

Proposed changes to the future of the Ōpaki Water Race



MASTERTON
WHAKAORIORI
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Introduction

Masterton District Council recently sought feedback from Ōpaki Water Race (Race) ratepayers and users on the future of the Race following changes to the law that have automatically extended the Council's resource consents to operate the Race. The Council is now formally consulting with Race ratepayers and users on a proposal to keep operating the Race for a further year, until 30 June 2027, on the basis that the costs are recovered via a targeted rate.

This Consultation Document has been prepared in accordance with sections 82, 82A and 83 of the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA). Our background and proposal for the future of the Ōpaki Water Race is in this document.

Submissions Close Monday 8 June



Background

In 2020, Masterton District Council decided to close the Ōpaki Water Race (the Race) at the expiry of the current Resource Consents on 30 June 2026.

The Race takes water from the Ruamāhanga River and distributes it via open channel branches to approximately 50 properties of varying size and land use across parts of the Ōpaki district, north of Masterton. The Race was originally built to provide grazing stock with water. As land use has changed over time, the Race water has been used for other uses such as grape irrigation and vineyard frost protection in addition to stock water. Due to low river levels and riverbed degradation, significant investment in river works will be required to secure intake flows for the future, including next summer.

Properties that use the Race pay a targeted rate to have access to water in the Race.

The Council consulted with Race users in 2019 before it made the decision to close the Race by 30 June 2026. The Council has worked towards closing the Race and is aware that many property owners have since moved away from reliance on the Race and invested in alternative water supplies.

Why are we proposing to extend the operation of the Race?

The Government has recently passed an Act which has automatically extended resource consents for 18 months. The Ōpaki Water Race Users Committee, a group of Race users, have been working with the Council with a view to taking over operation of the Race. The Committee intends to apply for new consents from Greater Wellington Regional Council to operate the Race. However, it is not yet in a position to operate and administer the Race or apply for the consents. Extending the operation of the Race will give the Committee time to become established while not interrupting the operation of the Race.

The Council sought feedback from the Ōpaki Water Race ratepayers and users, to help the Council decide what it should do — continue with closing the Race by 30 June 2026 or continue operating the Race under the extended consents.

This feedback was considered alongside other advice and information at an extraordinary Council meeting on 29 April 2026.

The Council resolved to consult with the Ōpaki Water Race ratepayers and users on a proposal to continue to operate the Race to 30 June 2027.

Our proposal

The Council proposes to continue to operate the Ōpaki Water Race for an additional 12 months only, until 30 June 2027.

This will allow additional time for the Ōpaki Water Race Users Committee to establish themselves to be able to take over operations of the Race after this date and to apply for resource consents. As a result of this extension, the Ōpaki Water Race targeted rate would be continued, for those who usually pay the rate, for the rating year 2026/27. The Council would continue to be responsible for the operation of the Race under the current consent conditions, over the time of the extension, to the same level as currently provided.

The Council proposes that the targeted rate for 2026/27 be set based on the Land Value of the properties serviced by the Race. The proposed rate will be \$0.001583 for every dollar of Land Value. This is a 6.2 percent increase in the rate that was charged in 2025/26.

What is the Council not proposing to do?

The Council is not proposing to utilise the full extension of resource consents until 31 December 2027. This is because an end date of 30 June 2027 aligns with the 2026/27 rating year and the Council will not have internal resourcing to maintain the Race past 30 June 2027. This will be transferred to Waiti Water Limited under the Government's Local Water Done Well reforms.

The Council is not proposing to adopt an alternative charging basis such as a user-pays system to cover the cost of operating the Race. It would not be possible to administer and enforce an equitable user-pays system as all properties have access to the Race, regardless of whether they use it or not, and there is no verifiable way to measure usage for most properties. Not charging properties who say they do not use the Race is not feasible as some could use it without paying and others could pay but have no water.

The Council is not proposing to increase maintenance or carry out remedial works on the Ruamāhanga River to restore more consistent Race flow. This is because of the short timeframe to obtain the necessary consent for more substantial works in the river and to carry out the works, the likely high cost of the consent that Race users would need to pay, and the risk of needing additional work if a weather event moves the riverbed again.

Proposed changes

Extending operation of the Ōpaki Water Race by Council until 30 June 2027 (12 months)

This will allow an additional 12 months for the Ōpaki Water Race Users Committee to apply for the consents they require to operate and work on the river and take over operations. This 12-month extension will align with the 2026/27 rating year, allowing the Council to apply a targeted rate as it has done in the past.

Continuing to charge a targeted rate to property owners in Ōpaki who are serviced by the Race

This will pay for the operating and maintenance costs of the Race during the additional 12 months of operation at the same level of service as prior years.

Maintenance of the Race during the additional 12 months of operation to the same level as currently provided.

This will enable Council to continue to operate the Race within the limits of the existing consents. The expectation is that the operating costs will remain at the same level as prior years, but there may be periods when the river intake cannot be altered to achieve optimal flow into the Race as more extensive river works will require additional resource consents.

Alternative option considered

Council considered the alternative option to follow the original resolution made on 28 October 2020 and close the Ōpaki Water Race from 30 June 2026, regardless of the automatic extension on the expiry date of the Consents enabled by legislation. The targeted Ōpaki Water Race rate would cease to be collected.

The Race would be sequentially shut down over the autumn and early winter months, in accordance with a Closure Management Plan submitted to Greater Wellington Regional Council. This would involve removing the culvert structure in the Ruamāhanga River and making good. Once the culvert is removed, there would be no flow into the Race. Fish and aquatic animal species rescue would be carried out at key locations.

The Council does not prefer this option because it does not take advantage of the extended timeframe for the expiry of the Race which would provide the Ōpaki Water Race Users Committee the opportunity to apply for the consents to take over the operation of the Race.

Supporting Documents

The following information is available on our website:

whatsup.mstn.govt.nz/proposed-changes-future-opaki-water-race

- Reports to the Council leading to the decision on 28 October 2020 to close the Race.
- Analysis of feedback from Race ratepayers and users collated in April 2026.

Te āhua o tō tuku kōrero

How you can have your say

This consultation is targeted only to the Ōpaki Water Race ratepayers and users, and iwi. Submissions from other persons will not be considered.

Please provide your feedback on the Proposed Changes to the future of the Ōpaki Water Race by midnight on Monday 8 June 2026.

You can have your say in several ways:



Complete our online submission form at:
whatsup.mstn.govt.nz/proposed-changes-future-opaki-water-race



Download a fillable pdf submission form from the website above and email to: submissions@mstn.govt.nz.



Pick up a submission form from the Masterton District Library or Customer Service Centre at Waiata House, 27 Lincoln Road. You can also print out our printer-friendly form from the website above. Post it to Masterton District Council, Freepost 112477, PO Box 444, Masterton 5840, or drop it off to our Customer Service Centre.



Phone the Strategy Team on 06 370 6300 between 9am and 4pm Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays) and tell us what you think.

Hearing

For those wanting to formally present their views to the Council, a hearing will be held on Wednesday 17 June 2026. You will need to indicate on your submission form that you would like to participate in the hearing.

Submissions close Monday 8 June

He aha au anō

What happens next

Following the consultation period, the hearing and deliberation on submissions received by the Council will be held on 17 June 2026.

The final proposal will be considered by the Council on 24 June 2026 as part of the adoption of the Annual Plan 2026/27.

If adopted, Council will continue to operate the Ōpaki Water Race until 30 June 2027 only.



06 370 6300

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submissions@mstn.govt.nz

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27 Lincoln Road, Masterton
9am - 4pm

Masterton District Council
PO Box 444, Masterton 5840

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