



Fact sheet: Amendments to wastewater standards

1. Background

Wastewater standards have been updated to address technical and drafting errors.

The wastewater environmental performance standards set nationally consistent requirements for wastewater treatment plants and networks. They are intended to make consenting faster, less costly and more predictable for councils and wastewater network operators, while maintaining appropriate environmental and public health protections.

There were four standards in the first tranche published in November 2025. They are: discharge to water, discharge to land, beneficial reuse of biosolids and monitoring and reporting of wastewater overflows and bypasses.

Since then, councils, regional councils, technical experts and other stakeholders have identified some technical and drafting issues that could create uncertainty or make the standards hard to implement. These amendment regulations address those issues, so the standards work as originally intended.

2. Purpose

This fact sheet summarises key information that councils need to know.

The amendment regulations are now available on the New Zealand legislation website. However, we acknowledge that interpreting the legislative changes can be challenging. The purpose of this document is to provide a plain language summary of the amendments. We wanted to clarify the overall effects of the amendments that water service providers and network operators should be aware of.

3. Summary

The wastewater amendments support accuracy and clarity to support implementation.

The amendments do not change the overall policy direction of the wastewater standards but improve workability, remove ambiguity, correct drafting errors and support consistent consent conditions and processes.

The amendments:

- clarify key definitions and the scope of the standards, including which wastewater treatment plants and networks are covered
- ensure consent conditions and processes can operate consistently and effectively
- correct technical matters such as calculation methods, units, cross-references and table values
- make biosolids requirements more proportionate for small-scale users and clearer for end users
- support implementation of the overflows standard, including allowing early opt-in for network consents before the standard formally commences.

Table 1 below summarises the main changes arising from the amendment regulations. It focuses on changes likely to be of most interest to wastewater operators, councils, consenting authorities and stakeholders involved in implementation.

Table 1. Summary of key changes arising from the amendment regulations

Section	Area	What is changing	Rationale
Reg 5	Definitions and scope	Replaces the definition of wastewater treatment plant, defines reticulated wastewater network, and excludes on-site wastewater treatment systems that discharge less than 20 cubic metres per day and connect to no more than five domestic dwellings.	Clarifies that the standards apply to wastewater treatment plants that are part of wastewater networks, while excluding small on-site systems.
	Resource consents for networks	Clarifies that a resource consent can apply to the whole or a specified part of a reticulated wastewater network, including new uncontrolled overflow points.	Provides a clearer legal basis for network-wide or part-network consents and supports the overflows consenting framework.
Reg 7	Biosolids beneficial reuse	Broadens the purpose of the biosolids rules from fertilising or improving soil condition to beneficial reuse of biosolids.	Better reflects how biosolids products may be used and avoids an unnecessarily narrow scope.
Regs 9–15; Reg 70	Biosolids end-user information	Inserts a new requirement for wastewater treatment plant operators to take reasonably practicable steps to inform end users about permitted activity conditions and where to find further information.	Improves transparency for people using biosolids and supports better-informed reuse.
	Biosolids permitted activity thresholds	Amends permitted activity conditions by adding thresholds for up to 300 kilograms per hectare per year, and for more than 300 kilograms but no more than 1,000 kilograms per hectare per year if specified conditions are met. It also adjusts the general application limit from 400 kilograms over 24 months to 200 kilograms in a 12-month period.	Makes the regime more proportionate for smaller scale discharges while retaining clear limits for higher-risk applications.

	Biosolids soil contaminants	Corrects the maximum soil contaminant limit table and allows naturally occurring contaminant levels set in applicable regional plans to be used where relevant.	Fixes a technical error and makes the standard workable in regions with naturally elevated background contaminant levels.
	Biosolids management plans and records	Allows consent authorities to require soil sampling information in biosolids application management plans and clarifies that reporting and record-keeping requirements apply to permitted discharges.	Improves evidence for demonstrating compliance and avoids applying reporting obligations too broadly.
Regs 4; Schedule 1 clauses 2–3	Overflows commencement and transition	Brings subpart 1 of Part 2 (overflows from networks) into force on 1 September 2026 in combination with a transition period. During that period, the subpart applies only where an operator chooses to opt in through a resource consent application. The commencement date remains 19 December 2028 for: - those who do not choose to opt into subpart 1 in a consent application, and - all bypass consents (subpart 2 of Part 1).	Allows early use of the national overflows pathway for consent applications where the operator chooses to “opt in” during a transition period, while retaining the 19 December 2028 application date for broader implementation of Part 2.
Regs 16 - 32	Overflow point mapping	Adds a mandatory consent condition requiring an up-to-date map of all overflow points in the reticulated wastewater network, including new overflow points, and risk assessments for new uncontrolled overflow points.	Supports better network information, clearer consent coverage and improved risk management.
	Overflow risk assessments	Changes the consent authority role from confirming risk assessments to certifying them. This allows the consent authority to require resubmission rather than undertake a separate assessment.	Clarifies responsibility. Operators prepare and improve risk assessments, while consent authorities certify whether they are adequate.

