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Cc: Neil McInnes <Neil@watersafety.org.nz>
Subject: Submission to Waitomo District Council Long-term plan 2021-2031

Kia ora,

Please find attached our submission to your long-term plan.

We think water safety and drowning prevention requires a collaborative approach and look forward to working with Council in the future.

We would like to be heard (zoom meeting) in support of our submission.

Please contact Neil@watersafety.org.nz for an appropriate hearing time.

Thank you

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Submission to Waitomo District Council's Long-Term Plan 2021-31

Executive Summary

1. Preventable drowning fatalities costs the NZ economy around \$320 million per year. WSNZ wants to reduce the number of preventable drownings in the Waitomo District and believes this can be achieved by ensuring more drowning prevention activity is undertaken, and there is better coordination and direction of the water safety effort. Ultimately, WSNZ wants residents of the Waitomo District to be safe in, on and around water.
2. The focus of the first part of this submission is to draw to the Waitomo District Council's attention the need for drowning prevention and water safety and highlight the relevant legislation and strategy.
3. This submission then comments on some of the key issues relevant to Waitomo District Council's 10-year Consultation Document 'The Journey Ahead – Te Haerenga Kei Mua' including the:
 - relevance of water safety and drowning prevention to the Waitomo Districts community's well-being – social, economic, cultural, and environmental;
 - need to invest in the on-going maintenance of waste and storm water infrastructure to ensure water quality (swimmability and manoeuvrability) in the Waitomo District's aquatic environments;
 - need to adapt and mitigate the impacts of climate change on aquatic environments in the Waitomo District, and
 - possibility of working with the Waitomo District Council (and other stakeholders) to expand the awareness of Māori water safety issues, and potential ways to reduce the Māori drowning toll in the Waitomo District.
4. What WSNZ wants to achieve from this submission is:
 - to work with the Waitomo District Council to help broaden and deepen Council's approach for reducing drowning fatalities and improving water safety awareness – a broader and deeper approach that is focused on community well-being;
 - Waitomo District Council to consider water safety and drowning prevention a key component of maintaining the community well-being of its residents;
 - Waitomo District Council to continue to invest in water safety and drowning prevention activities;

- Waitomo District Council to continue to work with WSNZ (and the broader water safety sector) on water safety and drowning prevention issues, including expanding awareness of Māori water safety issues, and potential ways to reduce the Māori drowning toll in the Waitomo District.

Introduction

5. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Waitomo District Council's (Council's) Long-Term Plan Consultation Document 'The journey ahead - Te Hae renga Kei Mua 2021-31'.
6. Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) is the leadership agency for the water safety sector and wants to reduce the number of preventable drownings in the Waitomo District. We believe this can be achieved by ensuring more drowning prevention activity is undertaken, and better coordination and direction of the water safety effort by all responsible parties.
7. It is towards these objectives that the following submission is made. Further information about WSNZ can be found in *attachment 1*.

Context

8. The World Health Organisation characterises drowning as a serious and neglected public health threat and a highly preventable public health challenge.
9. Drowning is a growing public health and well-being problem with drowning being the number one cause of recreational death and the third highest cause of accidental death (behind road accidents and falls) in New Zealand. ¹ From 2010 to 2019 there were 965 preventable drowning fatalities in New Zealand and injuries are increasing sharply; in 2018 alone, there were over 36,000 claims for water related injuries (an average of around 100 a day).²
10. It has been estimated that preventable drowning costs the NZ economy around \$320 million per year. (Based on an average of 80 fatalities per year at \$4.0 million per fatality). In 2016 the economic cost of water related hospitalisations was \$83.6 million. In addition, a drowning incident may require a response from several agencies including: Police, NZ Search and Rescue responders or ambulance and medical service. Intervening early, or preventing the need to respond to a drowning, will provide cost savings to the New Zealand economy.
11. In 2019 the Government-appointed Water Safety Working Group concluded the responsibility for water safety, drowning prevention and frontline rescue services is shared between central and local government, the community, and water safety NGOs. In essence, their message was that central government has a partial responsibility for water safety and further effort is required to ensure all responsible parties are actively involved in the prevention of drowning.
12. In response, through Budget 2020 the Government provided multi-year funding for frontline rescue services, and to grow WSNZ's capability to lead and support the wider water safety sector. The Government is now looking to other parties responsible for water safety, such as local government, to see what role they can play. To this end WSNZ recently briefed the Minister of Local Government on the state of the water safety sector, Wai Ora Aotearoa (our new Water Safety Sector Strategy 2025), and our intentions to work with local government to improve water safety and prevent drownings.

