

# Our water history – on tap

Water supply in the Wellington region 1867-2006



greater WELLINGTON REGIONAL COUNCIL | Water

Quality for life



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## Foreword

We first published an account of Wellington's water supply history, spanning more than a century, 21 years ago. Neil McDougall – then operations engineer for bulk water supply – oversaw that work. His zeal to place on record an accurate history deserves our recognition. *History of Water Supply in the Wellington Region 1872 – 1985* was the starting point for this publication.

As Neil McDougall was the catalyst for that earlier text, so John Morrison – Greater Wellington's recently retired engineering consultancy manager – has been for this expanded account. John has given more than 30 years of distinguished service in regional water supply, spanning a period that has seen many major improvements. We felt it timely to make good use of his enthusiasm for this subject, his first-hand knowledge and his eye for detail in defining this text.

From this distance in time, it is difficult to appreciate fully the extreme hardships our first engineers and surveyors must have encountered – and overcome – in bringing water to Wellington's citizens. However, it is apparent from this account that while much has changed in water

supply since 1867, vision, determination and no little engineering ability are constant themes in the development of the system we enjoy today.

In common with earlier custodians of Wellington's water, Greater Wellington faces the task of providing for a growing population. While the march of technology has made this task physically less demanding than it was for our forebears, the apparent primacy of the engineer and infrastructure over competing interests has waned, presenting new challenges.

The importance of a safe and reliable water supply cannot be overstated. It is timely to remember the achievements of our predecessors in planning for the long-term water needs of the region, which this publication so clearly illustrates. Our part is not only to appreciate what they achieved, but also to build on that legacy for future generations.



Ian Buchanan  
Chairman

Greater Wellington Regional Council  
September 2007

Since the earliest days of European settlement in the Port Nicholson area (Te Whanganui a Tara<sup>A</sup>), the development of water supplies has greatly influenced the subsequent growth and administration of Wellington city and the wider region.

The history of water supply for the Wellington region is to a large degree centred on the geography of the area. There have always been abundant water sources available to meet the demands of an ever-increasing population. The major challenge, however, has been one of overcoming the region's mountainous terrain and natural hazards at a cost its population would bear.

Peter Cooke researched and wrote this history, under contract to Greater Wellington Regional Council. He has developed and extended the *History of Water Supply in the Wellington Region 1872 – 1985*, written by Sally Morrison on behalf of Wellington Regional Council and published in 1986. Peter holds a BA with Honours and is a professional historian, based in Wellington, who specialises in engineering and defence histories.



View of Wainuiomata reservoir, showing the earth dam and spillway in the foreground (1920s).  
(S C Smith Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, NZ. Reference G-47765-1/2)

## Acknowledgements

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## Images

All images without reference details are held by Greater Wellington Regional Council.

## Units

All measurement units have been converted to metric, except where referred to in direct quotes. Metric conversions have been rounded. Imperial units were in use until metrication in 1974-1975.

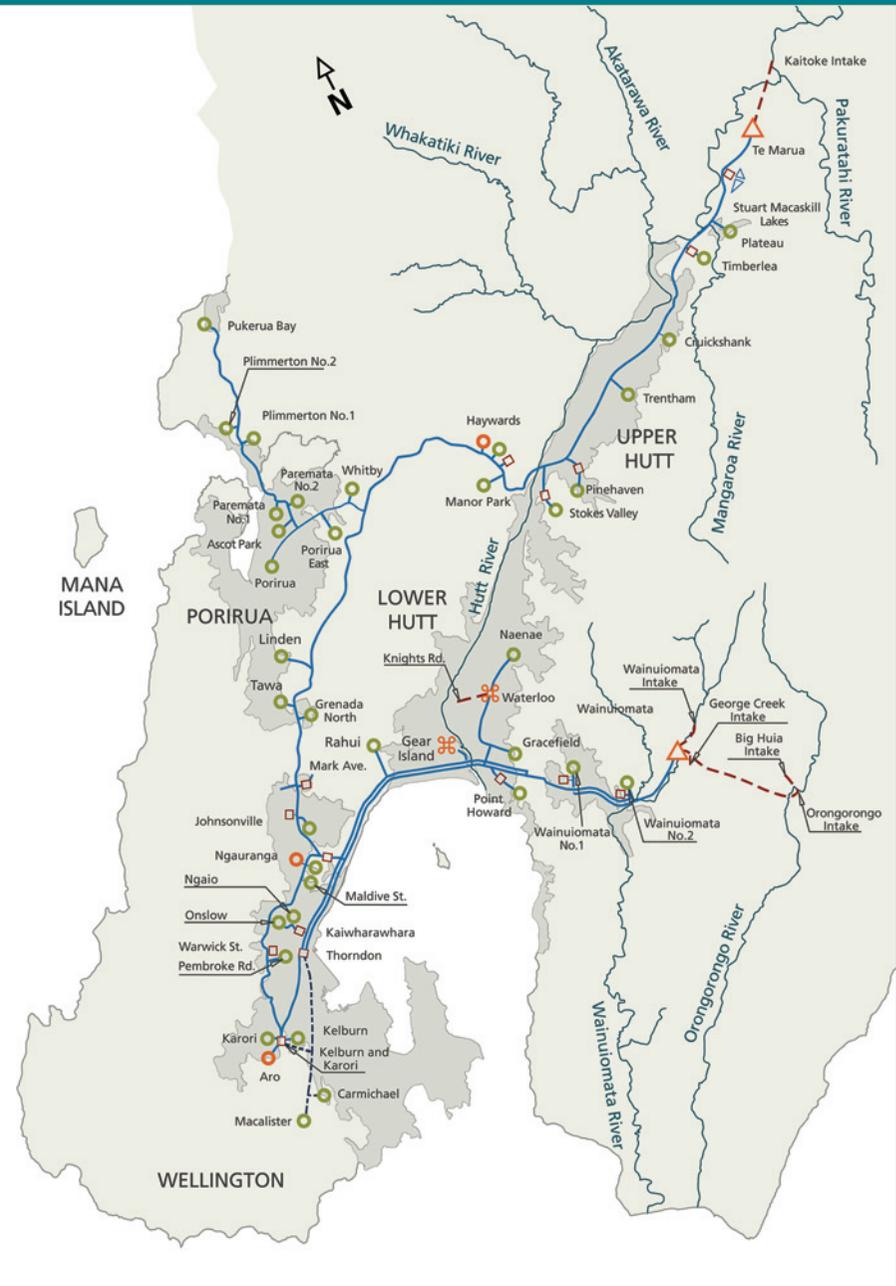
### Imperial to metric conversion rates (rounded)

One gallon (UK) equals 4.5 litres  
 One inch equals 25.4 millimetres  
 One foot equals 0.3 metres  
 One mile equals 1.6 kilometres  
 One acre equals 0.4 hectares  
 One ton equals 1.0 tonnes

## Map

### Key

-  Reservoir owned by GW
-  City reservoir supplied by GW
-  Treatment plant
-  Pumping station
-  Combined treatment plant & pumping station
-  Raw water main
-  Trunk water main
-  City water main



Greater Wellington Regional Council's wholesale water supply network, 2006.

Water, air, earth and energy – elements in Greater Wellington’s logo 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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