	Bypasses	Clarifies that a bypass is the infrastructure and processes that divert wastewater, not the discharge itself, and changes references from temporary to intermittent. It also clarifies notification duties when a consent holder initiates or becomes aware of a bypass discharge.	Improves alignment between the legal wording and how bypass infrastructure operates in practice.
Regs 33 - 52	Discharge to water scope	Clarifies that Part 3 applies to discharges of treated wastewater into water from a wastewater treatment plant, but not where wastewater is sourced only from industrial and trade waste producers.	Clarifies the intended scope of the water discharge standards.
	Shellfish gathering and coastal waters	Expands the shellfish gathering area definition to include areas where any person gathers shellfish for any purpose, and corrects references from freshwater to coastal water where required.	Improves coverage of shellfish-related protections and fixes water-type drafting errors.
	Dilution ratio calculations	Replaces low-flow terminology with mean annual 7-day low flow and specifies a method based on at least five years of daily flow data or estimated flow data.	Provides a clearer, nationally consistent method for classifying receiving rivers and assessing discharge conditions.
	Alternative discharge-to-water consents	Clarifies that alternative consents may authorise discharge into a specified river only during specified time periods or river flow conditions, with discharge otherwise needing to go to another receiving environment or storage or another management option.	Supports flexible consent conditions where discharges are seasonal, flow-dependent or otherwise limited.
	Sampling, testing and records	Reframes sampling, testing and record-keeping obligations as conditions that must be included in resource consents.	Ensures the obligations are enforceable through consent conditions and clearer for operators.
Regs 53 – 68	Discharge to land exceptions	Clarifies exceptions for wetland or land discharges not part of a wastewater treatment process, including cultural reasons, and limits the seepage exception to seepage from wastewater treatment or storage infrastructure.	Clarifies what is inside and outside the discharge-to-land standards.

	Limited discharge-to-land consents	Allows applications for discharges that occur only during specified time periods or soil saturation conditions, with site assessments and limits matched to those circumstances, and adds consent conditions for those limited discharges.	Creates a clearer pathway for seasonal or condition-specific land discharge consents.
	Draft operations and management manuals and draft management plans	Clarifies that a draft operations and maintenance manual, and a draft management plan, must be certified by the consenting authority when considering a resource consent application. Consent authorities may require resubmission if a draft manual or management plan is incomplete.	Clarifies that draft operations and management manuals / management plans are to be certified by consenting authorities as part of the consenting process.
	Compliance for small land areas	Clarifies that nitrogen and phosphorus concentration limits must be reduced proportionately where the relevant land area is less than one hectare.	Ensures limits scale or adjust appropriately for small discharge areas.
Schedule 1	Taranaki biosolids transition	Delays till 1 June 2027 the application of Part 1 to discharges of biosolids to land in the Taranaki region. This is to support those people who were already subject to, and continue to comply with, relevant regional plan requirements.	Allows continuity while the Taranaki region transitions to the national biosolids requirements.
Throughout	Minor drafting and technical corrections	Updates headings, cross-references, terms, soil descriptions, measurement wording, commencement references, and the spelling of <i>E. coli</i> .	Improves readability, internal consistency, and technical accuracy without changing the core policy intent.

4. Further information

Additional information and guidance can be found on the Authority's website for each of the four standards as below:

- [Discharge to water standard | The Water Services Authority - Taumata Arowai](#)
- [Discharge to land standard | The Water Services Authority - Taumata Arowai](#)
- [Beneficial reuse of biosolids standard | The Water Services Authority - Taumata Arowai](#)
- [Management of overflows and bypasses standard | The Water Services Authority - Taumata Arowai](#)

These guidance documents have now been updated to reflect the amendment regulations. The Authority will also be developing guidance on the overflows and bypasses standard, with the expected release in mid-2027. For any further questions or clarifications on the wastewater amendments, please contact stormwater_wastewater@taumataarowai.govt.nz.