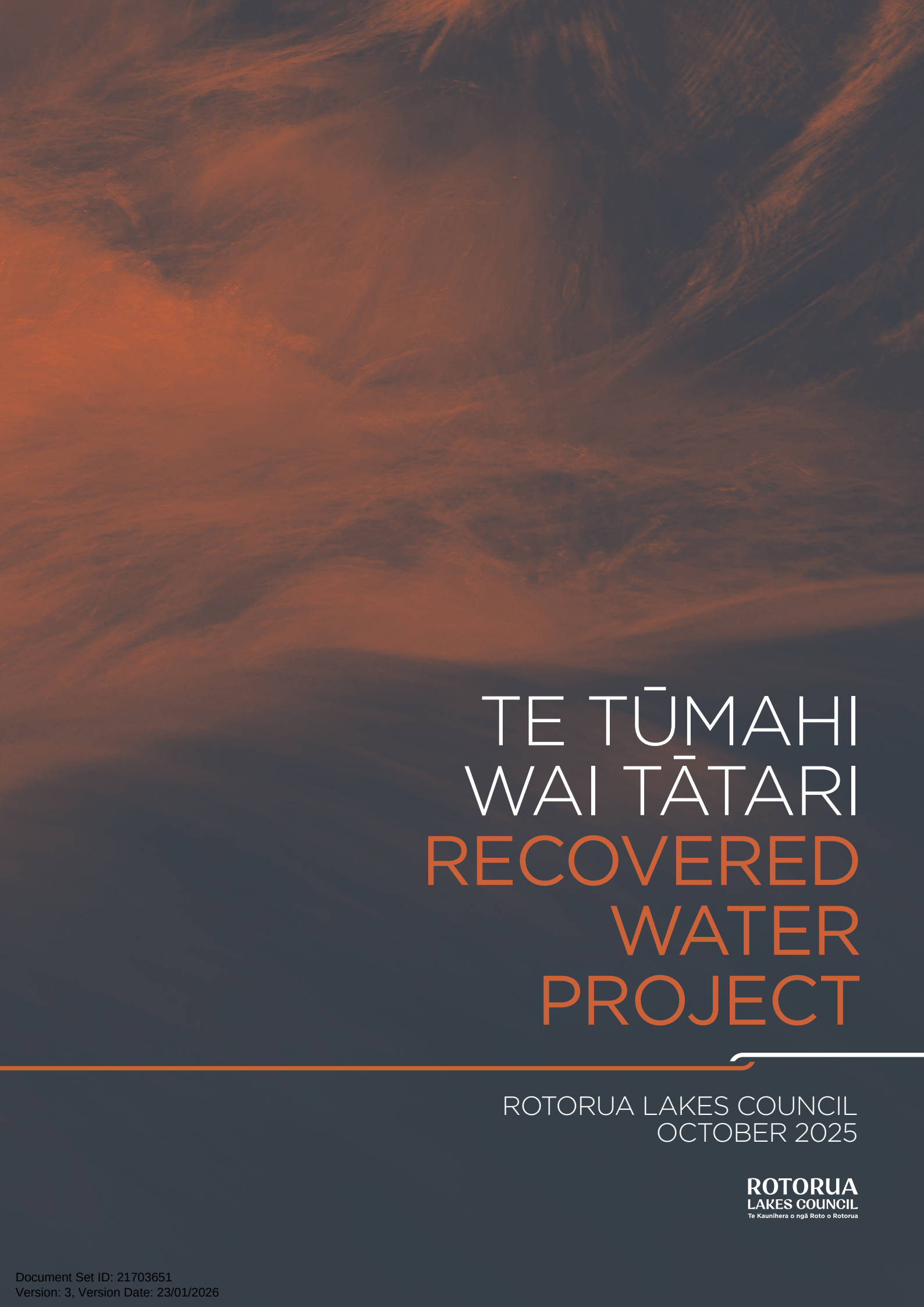




# TE TŪMAHI WAI TĀTARI RECOVERED WATER PROJECT

---

ROTORUA LAKES COUNCIL  
OCTOBER 2025

**ROTORUA**  
LAKES COUNCIL  
Te Kaunihera o ngā Roto o Rotorua

“

This is a complex challenge, but it's also a unique opportunity.