Wai Ora Aotearoa – Water Safety Sector Strategy 2025

13. WSNZ recently launched [Wai Ora Aotearoa](#) which is the result of a year's collaborative work by water safety sector leaders. The strategy represents a consensual view of the best way forward for drowning prevention in New Zealand. Moreover, the strategy reflects the need for a step

¹ WSNZ Drowning Report, 2018.

² ACC, 2020

change in the way the sector operates. This change will enable the sector to meet the major challenges it is facing over the next few years.

14. Key actions relevant to local government for the sector to implement over the term of the strategy include:

Develop a water safety sector local government engagement strategy that focuses on relationship building and engaging with local government planning.

Complete the Implementation of the Regional Strategy pilots and develop a Freshwater Strategy for the sector.

15. Both actions are relevant to WSNZ's relationship with the Waitomo District and are reflected in the content of this submission.

Community well-being

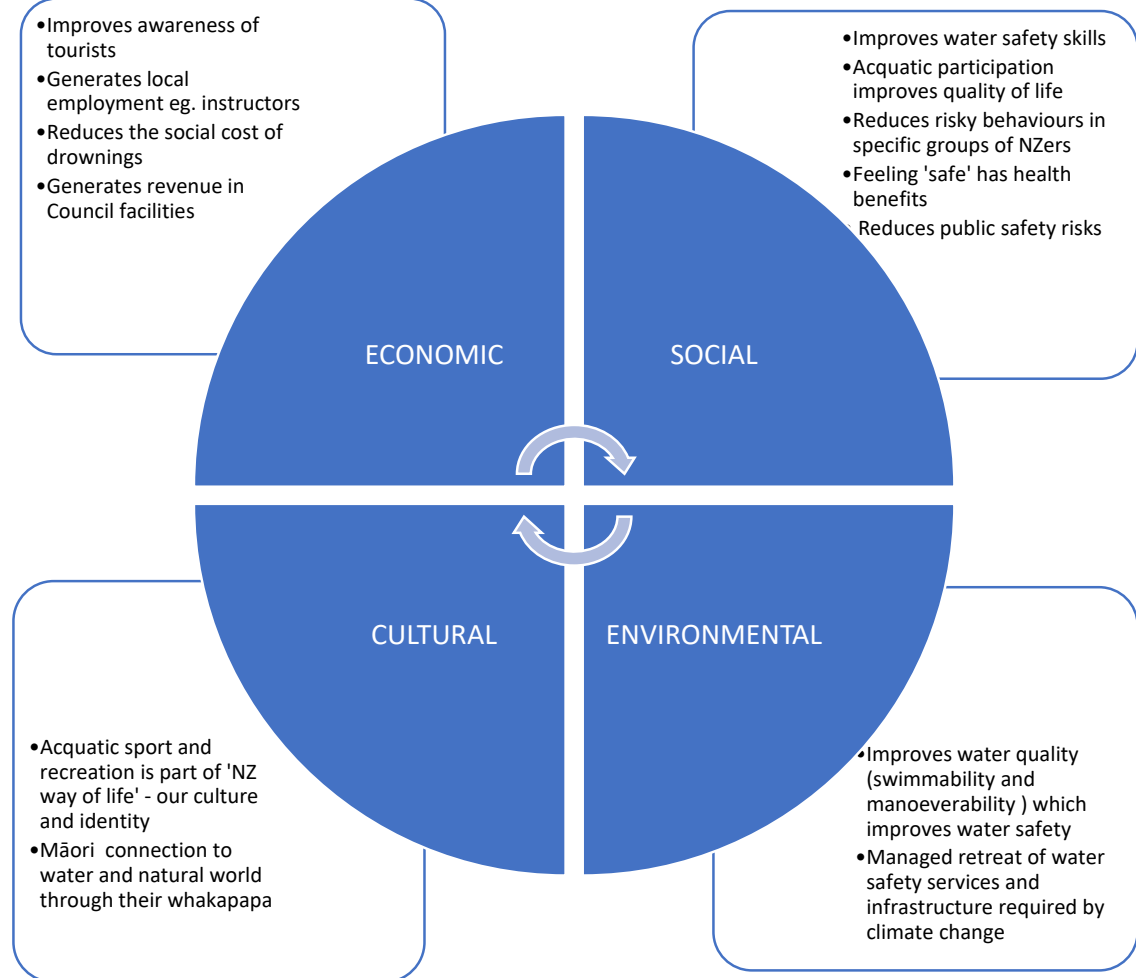
16. The Local Government (Community Well-being) Amendment Act 2019 restored the promotion of social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being to the purpose of local government.
17. The amendments to the Act are intended to enable local authorities, and ensure local authorities are responsible for, playing a broad role in promoting and improving the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of their communities-the four aspects of well-being.³
18. The Minister for local Government, Nanaia Mahuta, stated that this emphasis on well-being will engage councils and communities in an intergenerational approach to improving quality of life outcomes in towns and cities.⁴
19. As shown in figure 1 below, water safety and drowning prevention connects with all four components of community well-being – economic, social, cultural and environment.
20. A fuller discussion of the connections between well-being and water safety, that is consistent with the SOLGM Community Well-being indicator framework, is included in *attachment 2*.
21. Local authorities therefore have a mandate under the Local Government Act's community well-being umbrella to provide a wide range of initiatives to support water safety and drowning prevention– whether that be in relation to swimming pools, beaches, rivers, lakes, and/or the coast.
22. What this means is to fully contribute to the well-being of their community, local authorities must place greater importance on, and dedicate resources to, a wider range of initiatives relating to water safety and drowning prevention in all aquatic environments (pools, beaches, rivers, lakes, and the sea).
23. Local government needs to broaden its approach of providing community facilities and infrastructure, such as swimming pools, to a focus on community well-being. For example, focusing on providing and supporting water safety services to help reduce the social cost of drowning and allow New Zealanders to develop skills to feel safe in, on, and around the water. Other examples include a focus on managing the retreat of water safety services and infrastructure from the foreshore (required by climate change), and reducing public safety risks, particularly for high-risk groups and environments (under-fives; underwater activities; males aged 15-35 Years; Asians and male boaties aged 50+).

