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Full Name
Jo Wrigley

Organisation
Waikato Environment Centre

Phone
[redacted]

Email
[redacted]

Address

[redacted]

I wish to speak to Council about my submission
No

Should we move the Awakino Transfer Station to Mōkau?

My feedback on the Awakino Transfer Station

Do you have any feedback on the Draft Annual Plan 2026-27?
Yes

My feedback on the Draft Annual Plan 2026-27
The proposed closure of the Waitomo landfill and transition to transporting waste out of the district is presented as the most cost-effective option (p.4, p.13). However, this approach shifts environmental impacts beyond the rohe rather than reducing them. It does not fully consider effects on taiao, including emissions, cumulative impacts, and the mauri of receiving environments.
The proposal to move the transfer station to Mōkau improves access and may reduce illegal dumping (p.8–9), but the design remains limited to waste collection. There is no provision for organic waste, reuse, or resource recovery, which constrains opportunities to reduce waste and support local circular systems.
Across the Plan, waste is framed primarily as a cost and disposal issue. While there is acknowledgement that waste volumes are decreasing (p.13), this opportunity is not being used to accelerate a transition to zero waste systems.
Organic waste is not prioritised, despite its direct impacts on both wai and kai systems. Landfilling organic material contributes to methane emissions and leachate, while also removing nutrients that could support soil health and local food production.
The transition of water and wastewater services to Waikato Waters is a significant structural change (p.7). However, the Plan does not clearly demonstrate how outcomes for wai, including water quality,

ecosystem health, and cultural values, will be upheld through this transition.

Stormwater investment is a positive step, particularly given recent severe weather events (p.6, p.12). However, there is limited integration between stormwater, land use, and waste systems, despite their combined impact on water quality and resilience.

The removal of district-wide benefit rates for water and wastewater shifts toward a user-pays model (p.10–11). While this may improve transparency, it risks reducing collective responsibility for essential systems that underpin public and environmental health.

The Plan highlights increasing costs and a focus on affordability (p.14), but cost efficiency is primarily assessed in financial terms. This does not account for environmental, cultural, and long-term resilience considerations.

To ensure the Waitomo District Council's Annual Plan drives long-term sustainability, it is recommended that the Council formally integrate Community Education and Behaviour Change as a core pillar of its environmental strategy.

Technical infrastructure alone cannot achieve the District's targets for waste minimisation, water conservation, and climate resilience; success requires a shift in local social norms and individual agency. By supporting community-led resource recovery such as repair cafes and tool libraries and decentralised composting initiatives, the Council can foster hyper-local circular economies that reduce landfill pressure while building neighborhood-level climate readiness. This approach transforms residents from passive service consumers into active stewards of the District's natural resources.

Including these specific initiatives addresses two critical needs for a rural/provincial district:

Composting Hubs: These reduce the "truck-miles" associated with organic waste collection, keeping nutrients in local soil and lowering the CH_4 (methane) emissions generated by the landfilling of food scraps.

Resource Recovery: In a district where access to specialist repair services can be geographically limited, supporting community-led repair and reuse networks builds local self-reliance and reduces

disposal costs for households.

Climate Resilience Note: Community-managed composting doesn't just manage waste; it produces high-quality soil that improves the ground's ability to absorb water, directly contributing to local flood mitigation during heavy rain events.

Recommendations

Adopt a zero waste approach across the Annual Plan. This includes setting clear targets for waste reduction, prioritising reduction at source, and investing in reuse, repair, and recycling systems that reduce reliance on landfill and transport.

Reframe transfer stations as resource recovery centres. This should apply to all sites, including the proposed Mōkau facility, and include provision for reuse, recycling, and organic waste processing, alongside education and community engagement functions.

Prioritise organic waste diversion as a key action for both climate and environmental outcomes. Support composting systems that return nutrients to the soil, strengthen local food systems, and reduce contamination of waterways.

Ensure that landfill closure and waste export decisions are balanced with investment in local solutions that reduce total waste volumes and avoid shifting environmental harm to other regions.

Strengthen integration between waste, stormwater, and land use planning. This includes recognising the impacts of waste on waterways and ensuring that infrastructure decisions support water quality and resilience.

Ensure the transition to Waikato Waters upholds the principles of Te Mana o te Wai and the MEMP. This includes maintaining a strong focus on environmental outcomes, transparency, and accountability for water quality and ecosystem health.

Review the shift to user-pays funding for water and wastewater to ensure that it does not undermine equitable access or collective responsibility for essential services.

Expand the definition of cost efficiency to include environmental, cultural, and long-term impacts, in line with kaitiakitanga and intergenerational wellbeing.

Invest in community education as a core part of infrastructure delivery. This includes waste minimisation, water conservation, and climate resilience, and should be delivered through partnerships with communities, schools, and marae.

Align all aspects of the Annual Plan with the Maniapoto Environmental Management Plan by embedding mauri, kaitiakitanga, and the interconnectedness of taiao, kai, and wai into decision-making.

Conclusion

The Draft Annual Plan responds to immediate financial and infrastructure pressures, but it remains grounded in a model that separates waste, water, and environmental systems.

A Taiao, Kai, Wai lens highlights the need for a more integrated approach that reduces waste, protects water, supports food systems, and restores environmental health.

By aligning more strongly with the Maniapoto Environmental Management Plan and investing in local resource recovery and community capability, Council can move toward a system that is more resilient, equitable, and environmentally responsible.