”

## 1. WELCOME

Tēnā koutou katoa,

Nau mai, haere mai, me ngā mihi nui mōu i tūhono mai ki tēnei haerenga nui. He ekenga whakamua hirahira tēnei - ko te whakatūhanga o te Rōpū Whāiti mō te Whakahaere Wai Tātari hei whiriwhiri i tētehi whakatau motuhake mō te anamata o Rotorua, he whakatau e whakanui ana i tō tātau taiao, ō tātau uara ahurea, me tā tātau haepapa ngātahi ki ngā reanga kei te heke mai.

He ara tāpokopoko te hikoi, engari he rirohanga motuhake e tatari mai ana.

I roto i te tuamakatanga o ngā mana whenua, o ngā reo kōrero o te hāpori, o ngā mātanga pūkenga, me ngā manu mātārae, ko te whāinga ia, ka kitea i roto i te huarahi ka whāia ngā hiahia me ngā take matua o ā tātau tāngata.

Mā te takitini ka kite he huarahi ki te tiaki i te taiao, ki te whakaata i ngā mātāpono o te hāpori, me te hāpai i te oranga o Rotorua, ā, haere ake nei.

Koiana anō te mihi ki a koe me tō ngākau nui ki tēnei kaupapa.

Ngā mihi,

Greetings to you all,

Welcome and thank you for joining us on this important journey. The formation of the Recovered Water Management Solution Working Group represents a significant step forward in shaping an important decision for Rotorua's future - one that honours our environment, our cultural values, and our shared responsibility to future generations.

This is a complex challenge, but it's also a unique opportunity.

By bringing together mana whenua, community voices, technical experts, and elected representatives, we aim to ensure that the solution we choose reflects the aspirations and priorities of our people.

Together we will work to find a viable long-term solution that protects our taiao, reflects the values of our community, and supports the wellbeing of Rotorua for generations to come.

Thank you once again for your commitment to this kaupapa.

Kind regards,

Tania Tapsell  
Her Worship the Mayor of Rotorua



## PURPOSE OF THE WORKING GROUP:

The Recovered Water Management Solution Group has been established to assess options and recommend a viable solution for the future management of recovered water from the upgraded wastewater treatment plant in Rotorua.

The solution will need to meet new regulations and standards that have been signalled but yet to come into effect.

The working group will receive ideas for potential solutions from interested groups, Te Arawa entities, environmental advocacy groups and technical experts and make initial assessments of these proposals to recommend to elected members which should be further investigated.

Engagement with iwi/hapu/mana whenua and the wider community will provide community views. Options selected for further assessment will then be weighted against approved criteria and a preferred option will be presented to Council.

It is envisaged Council could approve a solution in the first quarter of 2027.

## The working group includes:

- Up to 3 Rotorua Lakes Council elected members;
- 1 representative from Te Tatau o Te Arawa;
- 4 mana whenua nominations;
- 3 wider community representatives (appointed via an Expressions of Interest process);
- 1 Project Sponsor (RLC staff).
- Rotorua Lakes Council CE will be the Interim chair.

## The role of the working group:

- Evaluate potential solutions using a multi-criteria assessment (MCA) framework;
- Oversee investigations into shortlisted solutions;
- Assess solutions against Stage 2 values;
- Recommend a preferred solution to Council.

## 2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

### Project summary:

Recovered water is currently discharged via Whakarewarewa Forest but with the end of the current resource consent, a new location possibly outside the forest needs to be found.

The ground's ability to sustain the ongoing discharge is decreasing. The ability to remove nutrients is also decreasing but will not be required once a major upgrade of the district's wastewater treatment plant upgrade is complete.