³ SOLGM, 2020

⁴ Mahuta, 2018

24. WSNZ wants to work with the Waitomo District Council (and its partners and stakeholders) to help broaden their approach and reduce drowning fatalities and improve water safety awareness in the Waitomo District.

Figure 1: Water safety and community well-being



Key issues and opportunities WSNZ would like the Waitomo District Council to address in their 2021-2031 Long-Term Plan

25. Reducing preventable drownings, and improving water safety, will improve the well-being of Waitomo District’s residents. It is therefore consistent with Council’s community outcome – ‘a district for people’.

26. WSNZ wants Council to consider the following points in the development of its long-term plan.

Water safety and drowning prevention - ensuring your communities well-being

27. The Waitomo District’s aquatic environment is diverse with pools, rivers and streams, lakes, and coastline for residents and visitors to enjoy for sport and recreation purposes. This means Council’s water safety risk profile is also variable as users carry out activities with different risk profiles (such as swimming, kayaking, boating, fishing, diving, or surfing).

28. To ensure your communities well-being (which as shown in figure 1 includes the concept of water safety and drowning prevention) a broader and deeper approach to water safety and drowning prevention is required.

29. A broader approach is one beyond the provision of aquatic facilities such as swimming pools and the enforcement of swimming pool bylaws. Council now needs to address water safety and drowning prevention in freshwater (pools, lakes, rivers, and streams), coastal waters (beaches, inlets, harbours) and in, on and around vessels (boats, yachts, surf skis, kayaks etc). A deeper approach involves advocating and providing for more people, of many cultures, to take advantage of Council's water safety and drowning prevention activities in the above aquatic environments. This broader and deeper approach needs to reflect the needs of your local community and provide local solutions for local needs.
30. In addition to a broader and deeper approach, WSNZ wants Council's approach to compliment the investment we make into water safety sector partner organisations (like Surf Life Saving NZ), or the funding we give to other providers through our contestable funding process.
31. WSNZ supports Council's existing investment in water safety and drowning prevention and wants to see Council's continued investment in these, and other types of water safety and drowning prevention activities. We want Council to continue to work with WSNZ (and the broader water safety sector) on the broader and deeper approach needed to ensure the community well-being of the Waitomo District's residents.

