



# 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](http://www.marlborough.govt.nz/environment/groundwater/wairau-aquifer-project)

## Marlborough Seniors' Expo next month

In three weeks, 60 stall holders will set up at the Marlborough Events Centre for the annual Marlborough Seniors' Expo.

Ranging from the Red Hat Society, Falls Prevention and Te Whatu Ora Health NZ to Marlborough Indoor Bowls and the Blenheim and Renwick Menz Shed, there really is something for everyone over 65, including music and refreshments.

The Seniors' Expo, on Tuesday 11 March, runs from 9am to 1pm and is free to attend. While Council delivers the expo, this year

Geoffrey T Sowman Funeral Directors and Summerset Blenheim have generously come on board as sponsors.

Council's Events and Community Partnerships Officer Natalie Lawler said while the expo was aimed at the over 65s, it was open to everyone. "It is designed for the whole community to help create awareness of services and activities available for older

people - and is a perfect opportunity to get vital information for whānau and family members," she said.

"Whether it's helping older folk to maintain an active lifestyle or meeting other people in a bid to reduce loneliness, the expo can help, even if it's just wanting to know where to find advice and support."

For more information, Ph: 03 520 7400.

## Waikawa Bay Foreshore Reserve Management Plan submissions close soon

Waikawa Bay Foreshore Reserve, on the eastern side of Waikawa Bay near Picton, is of great significance for Te Ātiawa and is a popular place for picnicking, swimming and launching boats.

Council is required to develop a reserve management plan under the Reserves Act which will enable a mix of uses and values in the area. The plan will also establish a policy to guide the day-to-day management of the Reserve.

Submissions should be made by 7 March 2025 and can be lodged via an online form at [links.marlborough.govt.nz/haveyoursay](http://links.marlborough.govt.nz/haveyoursay)

The draft management plan can be viewed online at: [www.marlborough.govt.nz/recreation/parks-and-open-spaces/parks-and-open-spaces-plans-and-reports/plans/waikawa-bay-foreshore-reserve-management-plan](http://www.marlborough.govt.nz/recreation/parks-and-open-spaces/parks-and-open-spaces-plans-and-reports/plans/waikawa-bay-foreshore-reserve-management-plan) or you can pick up a copy from Council's Customer Service Centres in Blenheim or Picton. You can also email [waikawabay.rmp@marlborough.govt.nz](mailto:waikawabay.rmp@marlborough.govt.nz) to lodge a submission.

## 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, 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](mailto: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.