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Focus group aims to improve Wairoa River

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Three local organisations breach discharge water consents nearly 20 times over 18 months

THE HEALTH of the Wairoa River is the focus of a stakeholder group aiming to improve water quality.

Last August the Wairoa Star revealed three local organisations, Affco, Wairoa District Council (WDC) and Silver Fern Farms, had breached their discharge water consents nearly 20 times over 18 months.

Affco was responsible for 10 breaches relating to water quality.

Affco general manager Andy Leonard said Affco had been working on compliance with all aspects of the discharge.

Part of that work has been activating a 2008 memorandum of understanding Affco made with the Department of Conservation which includes liaising with a working party towards sustainable management of the Wairoa River.



Wairoa River. File picture

This includes a range of investigations to help with consultation and decision-making.

In March WDC established a Wairoa River Community Wastewater stakeholder focus group, which Affco has joined.

The group is part of the council's consultation process with the wider community for its wastewater scheme resource consent renewal.

The group will help guide the consultation process with the wider community, with representation from council, tangata whenua and individuals from different sections of the community including business, older citizens and youth.

WDC engineering manager Jamie Cox is pleased Affco will be represented.

"We can learn from each other by sharing information to achieve better environmental outcomes," Mr Cox said.

"The council will be better informed as we seek the best option for cultural, environmental, social, and financial sustainability.

"The stakeholder group is not a decision-making entity and it does not replace consultation with the community. It is intended to enhance our consultation process and make it more effective."

Community consultations will include a series of publications, meetings and workshops.

Mr Leonard said Affco has a policy of continuous improvement in respect of its operations, including wastewater treatment and will continue to explore ways of improving the quality and reducing the quantity of its discharge.

Part of their resource consent requires signage, yet to be erected, near the discharge points and also 200 metres downstream from their diffusion pipe located in the Wairoa River.

The signage was to provide clear identification of the location, nature and timing of the discharge and the extent of the mixing zone.

Mr Leonard said Affco had undertaken extensive water quality monitoring confirming discharge was operating as required.

A survey showed Affco was not having an adverse effect on fish in the estuary.

The company was committed to an aspirational target of zero waste, and was committed to a programme of continuous improvement, he said.

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