

# Information Sheet – Raglan WWTP Discharge Consent Project

## **Project Background:**

Raglan's wastewater is currently treated at the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) on Wainui Road. The treated wastewater is then discharged into Whāingaroa Harbour through a pipeline. This treatment system has been in place for 50 years, with various upgrades over time. Both the Raglan community and mana whenua have long expressed a desire to stop discharging wastewater into the harbour and have been advocating for a land-based discharge solution.

The Waikato District Council, followed by Watercare Waikato, has been working with the Raglan community for over seven years to find an alternative solution. The permit allowing treated wastewater discharge into Whāingaroa Harbour expired in 2020. To address this, a short-term permit was sought in 2019 to legally continue discharging treated wastewater while a long-term solution was developed.

Subsurface drip irrigation (SDI) was identified as the best method for land discharge from the current WWTP. SDI involves using underground pipes to release treated wastewater directly into the soil slowly. The main challenge for implementing SDI in Raglan is finding suitable land. The land must be the right size, with appropriate soil and terrain. Additionally, establishing the necessary pumping and pipeline infrastructure to transport the treated wastewater from the plant to potential sites is costly.

## **Plant upgrade:**

To prepare for Raglan's future growth and improve the quality of wastewater treatment, the decision was made to upgrade the current plant to a Membrane BioReactor (MBR) system. An MBR uses biological processes to treat wastewater to a very high standard, making it as clear and almost as clean as drinking water. This decision received strong support from community stakeholders. The plant upgrade is progressing well and is expected to be operational by early to mid-2025.

## **Preferred Discharge Option:**

The upgrade to an MBR plant with high-quality discharge allows us to explore alternative ways of discharging treated water to land. Together with mana whenua and community stakeholders, a preferred solution has been identified.

This solution involves directing the discharge into a west-facing gully on Wainui Reserve via an underground pipeline from the plant to a naturalized rock channel, which filters the water into the gully and eventually soaking into the groundwater beneath the dune system. We plan to extensively replant and regenerate the gully and rock channel area.

The gully area will be fenced to protect the infrastructure but won't affect existing walking, horse riding, or cycling paths on Wainui, as the gully is steep and not a space currently used for recreation. Regenerating the gully plans to enhance the recreational and ecological values of Wainui Reserve.

This solution has the support of Tainui o Tainui and provides a land-based discharge option, which is also

the most affordable. Approximately \$6 million has been set aside for constructing this preferred discharge method by 2027, in the Waikato District Council Long Term Plan. This budget includes \$1.2 million for regeneration planting. Watercare is discussing this opportunity with local nursery suppliers.

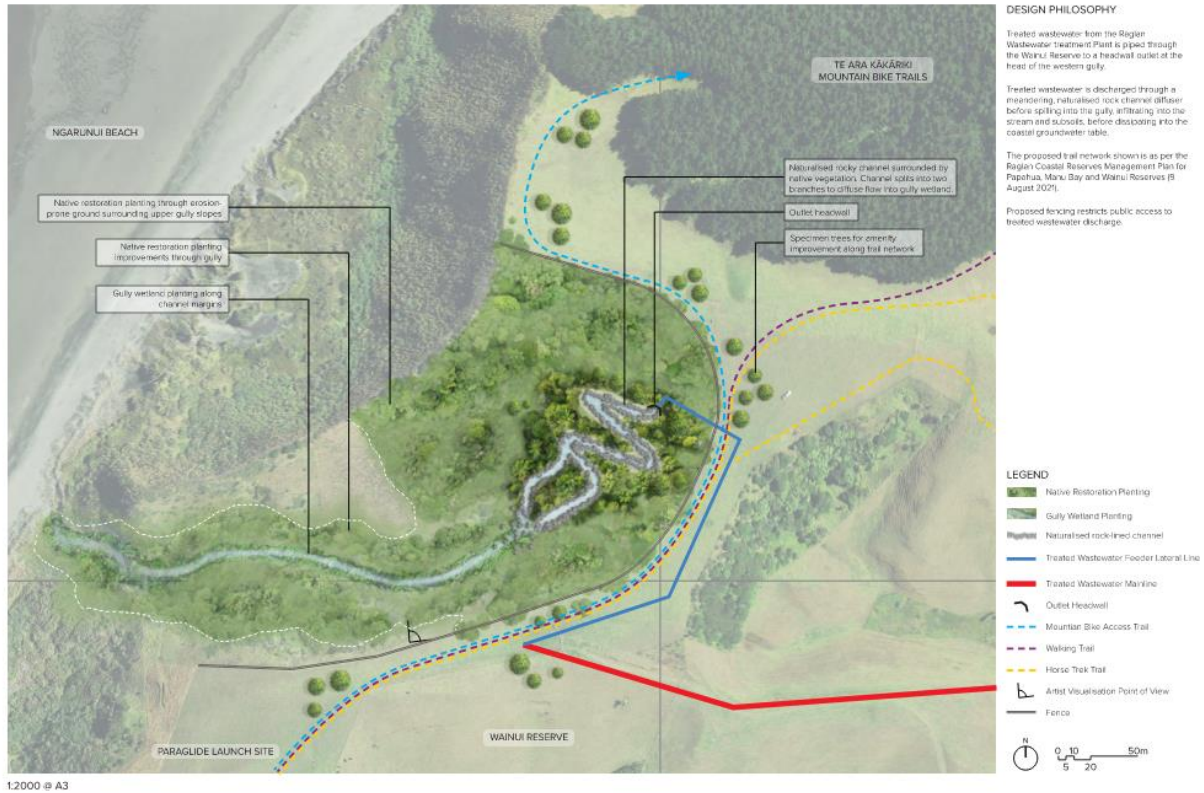
Once the MBR plant is operational, the existing pond systems will remain active for emergency storage in severe weather events. The current harbour discharge system will still be needed in the short to medium term for contingency purposes, should the storage ponds become full during severe weather and additional flows cannot be sent to the gully. Our ultimate goal is to cease harbour discharge, but we first must carefully test and monitor the performance of both the MBR plant and the new discharge method.



*Figure 1: Drone photo of Western Gully on Wainui Reserve*



**OPTION 1: WAINUI RESERVE WESTERN GULLY DISCHARGE**



**OPTION 1 ARTISTS IMPRESSION**



### Next Steps:

Technical investigations are currently being conducted to ensure that the preferred option will not negatively impact the environment and to determine the safe flow rates for discharging into the gully. We are particularly mindful of preventing visible water flows on the beach.

Further engagement efforts are planned to connect with the broader community and users of Wainui Reserve. Ongoing engagement with mana whenua and stakeholders will continue as well. Information and updates will be available on the Waikato District Council project website:

<https://www.waikatodistrict.govt.nz/services-facilities/water/waters-consents-and-projects/raglan-wastewater-discharge-consent> where you'll also find contact details for providing feedback on the preferred options or for any questions you might have.

### Project Timelines:

