

The Wairau Aquifer: a precious resource under pressure

Marlborough's Wairau Aquifer, a vital regional water source, faces unprecedented challenges. Based on 52 years of monitoring at Conders well near Renwick, observations show water levels are at their lowest ever for this time of year.

While water abstraction for irrigation and town use does impact aquifer levels, it's not the primary cause of the decline, which is attributed to reduced recharge from the Wairau River.

Hydrologist Charlotte Tomlinson said it was a complex picture, and several factors had contributed.

"Wairau riverbed levels have fallen over the past 50 years relative to the aquifer, meaning water can't flow into the aquifer as easily," she said.

"This was caused by less gravel arriving from the hill catchment and/or local extraction, together with the side effects of essential flood protection works. Consented abstraction from the Wairau River also reduces summer flows with less water available for recharge than historically.

"Climate patterns also play a role, with Blenheim receiving only two thirds of its average rainfall since June 2023. The 2024/25 irrigation season started wet but quickly turned dry, with December 2024 being the warmest since 1930. These conditions mean that when it does rain, more water is absorbed by dry soils, resulting in less runoff to replenish rivers and aquifers.

"The consequences of declining aquifer levels are becoming visible. Spring Creek and other spring-fed streams on the Wairau Plain show reduced flows and this trend is likely to continue."

Senior Groundwater Scientist Peter Davidson said Council was actively seeking solutions.

"Council's science and engineering teams are working together on potential solutions to stabilise groundwater levels by increasing aquifer recharge rates," he said.

"One option being discussed is making the Ruakanakana Stream channel 'leakier' by removing silt, so more water diverted from the Wairau River infiltrates into the underlying aquifer.

"We are also looking to have more targeted gravel extraction and trial localised flood management approaches in the river reach where most Wairau River water is naturally lost to the aquifer."

While climate change isn't the primary factor in the aquifer's decline, projections are for more frequent and prolonged droughts. Adapting water management practices and aligning river floodway approaches now will be essential to mitigate these effects and ensure the long-term sustainability of the aquifer.

For further information, go to: www.marlborough.govt.nz/environment/groundwater/wairau-aquifer-project



Low Wairau River levels are contributing to record low aquifer levels

Creative Communities helps seniors capture vibrant past

A project funded by the Creative Communities Grants Scheme has helped capture and celebrate the vibrant histories of Marlborough's senior community.

Called 'A Moment in Time' the digital storytelling exhibition for seniors was facilitated by Presbyterian Support Upper South Island.

It featured at the Marlborough Art Society Gallery in Blenheim from 24 January to 7 February.

Digital Inclusion Coordinator Emily Ritchie said the exhibition showcased the creativity of seniors aged 65 plus.

It featured prints, photos, video, and audio recordings celebrating the vibrant histories of Marlborough's senior community. More than 80 people attended opening night, and 300 viewed the exhibition.

"The Creative Communities grant provided a platform for the digital inclusion project focusing on story telling using

and developing digital skills and competency," Emily said. "By using each participant's personal experiences, we were able to weave in digital skill development.

"Everyone has a story to tell and the exhibition provided an opportunity for people to creatively record and share their stories using a range of new platforms. For many this was the first opportunity to do so in such a public forum - we saw this as a valued way to enhance the mana of all participants."

Future digital inclusion events will focus on navigating online accounts, digital safety and staying connected through technology.

Council's Arts, Culture and Heritage Manager Nicola Neilson said the seniors' digital storytelling project was a great example of a success story thanks to the Creative Communities Scheme. "It shows how the fund can be used



Digital Inclusion Coordinator Emily Ritchie at the recent 'A Moment in Time' digital storytelling exhibition

creatively, and it would be great to see a wider range of applicants in future," she said.

Now's the time to get your application in for funding through the Marlborough District Council Creative Communities NZ Scheme. Applications close at 8am on 3 March. For more information, go to: www.creativenz.govt.nz/funding-and-support/all-opportunities/creative-communities-scheme or email nicola.neilson@marlborough.govt.nz

High Court decision on East Coast bylaw welcomed

Council has welcomed the High Court's judgment regarding the judicial review brought against Council by Te Rūnanga a Rangitāne o Wairau Trust.

The Trust challenged the lawfulness of the East Coast Beach Vehicle Bylaw 2023, which limits vehicle access to Marlborough's East Coast beaches in order to protect the

natural environment and its fauna and flora.

In her judgment, Justice Helen McQueen ruled that none of the challenges advanced by the Trust were established and their claim had failed overall.

Mayor Nadine Taylor said it was a significant decision for Council and the protection of

Marlborough's ecologically significant East Coast.

"Council can now move forward and promote the protection of this very special coastline through public education."

For more information, go to: www.marlborough.govt.nz/your-council/bylaws/east-coast-beach-vehicle-bylaw-2023

Welcoming group looking for members

The Marlborough Welcoming Communities Advisory Group is seeking expressions of interest from representatives of community organisations, iwi, newcomers and business groups who can support newcomers in Marlborough.

In July 2022, Marlborough District Council was accepted into Immigration New Zealand's Welcoming Communities Te Waharoa ki ngā Hapori programme, which aims to encourage and support councils to take a greater leadership role in welcoming newcomers.

A strong, vibrant community is one that enables all its members to participate in economic, civic and social life, Welcoming

Communities Coordinator Heather Barnes said.

"It's a community where everyone feels included and has a sense of belonging," she said.

"Communities which foster an environment where newcomers feel welcomed are more likely to enjoy better social outcomes and economic growth. Social cohesion enables stronger, more resilient communities to flourish."

For more information go to <https://www.marlborough.govt.nz/our-community/welcoming-communities-te-waharoa-ki-nga-hapori>

The advisory group guides the Welcoming Communities programme and ensures a

collaborative approach.

Advisory group members help develop and implement the Welcoming Plan by:

- Contributing to and championing the programme
- providing cultural guidance and expertise
- helping in benchmarking best practice
- attending meetings and activities

Expressions of interest should be sent to Heather Barnes, Welcoming Communities Coordinator at heather.barnes@marlborough.govt.nz by 17 March 2025. The term is until December 2025 with the group meeting every six weeks during the day.

Opening Hours

Mon to Fri: 8.30 am - 4.30 pm
Closed Wed 12.30 pm - 1.30 pm
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