The irrigation system remains in place in the meantime, with the agreement of CNI Iwi Holdings Ltd, the forest landowners.

The upgrade of the city's wastewater treatment plant is underway and when complete will treat wastewater to an even higher standard with additional phosphorus removal, ultra filtration and UV treatment.

The upgrade will also increase the plant's capacity to cater for projected growth and peak flows during weather events.

### Discharge Location History

In 1991, treated wastewater began being discharged into Whakarewarewa Forest via irrigation blocks for further land-based treatment.

Treated wastewater is sprayed into the forest and seeps through land in the Purenga catchment before ultimately discharging into Lake Rotorua.

Cultural concerns from tāngata whenua prompted the Environment Court in 2013 to direct Rotorua Lakes Council (RLC) to investigate alternatives. In response, Council signed a deed committing to end forest spraying by 2019.

In 2014, the Rotorua Project Steering Committee (RPSC) was formed to explore new discharge options.

The committee included iwi and hapū representatives, technical experts, and council officials, and placed strong emphasis on cultural impact assessments.

The committee considered a range of possible ecosystem discharge solutions out of the forest including:

- Rapid filtration beds;
- Monitoring ponds;
- Gabion basket infiltration (rocks and baskets);
- Various wetland configurations including engineered wetlands and floating wetlands;
- Direct to water.

After extensive consultation and feasibility studies, a Land Contact Bed system was selected as the preferred discharge method.

In late 2018, Te Arawa Lakes Trust opposed the proposed discharge into Te Arikioa Channel and Lake Rotorua via the contact bed, citing cultural and environmental concerns.







## IRRIGATION MAP OF WHAKAREWAREWA FOREST

The orange areas in the map below show the irrigation zones.



Spray Area Information Boards.



Spray Irrigation Blocks



This opposition led to a collaborative agreement in 2020 between RLC, CNI Iwi Holdings, and Te Arawa Lakes Trust.

The Kawenata agreement allowed for a temporary discharge in the Whakarewarewa Forest while a long-term solution was developed.

In early 2025, RLC opened the discussion around selecting a new discharge site to a wider community group, seeking broader input and guidance.

As of mid-2025, recovered water from the Wastewater Treatment Plant is still being discharged to the forest site, but only until a new discharge solution is in place.

The final discharge location will be determined once a new solution is agreed upon, designed, consented, and commissioned.

### Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrade

The Rotorua Wastewater Treatment Plant, located at Te Ngae Road, was originally constructed in 1973 and has undergone several upgrades to meet growing demand and environmental standards.

In 2014, alongside discharge planning, the Rotorua Project Steering Committee began evaluating treatment system improvements.

The committee unanimously supported the upgrade of the treatment plant.

An approximately \$65 million contract was entered into for construction of an upgraded treatment plant and site works started in December 2022, marking a major milestone in the transformation of Rotorua's wastewater infrastructure.

Although the current plant treats water to an extremely high standard, the upgraded plant will significantly improve the quality of the treated water. This will include a higher level of nitrogen and phosphorus removal and full disinfection of bacteria such as E. Coli.

The treatment plant build is approximately 80% complete. Practical completion is expected by Q3 2026, after which the upgraded plant will begin discharging significantly improved recovered water to the existing forest site. This will continue until a new discharge solution is in place.