Water safety and drowning prevention, a correlation of water quality

32. Water quality, whether it be in pools, beaches, rivers, lakes, or the sea has a direct relationship with recreation and sport activities. This is because contaminated water, or water filled with weed or floating objects impacts on both the 'swimmability' and 'manoeuvrability' of people and vessels in various aquatic environments.
33. Poor water quality may impact on water safety risks and cause drownings.
34. To maintain water quality Council must advocate for (in partnership with others) and carry out a number of activities, including maintaining and improving waste and storm water infrastructure.
35. WSNZ wants to see Council's continued investment in these types of activities as this investment is essential to help maintain the quality of water for recreation and sport users.

Adapting and mitigating climate change

36. Climate change may result in rising temperatures and sea levels, changes in wind patterns, storm tracks, and droughts and the frequent heavy rainfall events. These changes may require:
 - an increasing demand on water safety services (rescues, medical support) from higher temperatures;
 - a requirement to replace, move or protect the water safety sector's physical assets located on the coastline (because of sea level rise);
 - a need for better monitoring of river conditions to identify changes in water safety risks attributable to climate change-related phenomenon; and
 - an increasing requirement for the effective communication of the risks to the public from the changing conditions.
37. Climate change impacts on water safety and drowning prevention and WSNZ believes preparing for climate change requires a collaborative effort. We (and the water safety sector) would like to be kept informed about (and participate as appropriate) in Council's relevant climate change initiatives.

Māori Water Safety strategy

38. Drowning rates for Māori are high and reducing and preventing Māori drownings is one of WSNZ's strategic priorities.

39. Working with a group of key Māori stakeholders, we recently refreshed our [Kia-Maanu-Kia-Ora-Stay Afloat Stay Alive](#) strategy. Wai Ora Aotearoa, WSNZ's new sector strategy discussed above, also includes a focus on improving the connection to water for Māori and supports greater use of a Kaupapa Māori approach to water safety for tangata whenua.
40. WSNZ wants to work with Council, and your other stakeholders to expand the awareness of Māori water safety issues and identify potential ways to reduce the Māori drowning toll in the Waitomo District.

Long-term plan 2021-2031 consultation process

41. WSNZ does want to be heard at Council's long-term planning hearing. Please contact neil@watersafety.org.nz

Paul Verić



Interim Chief Executive
Water Safety New Zealand

Attachment 1: About Water Safety New Zealand

Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) is the water safety sector leadership organisation for Aotearoa, New Zealand. We work with water safety sector organisations, individuals, and the public to reduce the incidence of drowning and injury. Our work contributes to the reduction in drownings by ensuring evidence-based water safety policies, investment funding, initiatives and aquatic education are delivered throughout the country.

WSNZ is an incorporated society with charitable status that was established in 1949. Our membership structure comprises 37 general members, 3 core members (Surf Life Saving New Zealand, Coastguard New Zealand, and Swimming New Zealand), and a partially elected board. The WSNZ Board includes delegates from each of our core members.

The WSNZ annual operating budget is funded by Sport New Zealand and ACC. We provide both agencies with accountability reports half-yearly. Thus, while we are an incorporated society, Sport New Zealand is the 'government home' for water safety policy and our reporting agency. Sport New Zealand oversees our governance appointments.

The New Zealand Lotteries Grants Board, via Sport New Zealand, provides WSNZ with funds to distribute to water safety providers through our annual funding round. We also provide funds received from charitable trusts and foundations, commercial sponsorship, and other funding partnerships.

In 2020/21 we distributed \$2.5 million across New Zealand to water safety providers. These providers included: drowning prevention and rescue NGOs, professional and national sport and recreation organisations, child and youth support organisations, Māori organisations, swim schools, local authorities, and regional sports trusts.

