



File: 32/715

13 June 2000

Murray Kennedy
Wellington Regional Council
PO Box 11-646
WELLINGTON

Dear Murray

Public Access to the Wainuiomata and Orongorongo Water Supply Catchments

Thank-you for the opportunity to comment on this issue. Regional Public Health views this as an important issue in terms of the potential risk to the people that are served by the water supply.

Up until the early 1990's there has been an increased trend on the reliance of water treatment technologies to ensure the safety of drinking water. At the same time there was a trend to relax control in the area of management and protection of water supply catchments. Internationally, the turning point followed the (US) Milwaukee outbreak of cryptosporidium in 1993. This outbreak affected over 400,000 people and resulted in a number of deaths. Since then the trend has reversed and it is acknowledged that there is a considerable risk to rely solely on water treatment technology. There is now a growing recognition that effective drinking water risk management includes ensuring the quality of source water is as high as possible.

The USEPA has a proposed vision to ensure that in 25 years, nearly 100% of the community drinking water supplies will have source water protection measures in place as part of comprehensive water quality management approach to provide safe drinking water to the public. The third report on the Sydney water contamination event identified a seriously compromised catchment and as a consequence a Catchment Authority was set up to manage and protect Sydney's water supply catchments.

In New Zealand, the proposed Health (Water Supply) Regulations will introduce a risk management approach to drinking water supplies. Under this approach risk management procedures/plans will need to be developed for all aspects of a community drinking water supply from collection of raw water through to treatment, distribution and storage. Catchment management and raw water protection will be an integral part of these plans and will ensure that potential risks to public health are managed.

The natural bush forest of the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water supply catchment area is one of the most effective natural filters. Native forest is considered superior to

Regional Public Health
Hutt Valley Health Corporation Ltd
Private Bag 31-907
Hutt Valley New Zealand
Telephone 0-4-570 0044
Facsimile 0-4-570 9211

exotic forest in terms of water purification. The natural **ecology** of the native forest ensures that high quality source water is provided. In permitting access to the area, measures need to be taken to ensure that the native forest is not adversely **affected**.

Given the importance **of the native** forest, it **is** important that effective measures are **taken to control feral animals which degradate** the forest and are one of the main contributors to pathogens in the source water.

The area is physically more accessible than the **Hutt collection area** and closer to a urban population. The high level of recreational users in the neighbouring **Catchpool area and the desire people have to visit** shows the value people place on the outdoor environment. An increased number of **visitors** to the area not only will increase the pathogen risk but will also have an adverse input on the natural forest. A higher loading of **pathogens in the source water will undoubtedly have an affect downstream** at the treatment plant **and therefore increase the risk of contamination of the public water supply.**

The definition of a "protected catchment" is outlined in the Guidelines for Drinking Water Management in New Zealand: "A catchment which is has major points of access fenced and is controlled so that there is only strictly controlled human access and limited feral animals".

It is our preference that the **catchment** meets the **definition of "protected"**. It is also **our preference that the area is managed and controlled in such a way that there is not an adverse input in the native forest** as this will **affect the ova-all water quality from the catchment.**

In restricting access to the catchment, consideration must be given to:

- **Clear buffer zones of no entry around the catchment intake areas**
- **Restricting vehicle access to the road under supervision**
- **□ camping overnight**
- **No domestic animals**
- **Feral animal control programme**

Regional Public **health** are happy to provide further input or advice and look forward to working with the Wellington **Regional Council on this issue.**

Yours **sincerely**



Dr Stephen Palmer
Medical Officer of Health
REGIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH