

Report of Glenorchy Wastewater Seminar, 25 February 2017

Seventy-two people attended a wastewater seminar in Glenorchy organised by Sustainable Glenorchy and funded by the Glenorchy Community Association and Glenorchy Community Trust.

Presentations setting out the context and issues surrounding and impacting decisions on community wastewater management, options for onsite treatment and the local hazard environment were followed by a general discussion, and question and answer session.

The workshop was facilitated by Jon Mitchell.

In attendance were councillors Clarke and Ferguson, and Ulrich Glasner Chief Engineer from Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC); and Simon Beardmore from the Otago Regional Council (ORC).

Key facts and issues that emerged from the Seminar:-

1. There is no current baseline information i.e. actual knowledge of local water quality, the state of existing on-site systems, and the volumes of waste produced by commercial users and public toilet facilities. Local sampling, inspection monitoring or measurement is not undertaken.
2. The length of time until new water standards are implemented by the ORC is uncertain, several years at the least and there are no current indications as to what those standards may be.
3. The probability of an Alpine Fault earthquake event is 30-50% and there will be a significant event due to the rupture of at least one local fault within the life of any wastewater scheme. It was noted that the QLDC had described this risk as 'low to medium' in its assessment of risks to the current proposal.
4. There is a lack of knowledge of who or what is driving the implementation of the current scheme. Neither the ORC or QLDC staff members could explain why a scheme for Glenorchy was being advanced at this time.
5. Affordability was a key issue on which further work needs to be undertaken in order for QLDC to fulfil its requirements under the Local Government Act. Estimates for the current QLDC proposal are approximately \$25,000 per household. It was noted that for a job lot, on-site advanced secondary treatment systems with disposal field would be around \$13,000. An attendee from the Kingston Community Association told the meeting that although QLDC had ruled out a community system for Kingston as it would cost over \$30k per household, the Association had a quote of around \$18,000 per household for a STEP scheme. The price included the disposal area. There was concern that annual costs alone of \$750 for water and \$900 for wastewater were unaffordable for many. It was stated that the community needed a caring solution that preserved the character of the community.
6. Two of the speakers cautioned that on-site systems are not without their drawbacks but that the risks to the environment and public health can be mitigated if the treatment plant and disposal systems are well designed for the site, are well constructed and well maintained.

This led to a discussion about:-

1. Community self-help and certification of existing and new on-site wastewater treatment units. The community or Council could lead implementation of audit, inspection and maintenance of on-site systems. Paul Brainerd spoke of his own positive personal experience of working under such a regime in the United States.
2. It was considered that on-site treatment was a viable option that would work within discharge standards for the vast majority of the community.
3. A wastewater installer who was present was concerned that QLDC intended to replace a network of dispersed treatment units. The units ensured residual waste products were diluted to a level beyond detection with a pipeline that concentrated all the waste, and passed it through a series of pumping stations. Each pumping station presented a risk of failure and discharge and did so in the immediate vicinity of our water supply and major streams leading directly to the lake.
4. It was noted that greywater meets the most stringent discharge standards for Nitrogen and technologies that capture toilet wastes could easily meet discharge standards. A range of such technologies already exist in Glenorchy.
5. Following the presentation on the hazard environment affecting Glenorchy, the question was raised as to whether or not it is appropriate for the community to grow in size? It was agreed that this was a pertinent question, but outside of the scope of the seminar.