This partnership funding is focused on two main areas - water survival skills training and water safety awareness raising and behaviour change. Water Skills for Life (WSFL) is WSNZ's flagship water survival skills program and it reaches over 200,000 primary school children each year. A range of water safety behaviour change initiatives are funded by WSNZ with emphasis placed on reaching demographic groups with high drowning risk (e.g. males aged 15-34).

Attachment 2: Community well-being and water safety and drowning prevention

WSNZ community well-being statement

WSNZ has, at the heart of its operations, a commitment to enabling the community well-being of all New Zealanders participating in aquatic sport and recreation or living near bodies of water. Our leadership, advocacy, policies, initiatives, and funding of programmes work to reduce the incidence of preventable drowning and injury in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Our work strives to contribute to a thriving society for individuals, families, and communities. A society where local communities inter-connecting economic, social, cultural, and environmental well-being needs are all met.

The Four Well-beings in the Local Government Act

Most definitions of well-being focus on the quality of life, a healthy human condition as well as happiness and prosperity. Social science research suggests that well integrated individuals with shared community goals have better health and well-being outcomes. Research also indicates the four domains of well-being are all interconnected, and all connect in some way with water safety.



The following outlines how water safety and drowning prevention infrastructure, services and activities provide local government with several opportunities to improve the community well-being of their community.

Cultural Well-being and Water Safety

Cultural well-being is defined by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage as:

'The vitality that communities and individuals enjoy through:

- *Participation in recreation, creative and cultural activities; and*
- *The freedom to retain, interpret and express their arts, history, heritage, and traditions⁵.*

Water is at the heart of our culture and identity as New Zealanders. New Zealanders have important connections to water through their history, experiences and practices that are important to them. Whether it is a connection to places that people swim, or swam as children, regular camping spots or mountain streams that people have encountered on tramps or hikes, many people have particular bodies of water that are important to them. These bodies of water can be important to a person's sense of identity, and from a Māori perspective, people are connected to water and to the natural world through their whakapapa. Aquatic recreation is a large part of the kiwi culture with many

⁵ Te Manatu Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage (date unknown)

*families and individuals enjoying spending time at their local beach, river, or lake and being able to safely enjoy taking part in aquatic activities such as, swimming, fishing, jet skiing, or boating is hugely important to New Zealanders.*⁶

Water safety knowledge and skills, gained from WSNZ's aquatic education programs, promote New Zealanders cultural well-being by allowing individuals to participate in aquatic recreation in a safe, enjoyable, and culturally sensitive way. This sense of feeling 'safe' is also relevant to New Zealanders social well-being in that it benefits our physical and mental health.

Environmental Well-being and Water safety

*Environmental well-being promotes interactions with nature; for New Zealanders to be able to enjoy and maintain their connections with water throughout New Zealand it is important that the quality of the water is maintained. The benefits of improving water quality of lakes and rivers throughout New Zealand benefit many activities from swimming to kayaking to mahinga kai. Environmental wellness can inspire individuals to live a lifestyle that is respectful of their surroundings and this in turn results in them assisting in maintaining and caring for waterway.*⁷

*Protection of mauri (life force or essence) is a principal issue for freshwater management, Māori throughout New Zealand are increasingly concerned with the integrity of waterways. A healthy body of water that has healthy mauri sustains healthy eco systems and supports a range of cultural environmental activities (mahinga kai or waka ama for example) and reinforces the cultural identity of the people.*⁸

Aquatic water, free from hazards such as bacteria, weeds, and floating objects, benefits New Zealanders well-being as it allows them to safely swim, dive, boat and gather food. Environmental well-being and water safety are interrelated, one does not exist in isolation of the other. Environmental well-being also re-enforces New Zealanders cultural identity.

Economic Well-being and Water Safety

Over the past ten years preventable drownings and injuries have incurred social and economic costs of over \$5 Billion. However, this financial figure does not illustrate the real cost in pain and suffering and disruption to families and work.

