



Horowhenua council admits dumping sewage

By SIMON WOOD and KELLY BURNS - The Dominion Post Last updated 05:00 22/09/2009

A council has admitted pumping 5.1 million litres of partially treated sewage into the Manawatu River.

Horowhenua District Council admitted yesterday in Palmerston North Environment Court that it allowed the effluent including tampons, condoms and toilet paper to flow into the already polluted Manawatu River from a treatment pond near Shannon in October 2007.

However, two contractors that Horizons Regional Council says are also responsible are fighting the allegation in the Environment Court.

Mack Tatana's company, Tatana Contracting, was hired by engineering firm EDI Downer to help install a meter monitoring the pond's outflow.

"Everything I did was with the permission of the district council and now they've gone and left me hanging. Everything we did was their decision," Mr Tatana said.

Workmen from both companies planned to drain the pond through a valve, but when this malfunctioned they pumped the contents of the pond into Stansell's Drain so the meter could be installed and the valve fixed.

The drain flows into Mangaore Stream, a tributary of the Manawatu River.

Horizons lawyer Ben Vanderkolk said 5000 cubic metres of sewage 5.184 million litres was pumped into the drain over 48 hours.

"Rudimentary" filter screens including plastic netting had been erected at the entrance to the drain, but this had not stopped contaminants and some sanitary items entering the stream.

Jeffrey Cooke, a senior environmental compliance officer for Horizons, said effluent entering the drain had been through a treatment process, making it relatively contaminant-free.

Green Party MP Russel Norman said it was a "terrible example of environmental pollution".

"I think the ratepayers of Horowhenua District Council should be saying, 'Okay, isn't it the job of the council to protect our environment and take our rates down?'"

"And here they are not protecting the environment and it's going to cost the ratepayers a lot of money," Dr Norman said.

Ratepayers will be stung twice with legal costs for their district and regional councils and ultimately the fine.

However, district chief executive David Ward said by pleading guilty it was "taking a responsible attitude" and ratepayers "should be pleased" additional legal costs had been avoided.

Horizons CEO Michael McCartney was pleased the long legal battle which cost "tens of thousands" of dollars was over. But he added, "one might argue we could have got there some time ago".

Environment Minister Nick Smith said from October 1 the maximum penalty of \$200,000 would increase to \$300,000 for an individual and \$600,000 for a company or organisation.

Massey University ecologist Mike Joy said the discharge would have had a "big impact" on the river, which was already severely polluted.

ManawatuStandard

Solution to drain strain on horizon

By LAURA JACKSON - Manawatu Standard Last updated 12:00 18/02/2010

Horizons Regional Council has vowed to finally stop Horowhenua District Council from accidentally pouring Shannon's sewage into Stansell's Drain.

The district council says it is committed to changing its ways.

But farmers Wayne and Lesley Rider are not holding their breath, as they say they have had sewage overflow from the drain on to their property several times each year.

It has taken thousands of ratepayers dollars, and an irritated district court judge to finally get the two councils to clean up their act.

Horizons took Horowhenua to court in 2007 for pumping waste into the drain, which feeds into the Mangaore tributary of the Manawatu River.

Horowhenua's consent to run the Shannon sewage ponds ran out in 2001, and it was issued a temporary renewal while a new consent was sought. After Horowhenua's first application for consent was denied in 2001, it took them four years to apply for a second one.

The level of waste it proposed pumping through was still considered unacceptable by Horizons.

By 2007, Horizon's decided to take legal action against Horowhenua for still pumping the waste into the drain. Thousands of dollars and several overflows of effluent on to land later, the charges were dropped last week after Judge Brian Dwyer said a resource consent issued in 1970 still allowed Horowhenua to discharge the sewage.

Horizons said it should have been harder on Horowhenua earlier, so that the years of waste being pumped into the drain could have been stopped.

Group manager of regional planning and regulatory Greg Carlyon said Horizons will no longer accept consent applications that are not sufficient.

"What happened with Shannon sewage was frustrating. We will be firmer from now on."

Despite spending more than \$20,000 of ratepayers' money on the court case, he does not regret taking Horowhenua to court.

"It was the right thing to do on behalf of the community to advance that prosecution. You always do think you will win."

Mr Carlyon is sympathetic to farmers Wayne and Lesley Rider, who say they have had sewage pour on to their paddocks when the sewage-filled drain has overflowed after heavy rain. "We have made a promise to them that if any sewage spills onto their land we will prosecute Horowhenua.

"They should not have to tolerate it. We accept their frustration."

But Mrs Rider doubts both the councils' sincerity. "We've been waiting for seven years for something to be done. I won't be holding my breath."

Her and husband Wayne have recently converted their 124 hectare farm on Johnston St into a dairy farm so say if the drain overflows again it could break their business.

But Horowhenua Mayor Brendan Duffy said the district and regional council had been focused on a resolution.

