

Water Bottling – Frequently Asked Questions

What is GWRC's role in managing water?

Regional Councils are delegated the primary responsibility for water management under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). The functions of regional councils under the RMA include managing the taking, use, damming and diversion of water, and the quantity, level and flow of water in any water body. The RMA adopts an effects based approach, regulating the effects of activities upon the environment. For example, in relation to applications for water permits, our focus is on managing the effects of the abstraction of water (e.g. on the aquifer or stream), and less on the end use of the water resource.

Greater Wellington Regional Council manages water use through our regional planning documents. Our regional plans include rules, which set out when water can be abstracted as a permitted activity without resource consent and when resource consent is required. The regional plans specify the amount of water in each waterbody or aquifer that can be abstracted, minimum flows in rivers, minimum water levels in aquifers and criteria to assess whether the use of water is reasonable and efficient. The provisions, including allocation volumes and minimum flow/water level requirements, set out in our regional plans have been informed by scientific research and a public process.

What is considered when processing water bottling applications?

When someone, or a business, applies for a water take consent GWRC's role is to look at the volume of the proposed take and the environmental effect of taking and using that water. We consider whether the proposed take is likely to affect the ability of other users nearby to take water, whether the take of water is reasonable and an efficient use of water, and whether there is a possibility of salt-water intrusion to the aquifer.

We cannot consider the intended use of this water (i.e. whether water bottling is an appropriate use) as part of our regulatory role.

How long are these companies allowed to abstract water?

All consents to take and use water have an expiry date. Under the RMA water permits can be granted for a maximum duration of 35 years.

- Petone Pure Water Company Limited were granted a water permit for 18 years and the consent expires in 2022
- Heretaunga Water Limited were granted a water permit for 10 years and the consent expires in 2023.
- Petone Property Holding Limited were granted a water permit for 17 years and the consent expires in 2033.

None of these sites are currently abstracting water.

Once a water permit expires the abstraction of water is no longer authorised and a new resource consent is required.

How much water does our region use?

There are nearly 600 consents to take and use water from the regions aquifers, rivers, and streams. Nearly 250 of those consents are to take groundwater from aquifers. In total 65,047,058m³ per year is currently allocated mainly for irrigation and public water supply purposes. The three existing water bottling consents take in total 1,125,070 m³ per year or 1.8% of the total amount of groundwater allocated in the region. The remaining 350 consents (approximately) take water from the regions rivers and streams. There are no water bottling operations that take water directly from rivers and streams in the Wellington region.

Is a consent to drill a bore the same as a consent to take water?

A consent to drill a bore is different to a consent to take water from that bore. Drilling a bore is a necessary step before applying for consent to take water, as bores must be tested to determine how taking water from it will affect other bores and water bodies in the area. There is no guarantee that if a person or company gains a consent to drill a bore, that they will consequently be able to take and use water from that bore. That is determined when a person or company applies to for a consent to take and use water from the bore.

Are water bottling consents required to be publicly notified?

The RMA sets out certain requirements for what consents are to be publicly notified.

If the environmental effects are more than minor then it is publicly notified. If not publicly notified, we have to consider whether there are any individual persons that may be affected to a minor level, and if so they will be served notice specifically.

If none of the statutory tests in the RMA are met, the applications are not notified.

How are water consents transferred when the business or property is sold?

Water permits can be transferred to the new owner of a site by providing a written notice of the transfer to the Council. This is an administrative change only to the name of the consent holder.

What happens when the land use changes?

This depends on the conditions of consent. If the use of water is tightly restricted via those conditions, a consent holder may be required to apply for a variation or replacement application to change the use of water

What happens during periods of water shortages?

Resource consents to take water are subject to conditions which include restrictions when river flows and groundwater levels are low. The river flows and groundwater levels which trigger restrictions are set out in the regional plans. Restrictions may require a reduction in the amount or rate of water taken or a complete cease in the water take until river flows or groundwater levels increase. The consents for water bottling are subject to a condition requiring the consent holders to comply with any restrictions directed by GWRC during periods of water shortages to give priority to abstraction for public supply purposes.