Te Niaotanga ō Mataatua ō Te Arawa Matatā Wastewater

How we reached the preferred option

I pēhea i whakatau i te kōwhiringa i mariu ai

The story behind the project

He tirohanga whakamuri

The existing Matatā wastewater management system is no longer working effectively. Despite decades of effort to establish a centralised wastewater solution, the town continues to struggle with poor wastewater management. High groundwater levels and the proximity to sensitive environmental areas make individual property septic tanks and disposal fields ineffective.

As a result, effluent from these onsite systems is seeping into the environment and contaminating land and water, including Te Awa o Te Atua (Matatā Lagoon). This is impacting both environmental health and the cultural connections mana whenua have with their rohe.

To address this, Whakatāne District Council, working alongside mana whenua through the Te Niaotanga ō Mataatua ō Te Arawa Co-Design Group, is developing a new wastewater system for Matatā. In September 2025, Council confirmed the preferred option: a moderate-scale wastewater treatment plant, with treated wastewater irrigated safely to land.

Our objectives

Ngā whāinga

The project has been guided by several overarching project outcomes and principles including:

- **Environmental and public health outcomes** – infrastructure that improves water quality and ecology in local rivers, drains, Te Awa o Te Atua (Matatā Lagoon) and the Tarawera Awa.
- **Cultural outcomes and consistency with Te Ao Māori principles** – local iwi and hapū share the aspiration of safeguarding the taiao within the Matatā rohe, restoring the mauri of Tarawera Awa and protecting the cultural landscape, which is of the utmost importance.
- **Supporting Whakatāne District and mana whenua growth aspirations** – making Matatā a place where people want to live, work and play. The goal is to support iwi and hapū aspirations for papakāinga development, encourage whānau to return home and create opportunities for future growth.
- **Sustainable and resilient outcomes** – resilient infrastructure that is safe, supports community wellbeing and can respond to emerging hazards and risks.
- **Long term growth and futureproofing outcomes** – infrastructure that supports growth over the next 50 years, ensuring future generations have a place they are proud to call home.

History of decisions

Te hītori o ngā whakataunga

The Council, supported by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and Toi Moana Bay of Plenty Regional Council (BOPRC), has a long history of attempts to implement a reticulated wastewater system.

2004–2011 **Early proposals**	• MOH 'Sanitary Works Subsidy Scheme' $6.7M funding approved in 2004 due to health risks posed by septic tank use in Matatā.
2013 **Council decision**	• Full reticulation confirmed (84% community support).
2014–2015 **Consenting and appeals**	• Council proposed wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) and land application. • Consent granted and then appealed. • Environment Court partially granted the appeal, revoking designations and resource consents for the WWTP and postponing decisions on the land application field.
2015–2017 **Integrated project**	• Council agreed to explore alternative wastewater solutions for Matatā and a new project was developed with limited input from tangata whenua. • Funding and consenting issues stalled progress and the Edgecumbe Flood caused further delays.
2018 **Maintenance zone and Bay of Plenty OSET Plan Change**	• Toi Te Ora Public Health requested Matatā be recognised as a Maintenance Zone to provide for greater maintenance and inspection requirements. • BOPRC and MOH indicated to Council that a solution needs to be decided.
2020–Present **co-design approach**	• Council commenced a new project which was recognised in the 2021-31 and 2024-34 Long-Term Plan as a high priority project. • Te Niaotanga ō Mataatua ō Te Arawa Co-Design Group established. • Preferred option endorsed September 2025 by Council.

PROJECT JOURNEY

Te Niaotanga ō Mataatua ō Te Arawa Matatā Wastewater

1 Council resets project

Council decision to reset the project, including identifying as a top priority for Council.

2 Establish co-design approach

Establish co-design approach with iwi, hapū and Council representatives. Establish technical team.

3 Review previous information

Understand what technical work was undertaken before to support new project.

4 Commence environmental monitoring

Establish robust surface water, groundwater and invertebrates monitoring programme to determine current environment.

5 Identify possible land sites

Through the co-design process, it was determined the treated wastewater needed to be discharged onto land and not into the water.

Develop map and technology based tool to support identification of possible land sites.

6 Undertake initial land based testing

7 Identify wastewater system options

Creating options for future wastewater system and selecting the best fit for the future.

8 Selection of the recommended option

WE ARE HERE

9 Community engagement and feedback

10 Resource consent application

Collate documentation for the new wastewater discharge consent.

11 Further community consultation

Community updated on progress of consenting documents.

Lodge consent application

All supporting documents for the new discharge consent are to be lodged to Bay of Plenty Regional Council.

Te Niaotanga ō Mataatua ō Te Arawa

Preferred option selection

Te kōwhiringa e mariu nei

Comprehensive options analysis has been carried out as part of the project. This work looked at both non-reticulation and reticulation options against agreed project objectives and technical criteria. Te Niaotanga ō Mataatua ō Te Arawa Co-Design Group considered a full range of options and developed a recommended wastewater system for Council's consideration.

In September 2025, Council's Infrastructure and Planning Committee endorsed the preferred option for the Matatā Wastewater Project, as recommended by the Te Niaotanga ō Mataatua ō Te Arawa Co-design Group.

Preferred option: Medium scale system

Summary outline

- Wastewater is treated centrally via a packaged medium technology, modular treatment plant.
- Low sludge.
- The liquid effluent is suitable for land-based disposal methods.

Reticulation	Pressurised system
Household collection	STEP (Septic Tank Effluent Pump) system
Treatment	Packed bed bioreactor with ultra-violet (UV) disinfection
Disposal	Low-rate land irrigation matched to the soil capacity

Key assumptions

- Growth within the General Residential Zone, allowing for up to 700 homes.
- Packed bed bioreactor treatment through modular inground built pods on Tahi Hill Farm.
- Includes drainage and recontouring of Tahi Hill Farm to maximise area available for land irrigation, avoiding the need for additional land.

Funding and financing

More detailed costings for the preferred option are underway. These will be supported by discussions with councillors to determine the most appropriate mix of funding sources and tools for delivering and operating the system over time. The outcomes of these discussions will inform future Long Term Plan and Annual Plan development and consultation.

Next steps

E whai ake nei

The project team are developing a consenting strategy to guide the next phase of technical work on the preferred option. Progress updates will be reported to the Council through the regular committees and meetings. For further information on the Matatā Wastewater Project please go to: **whakatane.govt.nz/matata-wastewater**