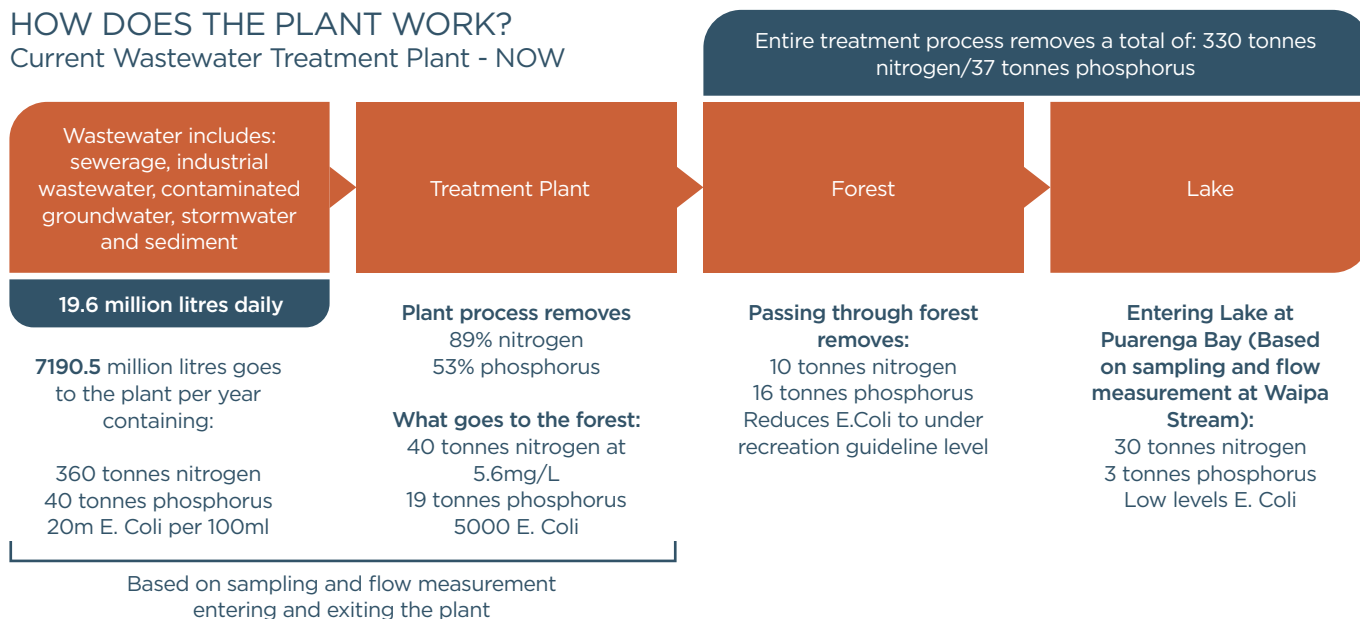
Once the upgrade is complete, the quality of the recovered water from the plant will be amongst the highest in the country.





