

# Stop Auckland Sewage Overflows Coalition (SASOC)

Auckland Council  
Private Bag 92300  
Auckland 1142  
[akhaveyoursay@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:akhaveyoursay@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz)

## Submission to Auckland Council on 2023/2024 Annual Plan and budget

### Introducing SASOC

SASOC is a coalition of community groups spread around the northern edge of the Waitemata Harbour and within the central Auckland isthmus. It was formed to represent their general concern about water quality within the Auckland isthmus and the wider Auckland region generally.

SASOC's specific concerns include

- the aging Victorian era combined stormwater/wastewater pipe network,
- the role of stormwater on the overflows from that network, and
- the effects of stormwater run-off from roading and other impermeable surfaces (some of the latter resulting from intensification of building within the isthmus).

Although focused on the isthmus, SASOC supports a holistic Auckland-wide solution to the city's water quality issues.

### **AUCKLAND ISTHMUS WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS**

The need for improvement of the combined sewer system was first raised in 1917 (source: Auckland Council). Since then, a number of plans have been made for sewer separation on the isthmus. None has so far been completed. In the late 1990's the then Auckland City Council designed a multi-year plan for incremental wastewater and sewer separation. Considerable work was done until the Auckland Supercity amalgamation when the process ceased.

More recently, starting with Council's long term plan in 2018, a new initiative to improve water quality was established for the western parts of the Auckland isthmus – this included a joint venture between Watercare and Auckland

Council known as the Western Isthmus Water Quality Improvement Programme, or, more simply, the Western Isthmus programme (WIP). Its objective was to reduce combined sewer overflows substantially, through separation and use of the new Central Interceptor. A Water Quality Targeted Rate (WQTR) was introduced. Most of this rate is used to finance Auckland Council's agreed \$350m contribution to the WIP. A similar programme has been put in place for parts of the eastern isthmus, with provision in the WQTR for some funding of infrastructure improvements in that programme.

## **EFFECTS OF INFLATION ON WESTERN ISTHMUS PROJECT**

When the project was set up all parties acknowledged that the WIP was based on 2018-dollar values for infrastructure construction. Cost inflation since then has increased the projected cost significantly – there is currently a shortfall of \$100m on the Auckland Council contribution to the WIP (source: Auckland Council; Healthy Waters department).

## **AUCKLAND COUNCIL ANNUAL BUDGET 2023/2024**

The Annual Budget 2023/2024 Consultation Document discusses the western and eastern isthmus water quality projects:

- It proposes reducing the WQTR “by around two-thirds” (at p 16):
  - “...we are also proposing the following changes to our current rates charges:
    - reducing the Natural Environment Targeted Rate and Water Quality Targeted Rate by around two-thirds and utilising the money we have already collected from these targeted rates to continue to deliver these work programmes in 2023/2024.”
- Under the heading ‘What are we planning to deliver in 2023/2024’ it states that the Water Quality Targeted Rate programme will continue in 2023/2024 (at p 26):
  - “Continue the Water Quality Targeted Rate programme
    - Western and eastern isthmus water quality improvement programmes.
    - Safe Networks – investigate and eliminate sources of wastewater entering our popular swimming beaches.
    - Safe septic – a proactive regional compliance monitoring for private onsite wastewater systems, such as septic tanks.
    - Restore the health and mauri of the Kaipara Harbour through the Kaipara Moana Remediation programme.”

- Later under the heading ‘Temporarily reducing the Natural Environment Targeted Rate and Water Quality Targeted Rate’ it refers to the purpose and effect of the introduction of the WQTR (at p 53):

“In 2018 ... we ... introduced the WQTR to bring forward our 30- year plan to invest in cleaning up Auckland’s beaches, harbours, streams, and aquifers. To date, revenue collected from these rates has been more than what we have spent due to different phasing of revenue and expenditure and the impacts that COVID has had on our planned investments. This has resulted in the WQTR ... accumulating reserve funds of \$33m ... as at 30 June 2022.

Temporarily reducing these rates and using funding from reserves enables us to continue delivering these programmes as planned while providing temporary support to ratepayers. This will reduce rates for an average residential property by around ... \$46 for the WQTR ....

We would need to return these targeted rates to their full level in 2024/2025 to ensure that these programmes continue within the planned timeframes.”

These “reserve funds” were part of the planning for the WIP, which anticipated that the majority of funds would be spent toward the end of the programme. The WQTR was designed to even out the impact on ratepayers (ie to avoid an annually fluctuating targeted rate). The “reserve funds” are already allocated, just not yet spent.

The statement that Council “would need to return to these targeted rates to their full level in 2024/2025 to ensure these programmes continue within the planned timeframes” appears to be a statement of hope rather than one of intention.

## **EFFECTS OF AUCKLAND COUNCIL ANNUAL 2023/2024 BUDGET ON THE WIP**

What seems clear from this is that, depending on what proportion of the proposed WQTR is to be provided for the WIP, there will be a further WIP shortfall of some \$20-24 M. That will exacerbate the overall shortfall to at least \$120M.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUBMISSION**

The statement that the proposed WQTR hiatus would permit the western isthmus programme to continue within the planned timeframe is untenable (we suspect that the same issue applies to the eastern isthmus programme).

The budget for the western isthmus programme was set on a predetermined annual level of rates input via the WQTR. The “reserve funds” outlined in the Annual Budget 2023/2024 Consultation Document do not exist. Any reduction in the Water Quality Targeted Rate will exacerbate the already existing \$100m shortfall.

We request that the Water Quality Targeted Rate be retained at its designed level as was intended. This is essential so that Auckland Council can meet the requirements for the WIP joint venture (as well as the planned eastern isthmus programme). The cost of retaining the WQTR will be minimal on a per ratepayer basis.

The alternative, further deferral of infrastructure “catch up”, is indefensible in light of history of under-funding, the effects of which were demonstrated so obviously in late January/early February.

SASOC wishes to be heard on this submission and has time allocated in a “face to face” meeting at 1 pm on 27 March 2023

David Abbott and Dirk Hudig  
Co-convenors  
SASOC  
26 March 2023

Address for Service  
Box 47-376, Ponsonby Auckland 1144, or  
[dabbott@xtra.co.nz](mailto:dabbott@xtra.co.nz) or [dirk Hudig@gmail.com](mailto:dirk Hudig@gmail.com) .