

# REGIONAL REPORT

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## SUMMER OPENING FOR KOTUKU DAM

A new multimillion dollar detention dam designed to help protect Whāngārei's Central Business District from costly flooding is all but completed and will be formally opened this summer.

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1. Emergency spillway #1
2. Worker atop dam embankment
3. 18m high dam face
4. Workers beside 2.1m diameter spillway pipe
5. Raumanga Stream
6. Raumanga Valley Rd ends just below this point
7. Emergency spillway #2
8. Kotuku St, Maunu
9. Upstream reservoir to temporarily hold up to 1.3 million cu m of floodwaters

## SINGLE NEW PLAN FOR WATER, AIR, LAND AND COAST

A draft of a new plan setting out how Northland's water, air, land and coast are managed will be released for public comment next year.

Our Regional Policy Committee is overseeing development of the new Regional Plan. Chair Graeme Ramsey says the plan is extremely important, given it will set the rules for when resource consents are (and are not) required.

"This plan will address a really wide range of activities – from aquaculture, moorings and marinas to flood protection schemes, earthworks and sewage discharges," he says.

"Issues like discharges to water, excluding stock from waterways, what conditions people can use agricultural sprays in – even things like which regionally important surf breaks we should try to protect – will be covered by this plan in some way."

Graeme (NRC's Deputy Chairman and its Kaipara constituency representative) says council currently has three regional plans – Air Quality, Water and Soil, and Coastal. However, all have been operative for more than a decade and are now quite dated.

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## CONGRATULATIONS ...

... to Ian and Sandy Page (pictured), winners of the NRC Water Quality Enhancement Award at this year's Northland Ballance Farm Environment Awards.

Over many years, the Pages have transformed what was a run-down 160-plus hectare property at Pataua North (near Whāngārei) into a model of sustainability sitting under a QEII National Trust covenant.

Professional forester Ian, and Sandy – a retired physiotherapist – began planting pine trees on steeper erosion-prone areas in the early 1980s at a rate of several hectares annually. Their property now boasts about 62ha of indigenous forest. Another 50ha runs sheep and beef and the balance is in production forestry.

## SUMMER OPENING FOR KOTUKU DAM

From p1

The \$11 million, 18-metre high Kotuku dam is one of Northland Regional Council's largest civil construction projects and is expected to be fully operative within weeks.

Craig Brown, who chairs the council's Whāngārei Urban Rivers Liaison Committee, says it is now four years since the council began its initial geotechnical investigations into the site – which sits at the ends of Raumanga Valley Rd and Maunu's Kotuku St.

"However, this project is actually the realisation of a long-held dream by various local authorities that actually dates right back to the 1960s," says Craig, a former Whāngārei mayor.

An official ceremony to mark the dam's opening is expected to be held in late February 2016.

Craig says the completed dam will hold the equivalent of roughly two-thirds of the Whau Valley dam, which provides much of the city's drinking water.

"But the Kotuku dam is fundamentally different from the Whau Valley structure in one crucial aspect; the 27 million cubic metres of water Kotuku can hold will all be floodwater collected during heavy rain and it will be stored for just two or three days."

He says the dam's design allows it to very quickly trap vast amounts of stormwater, then slowly release it over several days in a process designed to save potentially millions in flood-related damage to the city's CBD and parts of Morningside and Raumanga.

"This is because much of the damage caused by flooding depends not only on how deep the floodwaters are, but importantly, how fast they're travelling. Kotuku is designed to slow floodwaters and cut flood depths in the CBD by up to half a metre."

Craig says it would be fair to describe the project as a very challenging, complex one.

"There were a number of issues to resolve in terms of getting land use rights, the planning, design and construction processes, not to mention it's a fairly confined site with variable soil types and is quite close to a number of houses."

Craig, who represents the council's Coastal South constituency, says he's grateful to all those who have played a part in the dam project and says the end result is something all Northlanders should be proud of.

The dam is being paid for via a targeted rate on about 18,000 properties in the CBD and contributing catchment areas.

## Annual Report available



From major flood protection works and development of key regional plans to allocating more than \$2 million of economic development funding, 2014/15 was another busy 12 months for Northland Regional Council.

Our latest Annual Report sets out what we achieved in 2014/15 and how it stacked up against what elected representatives and staff had planned.

Copies of the full Annual Report – or a 16-page summary – will be available soon from our website: [www.nrc.govt.nz/annualreport](http://www.nrc.govt.nz/annualreport)

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## SEA CLEANERS EXTENDING ITS NORTH WORK

The Sea Cleaners Charitable Trust is to expand its summer coastal clean-up work into the Bay of Islands, Mangawhai and Dargaville areas.

Northland Regional Council agreed to fund the Auckland-based trust's work \$25,000 annually as part of its Long Term Plan 2015-2025 after a successful trial clean-up in and around Whāngārei Harbour late last year.

David Sinclair, one of two councillors who represent the council's Whāngārei Urban constituency, says he's delighted that NRC funding is now being matched by the Bobby Stafford-Bush Foundation. Keen boatie David was instrumental in securing regional council funding for the original Sea Cleaners Northland trial; he says he's thrilled the foundation has decided to back the initiative locally, effectively doubling Sea Cleaners' Northland budget.

"The foundation's generosity means Sea Cleaners will now spend two months in Northland each year for the next three years."

David says Sea Cleaners began work in Northland in the middle of last month and will continue until mid-December.

While most of its activity this year will again be based in the Whāngārei Harbour area, it will also be undertaking some reconnaissance/rubbish collection exercises in the Bay of Islands, Mangawhai and Dargaville areas.

