Watercare Citizens' Assembly

August - September 2022

What should be the next source (or sources) of water for Auckland?

Recommendations from the Assembly

Introduction:

A citizens' assembly is a form of public involvement in decision making where a representative sample of the public is invited to deliberate and make recommendations on a specific question. The organisation that posed the question then commits to taking on board the recommendations in future decision making.

12,000 invites were randomly sent out to people across the Auckland Metropolitan Network. 40 people representative of Auckland's demographics were selected. These ranged from different educational backgrounds, ages, genders, living situations and ethnicities.

Out of the 40 people selected, 37 people attended and were tasked with finding the next future water source for Auckland. This task is important because we need to ensure that beyond 2040 our water supply is sustainable, resilient, reliable and adapts to climate change. We know that Waikato awa is not a source we can rely on forever. We also need to factor in the population and economic growth of Auckland.

In the sessions, six options were presented concerning Auckland's future water source. These six options had been narrowed down prior to the assembly, however, alternative ideas were encouraged to be submitted if applicable.

During each session options were explored further with additional queries and information being provided by experts. There were also discussions surrounding the involvement and opinions of mana whenua.

In the final sessions, panels were held to discuss tikanga and mana whenua principles surrounding water. This included narrowing down the recommendations and figuring out what we found important as a group and what needed further discussion. The first draft of our collective final recommendations were presented to Watercare,

these recommendations were finalised during the last session. We understand from mana whenua that everyone needs equal and fair access to water and that it is also a human right to have access to clean and fresh water. We also understand that it is the belief of some Māori that we must find something else for our future water source as what we currently have is not sustainable. We are in agreement with mana whenua and have taken on-board their perspective when deciding on the final recommendations to make to Watercare.

The common topics that often came up throughout these discussions were that cost and environmental impacts must be considered, and this is shown throughout each recommendation we have made. Education is also a key factor to ensure the recommendations are successful. After much collaborative deliberation, the following recommendations are what we believe would be the best options for Auckland's next future water source.

A. Recycled Water

Recommendation
We recommend the implementation of direct recycled water as the next source of water for Auckland. Engaging the Auckland public in education on the safety and quality of the water is necessary to facilitate acceptance.
Rationale
● Cost effective in relation to other options ● Environmentally friendly because it assists with reducing wastewater ● Provides another source of water to secure Auckland's water supply *"Water is the essence of life"*
Implementation
● It is imperative that education is implemented immediately to allow citizens to be informed and engaged. The quality, cost and environmental impacts need to be addressed. ○ This can be done through PSAs, primary school trips, and integrated into the curriculum. ○ Open ended but targeted. ○ Cost of education must be considered. Must be cost effective and not result in this method being more expensive than indirect. ○ Use multi media and social media to engage the public ● Feedback from relevant groups (cultural, religious, communities) must be considered from the start. ● Monitoring for public health safety ● Phrasing is incredibly important. Singapore has renamed their recycled water "New Water" and put a lot of focus on independence from Malaysia's water sources. Using similar tactics in Auckland may increase public support.

B. Desalination

Recommendation
We recommend Watercare continue research & investigation studies to understand the feasibility of desalination for the future as we believe it may be a required supplementary source if it is projected that we will not be able to meet our water needs with recycled water only.
Rationale
● We need to be prepared ● A plan needs to be put in place so if Auckland experiences long term drought the system can be implemented in a timely manner. ● We won't have built strong international relationships from whom we can learn best practice ● It seems to be the only drought resilient solution
Implementation
● Continuation of overseas engagement with countries that have desalination plants, and make this public information (Building & operating processes/costs, successful and unsuccessful facilities) ● A need to ensure the water from the desalination plant matches the current mains water quality in terms of health benefits (e.g. minerals). ● Investigate cost sharing & sharing resources with neighbouring regions. ● Possibility of co-location with other water servicing plants (e.g. Recycled water treatment plant & Desalination plant on the same site. Build Recycled water plant & have systems in place to upgrade to include desalination plant.) ● How it would integrate into the existing current water network system ● Utilising brine and alternative use of the waste created from desalination ● Implementing in a 'timely manner': taking climate conditions/trends

into consideration, technology advancements and cost
- Watercare should provide information on desalination research on their website so that the public can be informed.

C. Water Efficiency

Recommendation
To provide education and resources to consumers in reducing water usage.
Rationale
● Consumers will make informed choices around water consumption. ● We believe rain tanks can play a positive part in reducing water usage and support educating consumers around rain water tanks, but the decision and implementation of them should be at the discretion of homeowners (minimal resources to promote rain tanks). ● Majority of resources should be for water reduction methods. ● This is important because it will allow finite water sources to service more households.
Implementation
● Transparency of costs to the public. ● Making sure information and resources are accessible and understandable for consumption by the general public. ● Passively advertise water reduction options (i.e Facts in bills, Digital advertisement, TV advertisement, Radio advertisement, School education, Information on rain tanks, etc.)

Minority report on the public involvement in decision-making

Recommendation
We recommend that 2-3 people from the Assembly sit on Watercare's steering committee, for future water sources
Rationale
● This assembly has gone through a learning process and has a lot of knowledge. Leaving it at this assembly would be a waste of time, knowledge and resources. ● It provides the input of a well-informed public, in particular when it comes to education and engagement of the public around the future water sources. ● Having some representation of the group would keep the momentum going.
Implementation