvest the fully depreciated water assets, allowing the state of Wellington's water infrastructure to progressively degrade.

It is the historic duty of this generation to address those failures; not least because both our citizens and central government are forcefully calling us to do so.

The historical neglect to put the appropriate monies in means we have to look to a variety of sources, not just rates increases, to fund the renewal and upgrades necessary. We need to go back to central government to get a partnership between the state and local authorities.

Funding the Network side to support freshwater and coastal marine

Until now freshwater hasn't been of interest to WCC and therefore has not been of interest to Wellington Water. That has to change. GW has allowed WCC to treat the streams and bays of Wellington little better than stormwater or sewage lines.

As pipes get older and get beyond their useful life Wellington Water renews them. If, however, a pipe leaks into the ground or into a stream, but the condition of all that pipe is durable, under current arrangements nothing is done about it. The leak is allowed to pollute with the blessing of GWRC and WCC.

But under an environmentally sensitive model, Wellington Water would be tasked to line that joint or otherwise fix it. It would be a required level of service.

The Global Stormwater Consent is the first time WCC and WW have been put under pressure to meet level of service aspirations from GWRC.

Current Scenario versus proposed:

A Wellington Water worker told me this:

"A big pipe from A to B, 80 years old, is starting to break regularly, we would dig that up and fix it. If that pipe is a rubber ring-jointed concrete pipe and one part of it is broken, and wastewater is leaking into the ground and then polluting a stream ... We would generally not fix that, because there's no need to dig it up. There's no level of service around that"

Once we have a level of service around aiming for 2040, WW would need to start thinking about innovative techniques of getting in and sealing up the joints to make them watertight again.

There is a loose assumption that 70% of the problem is on private property. Apparently, the biggest problem by far is that earthenware wastewater pipes that go between houses and the WCC networks. If they're not laid properly the tree roots get in, blocks up wastewater and you get spills all over the place. I was told by a WW staff member:

“We actually don’t have a very good idea of what the size of the problem is in terms of dollars or in terms of resourcing.”

What is the mechanism for sorting out private properties?

Serious work needs to be done by Wellington City Council for gearing up to tackle the significant failures on private property. We have had decades of very poor performance in respect to avoiding or managing cross-connections, sign-off procedures, supervision, enforcement, and an incomprehensible lack of distinct equipment for stormwater and sewage that have been a gift to polluters.

It’s time to stop thinking about thinking and actually do something to change all this.

We haven’t got a mechanism in place for approaching private property owners, having the power and the processes to ensure these problems are sorted out.

If we find a problem, who pays? How do they pay?

What needs to happen, what is the WCC policy position that can ensure private property owners have to fund repairs? Where is this written down? What are the laws that give teeth to the position? And can we enforce that? Are there mechanisms in place that allow people who can’t afford it, to pay it off their rates? Where are we at with the Warrant of Fitness idea (CCTV, etc, to see if there are problems) to ensure properties can’t change hands until the 3 Waters are checked and signed off?

END

Eugene Doyle
eugeontour@gmail.com
027 449 4602