## HOW DOES THE PLANT WORK?

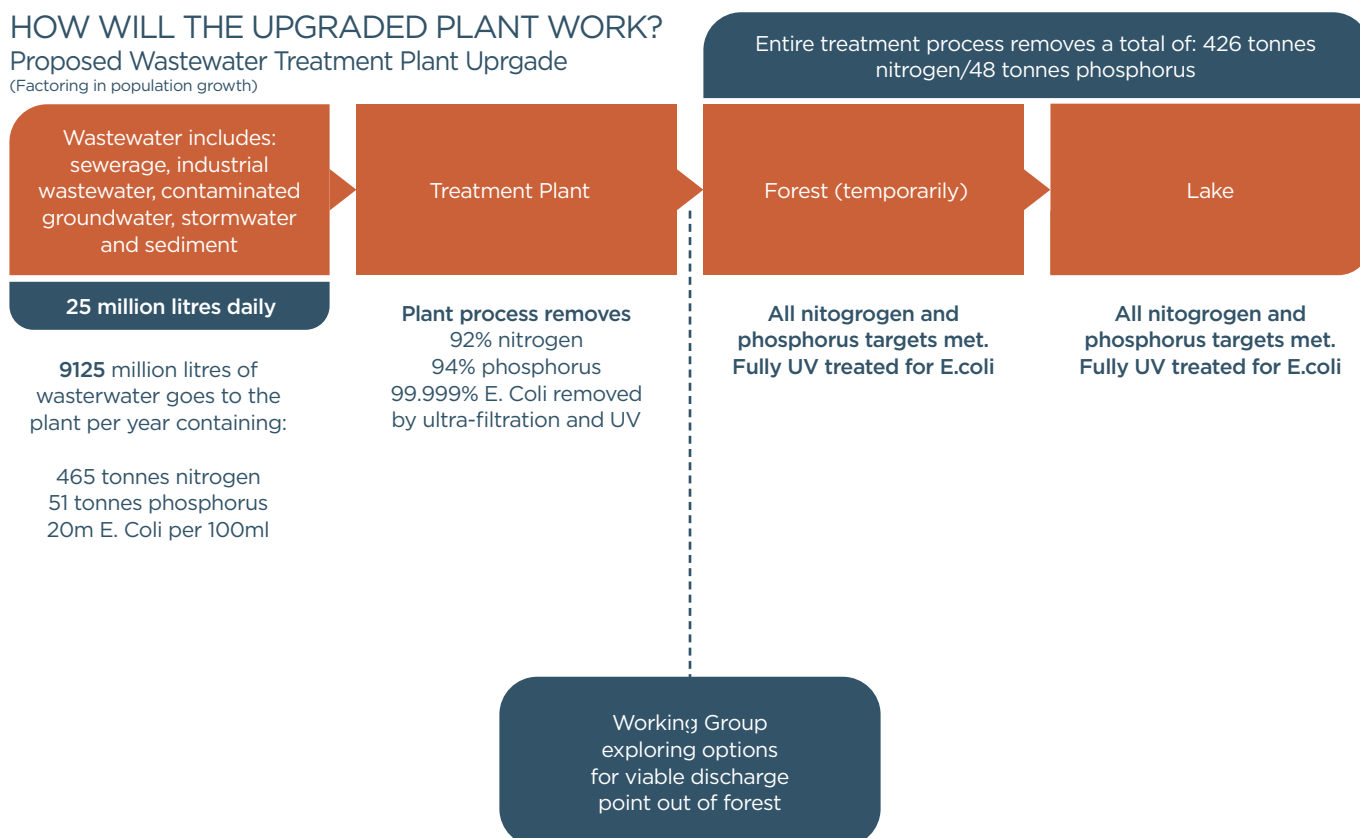
### Current Wastewater Treatment Plant - NOW



