

1. Introduction

Approximately 30% of houses in the Gisborne District are not reticulated for wastewater. On-site wastewater treatment, storage and disposal systems are therefore required. A review process has been initiated under section 79 of the Resource Management Act 1991 (the Act) in response to the issues raised by Central Government, the community and Council staff about on-site wastewater management in the Gisborne District.

Central Government identified that many systems nation wide are failing, creating adverse effects on water quality. A cost-benefit analysis demonstrated that the management of unreticulated wastewater treatment, storage and disposal is best dealt with at the Regional Level. Central Government has therefore formally withdrawn a National Environmental Standard relating to On-site Wastewater Systems.

Some people in the community have told Council that they would like to know more about design, installation, operation and maintenance of on-site wastewater treatment and disposal systems, and other systems that deal with wastewater/greywater. After it was decided that reticulation would not proceed for Wainui, Sponge Bay and Okitu, it was agreed that a way forward was to establish a partnership between these communities and Council. The partnership would develop a management programme for on-site wastewater treatment and disposal.

Staff are aware through experience that there are District-wide implementation issues with the Plan which would suggest that the Operative Plan for Discharges to Land and Water, Waste Management and Hazardous Substances (the Plan) does not represent the most effective and efficient response to handling unreticulated wastewater treatment, storage and disposal. These issues include:

- The Plan does not provide for some significant advancement in technology and valid options available for treating effluent on-site without the need for resource consent.
- Limited Permitted activity conditions mean that adverse effects on the environment are not necessarily avoided.
- A lack of setback and clearance distances between discharges and water bodies or other sensitive environments including difficult terrain.
- There are ageing tanks in the District, and also complex advanced treatment systems, some of which are not adequately cared for. There is no formal requirement to do so for tanks not subject to resource consent.
- Some of these systems are failing, causing adverse effects on the environment and it is not clear when they should be upgraded/replaced.
- Some (limited) testing of ground and surface water has detected the presence of human faecal contamination in unreticulated townships/coastal environments.
- The overall formatting and user-friendliness of the plan needs to be improved.

Adverse environmental contamination, public health, and amenity effects are likely to arise if wastewater is not adequately treated and disposed of. The Plan is an important tool for managing and preventing these adverse effects.

The RPDW currently includes Chapter 7 that has objectives, policies, methods and rules to manage unreticulated sewage systems. In addition, Appendix 5 contains specific design and

operational requirements for on-site wastewater treatment and disposal. The Rules outline the activity standards for new, existing and upgrading systems for non-reticulated waste disposal systems in un-reticulated areas and also makes provision for a consent to be applied for where on-site wastewater systems are desired in reticulated areas. The rules also regulate the discharge of septage to land. New systems that are under a certain size and meet certain design criteria are permitted activities. Larger or more unusual systems are catered for as Restricted Discretionary activities. Consequential amendments and general updating of Chapter 1 is required.

Plan Change 1 is concerned with the contents of Chapter 1, Chapter 7 and Appendix 5.

The substantive part of this report is section 6, which analyses the options for changing Chapter 1, Chapter 7 and Appendix 5, an analysis of the costs, benefits and alternatives to the status quo. A discussion on the risks of acting or not acting as a result of uncertainty or insufficient information is also addressed.