



**Waikato
Waters**

Proposed Significance and Engagement Policy

October 2026

Purpose

As a council-controlled water services organisation, we put forward proposals and make decisions that can affect public health, environmental outcomes and community wellbeing. The purpose of this policy is to ensure we engage externally on our proposals and decisions in a manner that is proportionate to their significance.

Not every proposal or decision requires public consultation. However, where a proposal or decision may have material consequences, we will engage in a way that reflects the significance of that proposal or decision.

We recognise that effective engagement leads to better decision-making. Customers, communities, iwi, hapū, other Māori organisations and stakeholders often have valuable insights into local conditions, service needs, and future aspirations. Meaningful engagement helps us to understand these perspectives and, where appropriate, incorporate them into our decision-making.

Through this process, engagement helps to build trust, improve understanding, and strengthen relationships with the communities we serve.

This policy has been developed in accordance with the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025 (the Act) and sets out:

- our general approach to determining the significance of proposals and decisions
- our criteria and procedures for determining the significance of proposals and decisions
- our general approach to engaging communities, including iwi, hapū, and other Māori organisations within our service area, and when engagement will be undertaken by our shareholders
- how we will respond to community preferences regarding engagement on decisions, including the forms of engagement that may be preferred.

The purpose of the policy, as set out in s.35(3) of the Act, is to:

- enable us, along with our customers, communities, iwi, hapū, other Māori organisations and stakeholders, to identify the degree of significance attached to issues, proposals, water services infrastructure, decisions and activities
- enable us to develop a flexible and locally appropriate approach to engagement which recognises and accommodates the preferences and expectations of our customers, communities, iwi, hapū, other Māori organisations and stakeholders
- provide clarity about how, when and by whom people can expect to be engaged on decisions
- inform us at the start of the decision-making process about the extent of engagement required, who will be involved, and the method of engagement.

Scope

This policy applies to proposals and decisions where there is or likely to be an impact on the community, environment or infrastructure within our area of operation.

There are circumstances where engagement is not required or is not practical. For example, where proposals or decisions are:

- routine or operational
- urgent or required in an emergency
- required to meet legal obligations necessary to protect health, safety or infrastructure
- commercially sensitive
- situations where we already have a clear understanding of community views from recent engagement on the same issue.

In these circumstances, we will act in a manner consistent with our statutory obligations, good governance practices and commercial responsibilities.

Policy statement

We will assess the significance of our proposals and decisions; and we will undertake timely engagement proportionate to their significance. We will ensure that the views of affected parties are understood, considered and reported on.

Principles

We recognise that engagement is broader than consultation.

Consultation is a formal process used to seek feedback on a specific proposal. Engagement includes a wider range of activities that help build understanding, share information and maintain relationships with communities and stakeholders.

We will apply the following engagement principles:

- **early:** where practicable, before key decisions have been finalised
- **genuine:** where there is a real opportunity for feedback to influence outcomes
- **transparent:** with clear information about the decision, its purpose and any constraints
- **inclusive:** involving those most affected by a proposal
- **proportionate:** matched to the significance of the matter.

Policy requirements

General approach to assessing significance

Significance is a measure of the importance of a proposal or decision and its likely impact on customers, communities, iwi, hapū, other Māori organisations, stakeholders and Waikato Waters.

Assessing significance helps determine the level of analysis, governance oversight and community engagement that is appropriate for a particular matter.

Significance is not determined solely by financial value. A proposal or decision may be significant because of its effect on a community, the environment or infrastructure.

Similarly, the significance of a proposal or decision may vary between communities. A matter that appears relatively minor from a regional perspective may be of considerable importance to a particular town, neighbourhood, catchment, iwi or customer group. We will consider both regional and local impacts when assessing significance.

Criteria for assessing significance

Proposals and decisions will be assessed against each of the criteria below and rated as low, medium, or high significance. Where the overall significance is assessed as medium or high, a written assessment will be prepared outlining the basis for the rating and the proposed engagement approach.

- **Affects strategic assets** including infrastructure critical to the delivery of safe, reliable and sustainable water services.
- **Affects consumers and communities** including impacts on service delivery, customer experience, network reliability, growth capacity or community wellbeing.
- **Affects levels of service** including material increases, reductions or changes to service performance.
- **Has financial consequences** including significant expenditure, borrowing requirements, long-term contractual obligations or impacts on consumer charges.
- **Affects environmental outcomes** including the health of waterways, ecosystems and receiving environments.
- **Affects Māori interests** including iwi and hapū interests, settlements, agreements and obligations.
- **Creates risks** including risks to public health, service continuity, environmental outcomes or organisational performance.
- **Generates public interest** including matters likely to attract sustained public attention or concern.
- **Affects strategic direction** including decisions that materially influence our long-term ability to deliver on our obligations and strategic objectives.
- **Is difficult to reverse** if circumstances change in the future.

What is a significant proposal or decision?

While each proposal or decision must be considered on its own merits, significant proposals or decisions are likely to include:

- major changes to levels of service
- significant infrastructure investments
- decisions relating to strategic water assets
- long-term contractual commitments of strategic importance
- major changes to customer charging approaches
- decisions with substantial environmental consequences
- decisions that materially affect Māori interests or community outcomes.

There is no single financial threshold that automatically determines significance. We must consider the overall consequences of a proposal or decision and the degree to which people may reasonably expect an opportunity to be informed about, contribute to, or influence that decision.

SPECTRUM OF SIGNIFICANCE

Low significance

People will be informed of decisions.

Likely to include decisions which:

- have limited financial impacts
- result in minimal change to levels of service
- are consistent with existing policies, plans or standards
- are of little public interest.

Medium significance

People can expect opportunities to provide feedback before decisions are made. Their input may help to shape the proposal.