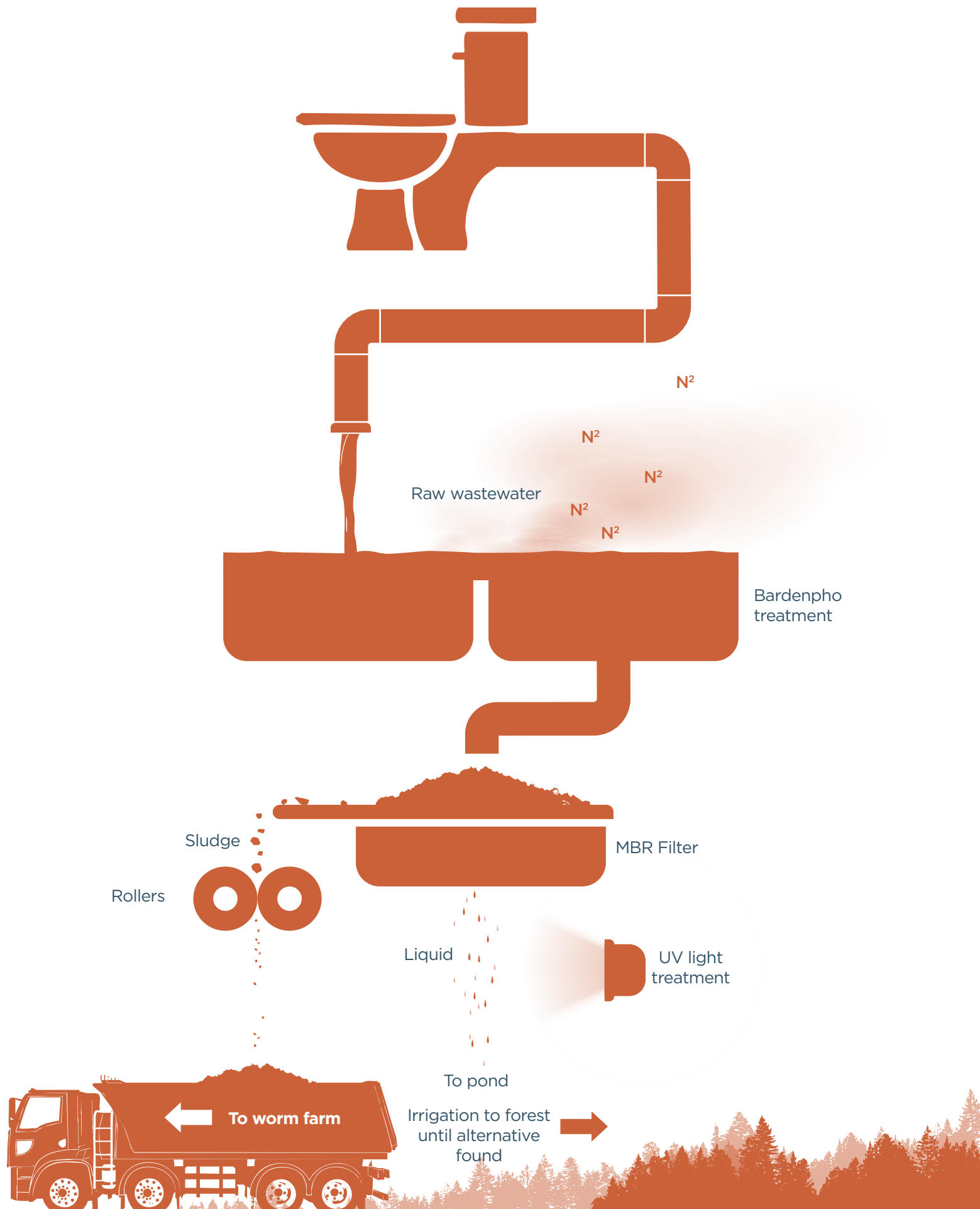
**Note:** with the forest process becoming more unreliable, nutriment removal is becoming less effective.

