Health (Drinking Water) Amendment Bill

Presentation by
Paul Prendergast
Principal Public Health Engineer
Ministry of Health

Outline of Presentation

- What does the Bill propose to do?
  - provide some regulation and a management system for the drinking water sector
- Why is the Bill proposed?
  - existing legislation is inadequate and fragmented
  - international experience is that , worldwide, drinking-water supplies are under pressure because of side effects of economic development.
  - water quality not adequate (E coli levels, rates of sickness, risk of major outbreaks)
  - current situation/improvements needed
- How does the Bill propose to achieve this?
  - “all practicable steps” to comply with standards
  - public health risk management plans to promote quality assurance of supply process
  - drinking water register

Outline of Presentation

- What will the Bill cost?
- Mitigation of Cost
  - Measures in the Bill
  - Financial assistance (Drinking Water Assistance Programme)
- Examples of how different supplies would be affected

What Does the Bill propose to do?

- Regulate the Drinking Water Sector

Management of drinking water in New Zealand forms a continuum that can be broken into three main parts.

1. The environment (RMA)
2. **Water suppliers** (The DW Bill)
3. Storage and distribution within buildings (Building Act)

(With some overlap with HSEA and some NZFSA legislation)

Why Regulate?

- The problem
  - Drinking water in New Zealand not adequate in some areas
  - Leading to poorer health and risk of outbreaks
- The evidence
  - Levels of faecal matter
  - Levels of sickness
  - Outbreaks

Why Regulate?

- The current system – what's wrong with it?

- The existing voluntary system has made improvements
  - The NZ Drinking Water Standards.
  - Register of Community Drinking-Water Supplies in NZ
  - Public health grading of community drinking-water supplies.
  - Water Information NZ
  - Public Health Risk Management Plans.
  - Annual Report on the Microbiological and Chemical Quality of Drinking-Water Supplies in NZ
  - Guidelines for Drinking-Water Quality Management in NZ
  - The use of Ministry-recognised laboratories.

  but

  - improvement did not extend to the smaller supplies, and stalled at about 76% of NZ's population

Why Regulate?

- Further improvements sought through Drinking Water Assistance Programme
  - Technical Assistance Programme
  - Capital Assistance Programme

- Remaining improvements needed
  - Greater compliance with standards
  - Greater coverage on register
  - Public Health Risk Management Plans
  - power to declare drinking-water emergencies at a level below civil emergencies

How the Bill aims to improve drinking water

1 “All practicable steps” to comply with NZ drinking water standards

- Compliance is not mandatory
- All steps reasonably able to be taken
- Cost and technical feasibility is a factor

How the Bill aims to improve drinking water

2. Public health risk management plans
   - For supplies serving >500 people

3. Requirement to be placed on Drinking water register
   - Only for reticulated suppliers, not self-supplied systems
   - Optional for self-supplied community purpose buildings

What will the Bill cost?

- Reliable estimates not possible
  - Range from $50m - $275m over 5 years

- Policy approval obtained on the basis that
  - Implementation of Bill is phased over 6 years, to give time for compliance requirements for small supplies to be better established
  - Committee to monitor costs during implementation and report back to Cabt Cttee.

Mitigation of Cost

- Measures in the Bill
  - Phased commencement
  - Proportionality
  - “all practicable steps” qualifier
- Other Measures
  - Sanitary works tech advisory committee
  - Drinking Water Assistance Programme

Potentially Contentious Issues

- Duty to take all reasonable steps to contribute to protection of source of water
- Power to enter land and inspect
- Interference with local government spending priorities

Examples of how supplies affected

1. Three Baches
2. Very Small Supplier
3. Community Purpose Self Supplier (ski field)
4. Community purpose supplied by Scheme (university campus)
5. Rural Supply
6. Rural Irrigation also used for drinking
7. Small town
8. Large City