



21 July 2022

Online Submission to NZ Parliament, Finance and Expenditure Committee

Submission on Water Services Entities Bill

Chris Webber, Senior Policy Advisor - Māori

Public Health Association of New Zealand

The Public Health Association of New Zealand (PHANZ) nationally represents its members across public, private and voluntary sectors. Our vision is ‘Good health for all - health equity in Aotearoa’ (‘Hauora mō te katoa – oranga mō te Ao’). We provide a forum for information and debate about public health action which aims to improve, promote and protect the health of the population through the organised efforts of society. We recognise Te Tiriti o Waitangi as Aotearoa New Zealand’s founding document and support it in policy and legislation.

PHANZ comprises members and expertise from across a broad spectrum relating to public health. We endorse, for example both science-based best-practice in providing for safe water and a precautionary approach such as where gaps in understanding or community concerns exist. As a Tiriti-aligned organisation with 50% Māori governance, we embrace kaupapa Māori and policy that aligns with Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations.

The writer has a background in public health, including water supply surveillance and development projects, as a Māori Health Protection Officer serving towns and rural communities, particularly Māori, in the Lakes/Eastern Bay of Plenty area around 2000-2005.

We wish to provide the following feedback on the Bill:

Tautoko - Our public health community is largely in support of the Bill and its intention for improved three waters outcomes. The new entity approach should help mitigate local authority under-performance due to ratepayer or other pressures. The economy of scale available and wider stakeholder inclusion should provide more options than was available with local authorities.

Caution - is required for various Māori water interests outside of town supplies which remain up in the air - a symptom of underinvestment lying outside of ‘the public health’ system. Despite Tiriti principles and recommendations for more tailored approaches with rural and mixed purpose water supplies - the ‘system’ is often not prepared to extend itself outside of the scope provided by the silo approach.

Whilst there is ability for national policy statements relating to te mana o te wai, the mauri and associated waiora principle should be considered equally important from a public health perspective - safe water for Māori contexts may include maintaining a relationship with water via a Maori public health workforce and surveillance system where kaitiakitanga is developed and expressed. Future infrastructure investments may not sustain without the people being part of the programme. Where a local water entity response sees this as outside of its scope, there should be facility for public health-related national policy statements and the ability to elevate concerns without barriers.

Stronger Tiriti o Waitangi Obligations - We recognise the gulf between the Māori view of Te Tiriti o Waitangi as signed by most people in Māori, having not ceded sovereignty in the way 'The Treaty of Waitangi' English text signed by few suggests. With Crown-derived principles variable over time, the principle of options for alternative pathways could be supported with a statement along the lines of 'nothing in this act shall affect Maori water rights under Te Tiriti o Waitangi'. If the new bureaucracies fail, Maori should have the right to test things further.

The co-governance with Māori should be celebrated and provides a pathway to shared development of the kaupapa to the extent it doesn't become a drain on Māori resource for little return. Something stronger in the 'Mana o te Wai' statements that 'must be' complied with is recommended where local efforts fail - such as a higher powered review if for example topical issues need to be escalated beyond initial 'response' that may be lacking.

We would be happy to share more about this if there is an opportunity to be heard in person.



Chris Webber
Senior Policy Advisor - Māori