## HOW WILL THE UPGRADED PLANT WORK?

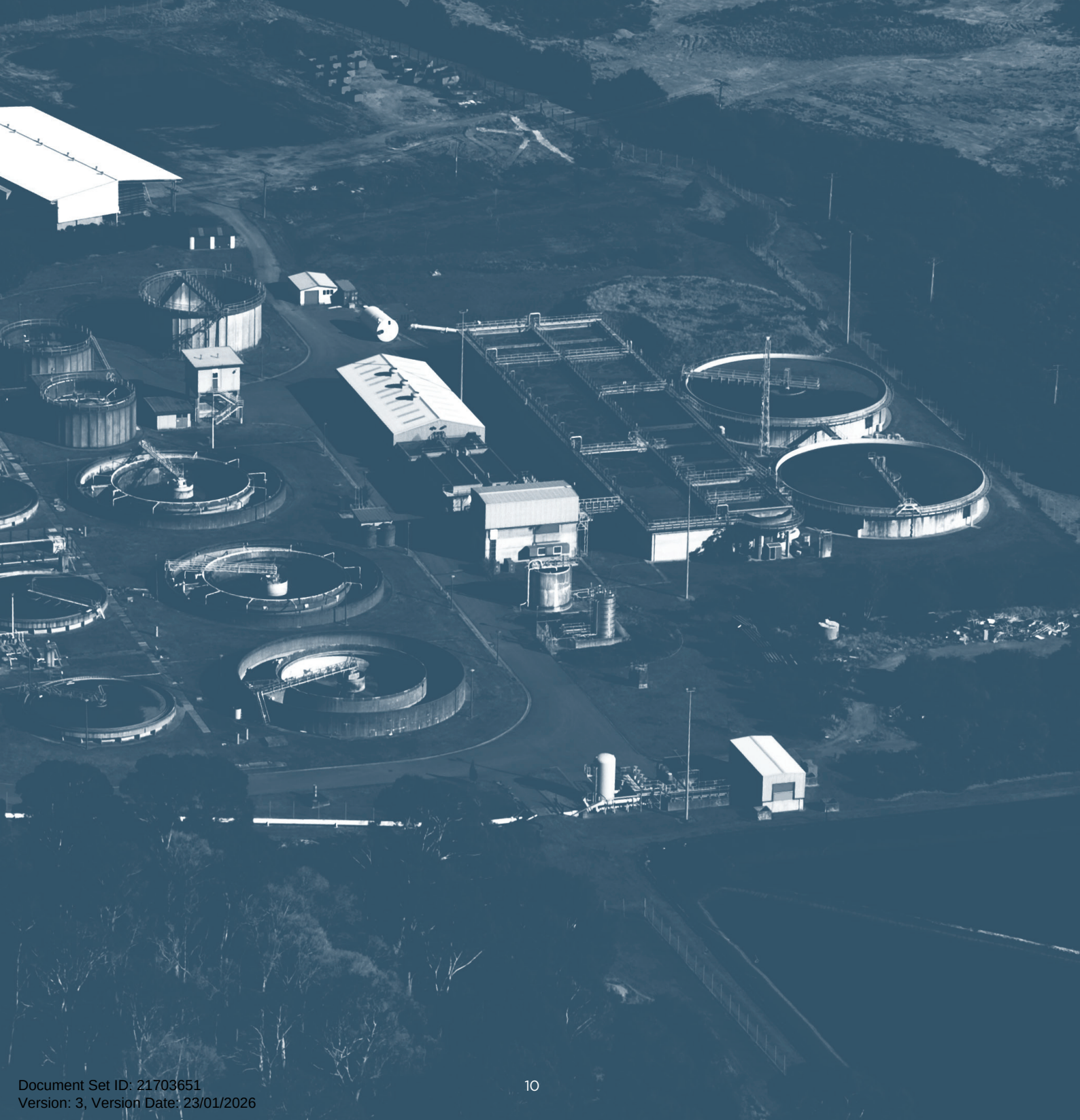
### Proposed Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade (Factoring in population growth)











“

The Recovered Water Project faces significant complexity, in assessing possible solutions...

”

### 3. DECISION - MAKING FRAMEWORK

A structured evaluation framework—Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA)—is being applied to ensure rigour and transparency in decision-making.

Multi-criteria analysis (MCA) is used to assess multiple criteria, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to compare different alternatives and options. It is designed to be transparent, robust, repeatable and apply sound logic.

The Recovered Water Project faces significant complexity, in assessing possible solutions, land identification and procurement, environmental factors, mana whenua impacts, cost implications, intergenerational equity and benefit realisation.

The MCA framework is structured in two stages:

#### STAGE 1 – PASS/FAIL CRITERIA

Solutions must meet all Stage 1 criteria (below) to proceed.

- Technical feasibility;
- Legal and regulatory compliance;
- Fits within Council's Long Term Plan allocated budget or less.

The working group will assist the project team in defining the scope of investigations and will receive monthly updates. Once sufficient information is gathered, the group will initiate the Stage 1 analysis.

The results will be presented to Council for approval to proceed to Stage 2.



## STAGE 2 – VALUES ASSESSMENT

Solutions that pass Stage 1 will undergo detailed investigation and reporting.

The working group will then conduct a values-based assessment using approved weightings outlined below:

| Stage 2 Values                                                                                                 | Relative weighting |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| a) Relationship with mana whenua                                                                               | 10                 |
| b) Community acceptance and support                                                                            | 10                 |
| c) Environmental outcomes (Te Mauri O Te Wai/Health of Water alignment), including intergenerational outcomes. | 10                 |
| d) Total lifecycle cost                                                                                        | 35                 |
| e) Implementation risk                                                                                         | 35                 |
| TOTAL                                                                                                          | 100                |

The outcome will be a recommended solution or shortlist presented to Council for final approval.

