

Submission on Tiaki Wai Water Services Strategy

From: Anne Tuffin on behalf of the Trelissick Park Group, Kaiwharawhara Catchment

18 April 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Tiaki Wai Water Services Strategy. We appreciate the complexities involved in bringing water services up to a standard that will provide safe and reliable water services whilst also protecting the environment. We also appreciate that this strategy is for one year only, and that a longer-term strategy will follow.

Who are we?

The Trelissick Park Group (TPG) is a trusted community group that has been actively advocating for the restoration of the natural environment of the Kaiwharawhara Catchment since 1991. The TPG works with the Wellington City Council to achieve the objectives of its Five-Year Management Plan for Trelissick Park.

Why are we submitting?

Trelissick Park is a 20+ hectare WCC scenic reserve situated between Ngaio and Wadestown in what is often referred to as the Ngaio Gorge. Because of its topography, the park receives the stormwater from all the surrounding suburbs and from suburbs higher up in the Kaiwharawhara catchment. This stormwater is released into the Kaiwharawhara and Korimako Streams that flow through the reserve. Stormwater and stormwater infrastructure are therefore of particular interest and concern for us.

Tiaki Wai should make the most of stormwater provisions open to them

We appreciate that the initial focus for both the economic and water quality regulators (commerce commission and Taumata Arowai respectively) is on drinking and wastewater, with regulation and proposed standards for stormwater at a later date.

We note the spatial planning requirements under the planning bill currently before select committee. As well, we note the Ministry for the Environment's recent Our Freshwater report which confirms what many of us working in and around freshwater already see on the ground: too many of our rivers, lakes and wetlands are under pressure, and native species are paying the price. The Kaiwharawhara is no exception.

We submit given these considerations and the relative maturity in thinking and approach at the councils of the Wellington region (including the Whaitua process), that an earlier, integrated and holistic focus on stormwater and catchment planning is essential. We cannot have backsliding when it comes to freshwater and environmental protection.

Both stormwater quality and quantity are a major consideration in the region given the changing climate (increased storminess), as well as urban development and growth. We see the regular effects of this on the hillsides and in the streams of Trelissick Park.

Stormwater has forever been the underfunded third water. This means the majority of our region's stormwater piped network is under capacity and designed for a climate 50 years ago, unable to cope in the wet weather events experienced now. We also welcome the involvement of iwi. We note that iwi and community expectations of limiting or reversing environmental degradation are stronger than they ever have been.

Stormwater quantity and quality planning and management must be prioritised and appropriately funded and resourced in the Taiki Wai model. The TPG was elated to see the Local Government Water Services Act 2025 stormwater definition including green infrastructure, overland flow paths and watercourses, and with clauses requiring specific planning and management of these assets. The inclusion of stormwater risk management plans informing the risk management of overland flow paths and watercourses is long overdue.

Local Water Done Well (LWDW) is a good thing

Forming fewer different council approaches is a good thing. Under the current model, Aotearoa communities cannot afford to prudently manage our vital water and sanitation, including addressing deferred maintenance and renewals.

The regulated approach is a good thing. The Resource Management Act has failed to protect freshwater and te taiao. Regional councils lack the resources, ability and knowledge to monitor and enforce three water activities compliance, including water takes and discharges, freshwater and ecological quality and health, urban stormwater quantity and quality. These failings are demonstrated by ecological decline - the piping of streams, filling of gullies and draining wetlands. Having three regulators should go some way to addressing the funding deficit and environmental degradation.

Financially, it's a good thing, getting autonomy from council purse strings. To deliver efficient effective water services any water service provider needs to be able to fund appropriately and without personal politics and interference.

Two or three waters for WCC?

We are aware there have been conversations at the council table as to whether stormwater should be brought back in house. We consider this move would be hugely detrimental. WCC has not had any stormwater expertise or capability in the last 20 years (since the formation of Capacity, the forerunner to Wellington Water Ltd). It is unlikely WCC would be able to attract and retain sufficient stormwater personnel. We understand that there aren't that many stormwater practitioners in the country.

We understand the motivation – a tighter relationship between and with stormwater, land use, Parks and Reserves and district plan teams. Similarly there have been observations that stormwater in

house works in Auckland. Auckland's forward-thinking stormwater planning requirements have kept pace with their growth, for 20 or 30 years. As the country's biggest unitary authority they have a) the rating base and b) Healthy Waters to manage flood protection and urban stormwater - at a catchment scale, straddling both the RMA and the Local Government Act/LWDW.

Wellington is comparatively immature in its water management compared to Auckland and Christchurch. Rather than starting from scratch, based on aspirations, without funding or political mandate, we suggest a regional approach to stormwater catchment management by Taiki Wai is the most sensible and efficient.

Future longer-term Strategy

We are disappointed that the initial one-year plan addresses only ongoing flood management, maintenance of stormwater networks and environmental monitoring. We look forward to the longer-term planning that will make a real difference to stormwater management in the Kaiwharawhara catchment.

Given the increase in hard surfaces through urban development, and the increase in water volumes because of climate change, the TPG's vision for stormwater management is to divert as much stormwater as possible from entering the park in the first place. We urge Taiki Wai to start planning for new stormwater routes that would take stormwater to the sea without the need for the streams to become open stormwater channels. We also hope that the stormwater that does enter the park is slowed down in water storage systems so that it enters the streams in a measured way. It is time to start thinking about the future.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share our thinking on the draft Taiki Wai Water Services Strategy. We look forward to helping to shape the future vision and strategic direction.

Sincerely

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