

3. REPORT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT: “AGEING PIPES AND MURKY WATERS”

Officer responsible Water Services Manager	Author Allan Watson
Corporate Plan Output: No specific output	

The purpose of this report is to summarise for Councillors the key concerns raised in the Commissioner’s report, to indicate how Christchurch City stands in relation to these concerns and to recommend how the Council could respond by way of submissions. This report has also been referred to the Environment and Parks and Recreation Committees for their comments.

COMMISSIONER’S ROLE

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment is an officer of Parliament appointed under the Environment Act 1986. The Commissioner is responsible to Parliament through the Speaker and is independent of the Government. He has powers to investigate and report on any matter where the environment may be or has been adversely affected. Investigations can include the effectiveness of New Zealand environmental legislation, and planning and management by public agencies.

KEY FOCI OF THE REPORT

Discussion in the report is centred on the need for viewing water in the urban environment holistically and managing accordingly. This means integrating management across the ‘three waters’ water supply, wastewater and stormwater, to which a fourth could be added—natural water. It means also integrating management across the water **catchment**. In New Zealand this can only occur with close co-operation between territorial and regional councils and requires regional councils to take an interest in demand management, efficient use and re-use of water as part of their water resource planning, allocation and management.

The Commissioner emphasises the need for community and stakeholder education and involvement and places a special emphasis on active partnerships with Tangata Whenua.

This holistic view requires a shift away from economic considerations that focus on ownership and structure toward sustainable water cycle management that recognises all of the roles water plays in the urban environment. It seeks to close loops rather than repeat the linear pipeline based clean water in, contaminated water out solutions of today. To quote from his preface:

“There are major tensions between some communities and councils over current or proposed ownership and delivery models. Privatisation fears are limiting vision and constraining dialogue. Until these tensions and fears are resolved and there is some community consensus on needs and options, few water opportunities will be realised.”

The Commissioner's views closely mirror the City Council's, especially its current emphasis on sustainable city solutions. However considerable change is required to move the city to a truly sustainable condition. In the attached tables the changes implied by the thrust of the Commissioner's report are listed together with the City Council's current position, the opportunity for change or movement and finally a suggested submission comment.

- Recommendation:**
1. That submissions be forwarded to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment along the lines indicated in this report.
 2. That where the report indicates opportunities for a change in Council direction or policy these be referred to the appropriate Units for further study and report.
 3. That the need for local authorities to be given flexibility to develop solutions most appropriate for their environment to be stressed.

Note: In addition the following additional recommendations were also made by the Environment and Parks and Recreation Committees:

4. That officers be requested to investigate indicators that can be used to measure and monitor urban sustainability in Christchurch.
5. That the Council reaffirm its policy not to charge for domestic water, stormwater and wastewater by volume.