Likely to include decisions which:

- have moderate financial impacts
- result in noticeable but not substantial changes to levels of service
- may deviate from existing policies or plans in ways that are material but not substantial
- are expected to be of interest to specific communities or stakeholder groups.

High significance

People will have the opportunity to participate in formal consultation.

Likely to include decisions which:

- have significant financial impacts
- result in major changes to levels of service or infrastructure
- represent a substantial departure from existing policies, plans or standards
- are of significant public interest
- may have long-term impacts on communities, the environment or taonga.

Additional statutory considerations

Contracts

The Act places obligations on us in respect of significant contracts. When determining whether a proposed contract is significant, we will consider:

- the significance criteria in this policy
- whether the proposed contract is of high value relative to our revenue
- whether the contract would create a public-private partnership
- the impact on our ability to meet statutory obligations.

A contract will not ordinarily be considered significant where the proposal or project to which the contract relates has already been approved through the Water Services Strategy.

Where a contract is determined to be significant, we will undertake consultation in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

Joint water service provider arrangements

We must assess whether a proposed joint water service provider arrangement is significant using the criteria in this policy.

Where such an arrangement is determined to be significant, consultation will be undertaken in accordance with the Act.

Strategic water services assets

We will comply with all statutory requirements concerning strategic water services assets, including any requirements to consult where ownership or control of a strategic asset may be transferred, received or otherwise materially affected.

Broadly, under the Act, strategic water services assets are defined as assets that are necessary for us to:

- meet our regulatory requirements, or
- maintain our capacity to achieve the outcomes set out in the Water Services Strategy.

We consider water supply networks and wastewater networks to be strategic water services assets.

In general, each network constitutes the strategic asset, rather than the individual components within it. However, a component within a network may constitute a strategic asset if it is integral to the operation of the network. For example, a water treatment plant that supplies an entire network.

Changes to levels of service

When considering a proposed change to levels of service, we will assess the significance using the criteria in this policy.

Approach to engaging with communities

We are committed to engaging with our customers, communities, iwi, hapū, other Māori organisations and stakeholders in ways that are practical, accessible and proportionate to the significance of the matter being considered.

We recognise that different communities may have different interests, expectations and preferences for engagement. The methods we use will depend on the significance of the proposal or decision, who may be affected, and the opportunities available for community input to influence the decision.

Engagement may be undertaken directly by us, through our shareholding councils, or through a coordinated approach where this is considered the most effective way to engage affected communities.

The engagement approach adopted in a particular situation will depend on the circumstances. We may choose to undertake a higher level of engagement where this is considered beneficial or appropriate.

Where engagement is undertaken, we will communicate:

- the purpose of the engagement
- what aspects of the proposal are open to influence
- any legislative, regulatory, financial or operational constraints
- how feedback will be considered
- the next steps in the decision-making process.

Approach to engaging with iwi, hapū and other Māori organisations

We recognise iwi and hapū as strategic partners in water services and commit to engaging early where decisions may affect their taonga, interests, settlements, agreements (for example, joint management agreements) and obligations (for example Te Ture Whaimana).

We will consider cultural impacts in decision-making and document how the views of iwi, hapū and other Māori organisations have been considered.

Approach to engaging with our shareholders

We will maintain constructive relationships with our six shareholding councils.

Shareholders play an important governance role and have responsibilities under Act in relation to certain significant decisions.

We will:

- keep shareholders informed of significant issues and emerging risks
- engage early on matters likely to require shareholder approval
- support alignment between the Water Services Strategy and shareholder expectations
- work collaboratively with shareholders where community engagement responsibilities overlap.

Nothing in this policy limits the statutory responsibilities of either Waikato Waters or our shareholders.

Reporting back

Where engagement is undertaken, we will, where appropriate:

- communicate the outcome of the engagement process
- summarise key themes raised
- explain how feedback was considered
- communicate the final decision and the reasons for that decision.

Roles and responsibilities

Role

Tier 2

People Leaders

All Staff

Governance

Responsibility

Ensures policy requirements are implemented

Ensure staff compliance

Follow policy

Maintains register and publication

Compliance

As non-compliance with this policy may result in legal consequences for Waikato Waters, this policy must be adhered to.

Definitions

Significance

The degree of importance of a proposal or decision based on its impact.

Consultation

A process generally required by statute or triggered by the Significance and Engagement Policy framework. This process is generally timebound, transactional, and asks for feedback on a proposal to enable citizen participation. This process aids and informs decision-making.

Engagement

Communication to inform or seek input from stakeholders.

Legislation and related documents

Legislation

- Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025

Documents

- Attachment 1: Process to apply the Significance and Engagement Policy

Policy review

This policy will be reviewed every three years or sooner following significant organisational change.

Attachment 1:

Process to apply the Significance and Engagement Policy

Step 1: Determine significance

Low significance proposal or decision by Waikato Waters

Medium significance proposal or decision by Waikato Waters

High significance proposal or decision by Waikato Waters

Step 2: Determine engagement approach

Low or no levels of engagement

Medium levels of engagement

High levels of engagement

Examples:

- Any contract to implement any part of the Water Services Strategy
- Submissions to external processes
- Land acquisitions
- Renewals and maintenance programmes
- Development agreements

Examples:

- Water Service Bylaws
- External policies, such as the Waiver Policy

Examples:

- Water Services Strategy

Channels we may use:

- Website
- Social media
- Public signage
- Letters/emails
- Newsletters/flyers

Channels we may use:

In addition to channels used for low significance decisions, we may also use:

- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Hui
- Targeted stakeholder engagement

Channels we may use:

In addition to channels used for low and medium significance decisions, we may also use:

- Online or in-person events