"There will be a trial commencing to determine whether there is an improved option for further treatment of the effluent before it gets to the drain," Mr Duffy said.

This would happen within the next few months, he said.

ManawatuStandard

Editorial: No time to waste in sewage clean-up

WARWICK RASMUSSEN, Deputy Editor - Manawatu Standard Last updated 12:00 18/02/2010

OPINION: It is a sickening thought that is hard to stomach.

But imagine having sewage spilled on to your property over and over again over a number of years, including condoms, used toilet paper and discarded sanitary items.

Now if that has not put you off reading any further, then add to it the fact that you have been hitting your head against a brick wall trying to get councils (regional and district) to listen to you, then make suitable changes to make things right.

That is only a snapshot into the lives of farmers Wayne and Lesley Rider, whose property near Shannon has doubled as an unlucky and unhygienic dumping ground for the unwanted waste.

Horowhenua District Council has been largely responsible for the pollution, which has spilled into and often overflowed Stansell's Drain.

The effluent is pumped in to help lower the levels of nearby oxidation ponds. This has caused friction between the district council and Horizons Regional Council. But the latter has finally said enough is enough and is cracking down on the district council to stop the accidental emissions.

While the fight has dragged on between the councils, costing thousands in ratepayer dollars, the Riders have been stuck in the middle hoping for improvements.

It is easy to understand their frustration and also their reluctance to accept what Horizons is saying.

Issues such as sewage and sewerage programmes are always sensitive. The waste has to go somewhere. But clearly, the status quo was not an acceptable option.

Fixing the matter will be costly – as most engineering solutions are – but must be done.

What has been allowed to happen for so long has been an outdated and outmoded way of doing things that may have been acceptable in the 1960s or 1970s, but not in the second decade of the 21st century.

On top of that, Stansell's Drain leads into the Mangaore Stream, which leads into the Manawatu River.

There are other tributaries that are polluted and lead into the river and ones that probably pollute more.

With the Manawatu River's water quality under so much scrutiny, moves to clean up areas like this one in Shannon are a step in the right direction and will go a small way to improving the perception of cleaning up our region's precious waterways.

One more thing: It was good to finally see some movement with the plans to do up the Te Manawa complex in Palmerston North. City firm McMillan and Lockwood has been tasked with the big job, which will create a cultural hub in the centre of town. The plan, which includes a more central site for the rugby museum, makes sense and should be an attractive addition. The redevelopment needs to be finished before next year's Rugby World Cup to take full advantage of the event. Here's hoping everything runs to schedule and budget.

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Sewage could ruin dairy farmer

EMMA GOODWIN Last updated 13:04 04/04/2012

A Horowhenua farming couple could lose their business if their district council doesn't stop flooding their land with sewage.

The commissioners hearing the consent application for the council's Shannon wastewater treatment plant were told yesterday how a lack of action by Horowhenua District Council to stop water flowing over the dairy farmers' land polluted it with human waste.

Last month the company that picks up Wayne and Lesley Rider's milk informed them that if it continued to be a problem the tankers would stop coming.

Rider, who milks 300 cows on his 124-hectare farm on Johnston St, said getting the letter from Open Country Dairy Ltd was the last straw.

"They have put us on notice that if this is not resolved the company won't pick up the milk. This is my livelihood we're talking about here.

The Riders told how cows and their calves had become sick after grazing the land, resulting in large vet bills and extended periods of medication. Milk also had to be dumped, meaning a loss of income for the farm.

"We couldn't put milk from sick cows into the vat."

John Fairweather, milk quality manager from Open Country Ltd said he did not want to discuss individual client's issues but confirmed that a letter had been sent to the Riders about problems of the land being contaminated, and possibilities of the milk being affected.

The letter said that it considered there was a risk of milk being contaminated and a risk to tanker drivers.

Fairweather said it was an unusual issue that the company had not come across before.

"It's certainly a one-off and nothing I have seen anywhere else."

Rider said the council should be given three years to drain the sewage ponds, remove the sludge, reline them and regulate their level to stop the sewage ending up on his land.

The council is asking for a consent to continue discharging waste water into Stansell's Drain but Rider said every time the drain was in flood, sewage flowed on to his property. "I would support their request if they put a permanent pump at the end of the drain and if they lined their ponds to stop sewage seeping out."

Horowhenua District Council's community assets manager Wally Potts has given evidence at the hearing that when the Mangaore Stream rose to a certain level, the flap gate on Stansell's Drain closed, creating high water in the drain.

Rider said this water then ends up over his property.

But Rider said he felt it would take more than a pump and some lining to sort the council's problems out. The council should be looking at a land-based discharge and not to water, he said.

"They have got to fix the whole sewage system. I want them given four years to become fully land-based. If Shannon cannot afford to run its sewage system properly then they should look at putting the town on septic tanks."

Rider said the council preferred the discharge to water option because it was cheaper and easier for it to do so.

"Don't just dump it in the river because it's the easiest place."

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