

The future of the Ōpaki Water Race



MASTERTON
WHAKAORIORI
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Overview

The Council is seeking public input on the future of the Ōpaki Water Race (Race), which operates under four resource consents issued by Greater Wellington Regional Council (Consents). These Consents were originally set to expire on 30 June 2026 in alignment with the Council's decision to close the Race by that date.

However, the Resource Management (Duration of Consents) Amendment Act 2025 (Amendment Act) which came into force on 17 December 2025 has automatically extended the expiry date of the Consents to 31 December 2027. This extension has created an opportunity for the Council to reconsider its earlier decision and assess the best course of action moving forward.

After undertaking the special consultative procedure in accordance with section 83 of the Local Government Act 2002, on 28 October 2020, the Council confirmed the Hearings Committee recommendation to close the Race by 30 June 2026. The Council also resolved to work with the Ōpaki water race users committee (a group of Race users) (Users Committee) to achieve closure of the Race and to assist the Users Committee to find alternative water supply options before closure.

Under a further resolution passed on 14 May 2025 the Council resolved to assist the Users Committee to prepare an application for resource consent to Greater Wellington Regional Council for a resource consent to abstract/divert water from the Ruamāhanga River to enable it to operate the Race itself.

Although the intention of the Users Committee is to receive a transfer of the Consents for the Race from MDC and then to apply for its own resource consents to operate the Race in the future (once the Consents expire), the Users Committee has not yet submitted a resource consent application and is not yet in a position to operate and administer the Race itself.

Operation of the Race in early autumn 2026 has been compromised by low flows, riverbed degradation, and changes in the river channel. While rainfall in the Tararua Ranges is expected to restore Race flow, investment in river works, (including obtaining any necessary consents to undertake those works) is required to secure intake flows to the Race for next summer. The costs associated with these works will depend on the scale and complexity of them. For context, early indicative estimates suggest that the physical works could be in the order of \$50,000, excluding professional or consenting fees.

The Council must decide whether to proceed with the planned closure of the Ōpaki Water Race by 30 June 2026, as previously resolved, or to continue operating the Race until the extended expiry date of 31 December 2027. This decision requires careful consideration of financial, environmental, and community factors, as well as the operational challenges currently facing the Race. The Council also acknowledges the interest of the Users Committee in taking over the Race, although the Committee has not yet established the necessary capacity or obtained resource consents to do so.

What we want to know

To guide its decision making, the Council seeks Public feedback, in the form of targeted consultation with the Ōpaki Water Race ratepayers'. The consultation focuses on understanding the ratepayers' perspectives on the following:



the current arrangements for water access and the extent of reliance on the Race



support for the continued operation of the Race and the associated payment of the Ōpaki Water Race rates beyond 30 June 2026



applying for an additional resource consent to carry out necessary works to maintain intake flows into the Race, dependent on the costs being borne by the Users Committee.

Current implications

There are several factors to consider:



Reliance on the Ōpaki Water Race has changed, with several properties now using alternative water sources. We are aware of some properties, however, do not have a confirmed number. This may affect how the costs of the Race should be shared in future if the Race remains open.



The Amendment Act automatically extends the expiry date of the Consents to 31 December 2027, providing the Council with an opportunity to continue operating the Race up to this date (should it decide to).



The Council have previously resolved to close the Race by 30 June 2026.



MDC can apply to Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) to transfer the Consents prior to 31 December 2027 (should Council decide to continue operating the Race). The transfer would be to a new entity established by the Users Committee.



The new entity would need to apply for new resource consents to operate the Race beyond 31 December 2027, should it choose to do so. This would be at the cost of the new entity.



There is no guarantee that a transfer will be approved by GWRC or new resource consents will be obtained by the new entity.



Whether the Government might later legislate another extension beyond 2027 is not reflected in the Amendment Act. Any extension beyond 31 December 2027 would require further legislative change or transitional provisions under the Government's new planning regime.



If the Council decides to proceed to continue operating the Race past the current proposed closure date of 30 June 2026 (ie up to 31 December 2027), the Council would continue to charge a targeted rate to all existing race ratepayers for the costs of keeping the Race operational until its closure or transfer.



Investment in river works is required to secure intake flows for next summer in response to changes in the river.



There is no guarantee that the resource consent for remedial river works to restore the Race flow will be granted by GWRC.



If relying on the extended expiry dates for the Consents, costs for the resource consent application to enable remedial river works to restore the Race flow, as well as rates and maintenance would be passed back onto Race ratepayers irrespective of whether the resource consent is able to be obtained or not.

What we'd like you to do

We are carrying out targeted consultation with Ōpaki Water Race ratepayers to understand what you think the Council should do. Consultation will be open from 9am, Wednesday 8 April, until 5pm, Wednesday 22 April 2026.

You can have your say:



By completing the online feedback form at:
whatsup.mstn.govt.nz/opaki-water-race

(this page is not publicly available and can only be accessed via the link; you may type it directly into your browser).



By completing the paper feedback form and returning it to our service centre at 161 Queen Street, or to Waiata House, 27 Lincoln Road.