Sea Cleaners founding trustee Hayden Smith (left) and regional councillor David Sinclair checking out the Russell foreshore recently.



"This is being done with the intention of doing a greater amount of work in these and other Northland areas next summer and the summer after that."

He says Sea Cleaners will be reporting back to council on the volume and types of rubbish it collects, the size of the areas covered and the hours involved.

"While many parts of Northland are renowned for their natural beauty, especially popular and heavily-used ones still require the attention of groups like Sea Cleaners."

He says Sea Cleaners is not just about organising the collection of rubbish; it also helps educate people about how that rubbish gets into the sea in the first place.

"Everything that gets dropped or falls to the ground ends up in the sea eventually. Rubbish thrown from a car window or carelessly discarded on the ground, even fairly long distances from the coastal environment, can still find its way into the ocean."

David says Sea Cleaners works within the education system to raise awareness and upskill students and teachers with the knowledge to organise their own coastal clean-up events.

"Focusing on kids is a great way of making sure a message gets through to their parents too."

For more information on Sea Cleaners, visit: [www.seacleaners.com](http://www.seacleaners.com)

## SINGLE NEW PLAN FOR WATER, AIR, LAND AND COAST

From p1

"A lot has changed since they were drawn up and we now have a great opportunity to develop a new, integrated plan retaining those elements of the existing plans that work well while also offering more certainty and clarity in other areas."

He says the committee is keen for a more streamlined plan that will be a 'rule book' first, but also a set of provisions to guide resource consent decision-making.

"We want it to be more specific about the values and characteristics we want and need to protect, but also provide for the 'clipping on' of new catchment-specific provisions as these are developed by local communities."

Graeme says all three existing regional plans were reviewed last year. That process including more than a dozen workshops and hui with over 100 key stakeholders and Maori who provided initial feedback.

Among the issues identified was a need to 'give effect to' recent national and regional policy, a lack of integration across the three plans, and the fact that better information is now available.

In the wake of that feedback, the council had decided to combine all three into a new, single plan. A draft for initial public feedback is expected to be released about the middle of next year.

"Ahead of that release, committee members and staff are working hard to prepare provisions (supported by the necessary justification), and a wide range of research necessary for the new plan's development has also been commissioned."

Graeme says the sheer volume and type of issues the plan needs to address means there will be a correspondingly large number and diverse range of views held by the public.

"That makes consultation to get the correct balance all the more essential; it's important to note that anyone will be able to provide feedback on the draft when it's released next year."

A process to formally notify the proposed plan for submissions would then follow about a year later and the public will also have another opportunity to comment at that time.

Graeme says while the process may seem drawn-out and expensive, the new plan will be in place for many years and it's crucial to get it right.



*'Anyone will be able to provide feedback on the draft ...'*

Regional Policy Committee chair Graeme Ramsey

"This means when making decisions on the plan's content, including any rules, council must consider evidence in submissions and hearings and the costs and benefits of various resource management options. We are also legally required to 'give effect to' certain national policies relating to the management of various resources."

Graeme says once the council eventually issues its decision on the new plan it will still be open to a formal appeals process.

"Realistically, it will still be another two years before the new plan is up and running, but the end result should be a much more modern, enabling and workable document."

Want to know more?

To keep informed on the progress of our new Regional Plan project, visit: [www.nrc.govt.nz/newregionalplan](http://www.nrc.govt.nz/newregionalplan)



# SUMMER WATER QUALITY TESTS BEGIN

Tests will begin shortly to indicate how suitable Northland's most popular beaches, rivers and lakes are for swimming, water sports and other forms of summer recreation.

Council chairman Bill Shepherd says testing is scheduled to start on Monday 23 November and will run until Tuesday 23 February.

Bill says hundreds of samples to check bacterial levels will be taken from 47 popular coastal sites and 13 freshwater locations Northland-wide over that period.

Results will be posted on the national environmental reporting website LAWA. A link to the website can be found at: [www.nrc.govt.nz/swimming](http://www.nrc.govt.nz/swimming)

Depending on the number of bacteria in them, samples are graded either 'green' (suitable to swim), 'amber' (potentially unsuitable for swimming) or 'red' (unsuitable for swimming).

Weekly results are also forwarded to Whāngārei, Far North and Kaipara District Councils, Northland District Health Board (DHB) and other interested parties.

"Northland Health and the relevant district council are informed of any results showing elevated

bacterial levels within 24 hours and it is then the board and the appropriate district council's responsibility to take action," says Bill.

He adds that action can include further site investigations to establish the source of any contamination, public warnings not to swim or gather shellfish, and putting up permanent warning signs at the worst sites.

He says simple tips to judge water quality include not swimming for two or three days after heavy rain or if there are warning signs indicating unsafe water.

"Don't swim if water looks dirty/murky, smells or has scum on its surface, and be aware of potential sources of contamination, nearby and upstream."

Most popular spots monitored by the council are usually suitable for swimming, but Bill points out they can still be temporarily contaminated by run-off from land for several days after heavy rain.

Water quality concerns can be reported to the regional council's freephone 24/7 Environmental Hotline on **(0800) 504 639**.

Ōpua-based Environmental Monitoring Officer Adam Phillips takes a water quality sample from Kerikeri's Rainbow Falls.



## HOLIDAY HOURS

All Northland Regional Council offices will be closed from 2pm Thursday 24 December until 8am Tuesday 05 January for the Christmas-New Year holiday break.

Our 24/7 freephone Environmental Hotline (0800) 504 639 will still be available for people to report environmental or maritime incidents during the holiday period.

Councillors, management and staff wish all Northlanders and visitors to the region a merry Christmas and a safe and happy New Year.

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