

PHA emphasises importance of Resource Management Act to health

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The Public Health Association (PHA) has warned against changing the Resource Management Act (RMA) at the expense of people's health.

Speaking to the Local Government and Environment Select Committee, PHA National Executive Officer Dr Gay Keating, said while the PHA acknowledged the RMA needed to be simplified and streamlined, the decision-making process must still take public health concerns into account.

"Streamlining the Act by restricting the ability of the wider public to participate in the resource management process, risks taking away people's rights to have a say on things that could personally affect them, and their health."

She said it was impossible to overstate the significance of the RMA to human health.

"A sustainable and safe environment is crucial for the most basic of health needs – safe water and air, adequate and nutritious food, safe and adequate shelter now and into the future.

"At the time of the formation of the RMA, a range of long-standing protections for health (such as controls on discharges to air) were moved from the Health Act 1956 to the RMA. It is quite unacceptable to make any changes to the RMA that will reduce in any way the ability to protect the environment for human health.

"A further implication is the costs for individuals, and opportunity costs on District Health Boards that must divert resources from waiting-list surgery to treat an increase in preventable illnesses."

She said that PHA was particularly concerned about the impact changes to the Act could have on Māori.

"The Bill will make it more difficult for Maori to participate in, and challenge, post-consultative decisions, which is contrary to the principles of the treaty of Waitangi of partnership, participation and protection. These principles support the reduction of inequalities."

For further information:

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