*Social costs of fatal preventable drownings and water related injuries can be difficult to isolate and measure. The individual victim is usually the person most directly affected; however, accidents can potentially impact on family members, coworkers, medical care providers and a host of other individuals. Socio demographic differences potentially modify the type and extent of a fatal preventable drowning or injury's social costs. An individual's age, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, education, and their socioeconomic status all can influence the responses of the individual as well as others in their social circle. Multifarious impacts are possible and may include vocational, psychological, behavioral, social, economic, and functional effects. These costs and their impacts are varied, wide reaching and include both direct and indirect costs, costs at the micro and macro levels.*⁹

Water safety and drowning prevention services, activities and infrastructure reduce the social cost of drowning. Preventable drownings save the economy costs in terms of reduced hospitalisations, on-going medical attention, and the attendance of police, ambulance etc. at events. Preventable

⁶ Ministry for the Environment, Manatu Mo Te Taiao, 2020

⁷ U C Davis, 2020

⁸ Tipa and Tierney, 2006

⁹ Dembe, 2001

drownings also reduce family and whanau economic, social, and cultural costs resulting from loss of household income, a primary care giver, and that person's broader contribution to their community. Reduced social costs benefit the economic well-being of local communities.

WSNZ's awareness and behavioral change programs also provide economic well-being benefits to international visitors, who unaware of the risks in some of our popular aquatic environments, are often included in New Zealand's drowning statistics.

Water safety and drowning prevention services, activities and infrastructure also benefit the economic well-being of local communities. These benefits can be seen in the revenue generated through fees and local employment (which has an economic multiplier effect).

Social Well-being and Water Safety

*Social connections play an important role across many aspects of people's lives, from employment opportunities and advice on important life decisions, to receiving support during hard times and having someone to enjoy life and relax with. There is a growing body of evidence supporting the notion that healthy social networks are important for health and well-being.*¹⁰

*Aquatic activities are often undertaken as social activities and allow for social connections to be formed and maintained. Aquatic recreation is both a means to an end (contributes to health and fitness) and an end in itself (enjoyment and satisfaction). Recreation is a useful tool for social connection and social well-being.*¹¹

WSNZ's awareness and behavioral change programs allow individuals (and their families) to be able to safely partake in aquatic recreation activities. These programs equip them with water safety skills to ensure they can keep themselves and their families safe in, on, and around the water. Community education, and the use of safety/warning signage, also promotes awareness of the risks and dangers inherent at popular aquatic recreation spots.

Social well-being can also be enabled through the concept of safe communities. Safe communities are a World Health Organisation (WHO) concept that recognises safety as a universal concern and a responsibility for all. A safe community is a livable community where people can go about their activities in an environment that is without fear, risk of harm, or injury. Twenty-two communities in New Zealand are accredited as Safe Communities by the Safe Communities Foundation New Zealand (SCFNZ). A further five are currently working towards accreditation which is based on the WHO endorsed Safe Communities model. The safe community's website states:

*Community safety is not only about reducing and preventing injury and violence. It is about well-being, building strong, cohesive, vibrant, participatory communities. Homes, the roads, public spaces and the workplace are safe for everyone to enjoy. This is exactly what the Safe Communities Foundation New Zealand (SCFNZ) does for community development, through leadership and collaboration, to create safer communities to work, play and live. The majority of community-based injuries and accidents are preventable and predictable – it is this premise that forms the basis for everyone's safety. Each community or local area is different - each safety approach meets the unique needs of the people, their goals, and the community values, working together for better outcomes. SCFNZ specifically supports communities to adopt the Safe Community model to increase well-being and become effective advocates and enablers of injury and violence prevention*¹².

¹⁰ Frieling, Krassoi, & Cording, 2018

¹¹ Recreation Aotearoa, 2019

¹² Safe Communities Foundation NZ, 2020

This approach to community safety encourages greater co-operation and collaboration between non-government organisations, the business sector, and local and central government agencies. It increases community well-being by creating an infrastructure in local communities to increase action by building local partnerships and collaborative relationships. Currently, some Councils in New Zealand incorporate water safety and injury prevention into ensuring the well-being of the community. WSNZ encourages all councils to consider the benefits to the well-being of their communities of becoming an accredited safe community. WSNZ also encourages all existing accredited communities to place greater emphasis on water safety in their regions.

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