Once Council selects and approves a solution, the project will exit the MCA decision-making phase.

The working group's role will be reviewed to determine its ongoing suitability as an advisory body.

The project team will then lead the approved solution through detailed design, consenting, procurement, construction, commissioning, and handover to operations.

### NEGOTIABLES

There are several areas where stakeholders—particularly mana whenua, landowners, and the wider community—can meaningfully influence outcomes.

#### Key negotiables include:

- **Discharge Location:** While the current site in Whakarewarewa Forest is temporary, the long-term discharge location is yet to be determined. Stakeholders can help identify and assess potential sites based on cultural, environmental, and practical criteria.
- **Cultural Values:** Mana whenua input is essential in shaping how the discharge system reflects tikanga Māori.
- **Community Engagement Process:** Stakeholders can influence how engagement is carried out - who is involved, how feedback is gathered, and how decisions are communicated.

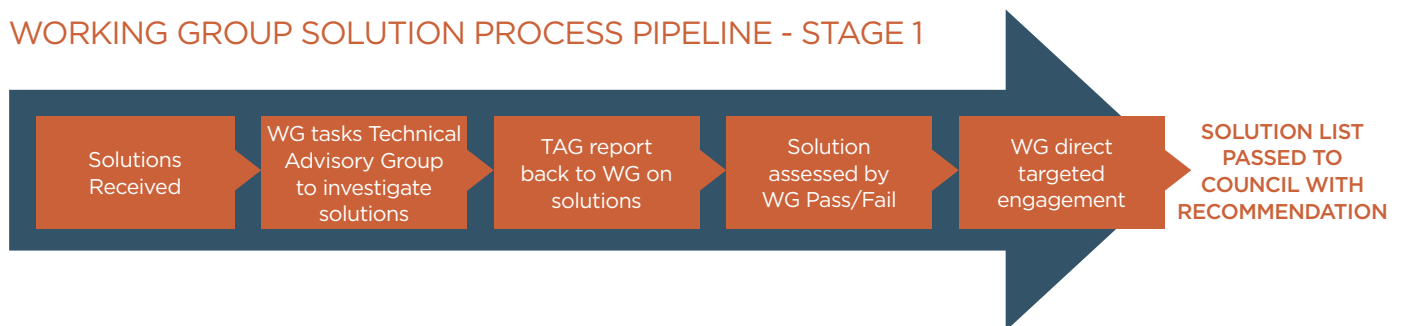
These negotiables are central to building trust, ensuring transparency, and delivering a solution that reflects shared values and priorities.

## NON-NEGOTIABLES

While the Recovered Water Project invites input from mana whenua, stakeholders, and the wider community, there are several elements that are non-negotiable due to legal, technical, or regulatory constraints.

- The upgrade of the Wastewater Treatment Plant is already underway and approximately 80% complete. The design and commissioning timeline (mid-2026) are fixed and cannot be altered.
- Any future discharge solution must comply with the new national standards for wastewater discharge, biosolids use, and overflow management.
- A viable alternative to the existing discharge arrangement in Whakarewarewa Forest needs to be found. A new long-term solution must be in place.
- Any solution must ensure the safe management of recovered water to protect public health and the environment. Options that do not meet these standards will not be considered.
- Rotorua Lakes Council will make the final decision on which solution is selected after considering the recommendations from the working group.

## WORKING GROUP SOLUTION PROCESS PIPELINE - STAGE 1



### 1. Submissions received

External stakeholders (mandated) submit potential solutions and all submissions are logged and acknowledged project team and Technical Advisory Group (TAG) may also include additional solutions not suggested by the Working Group.

### 2. Working Group Review

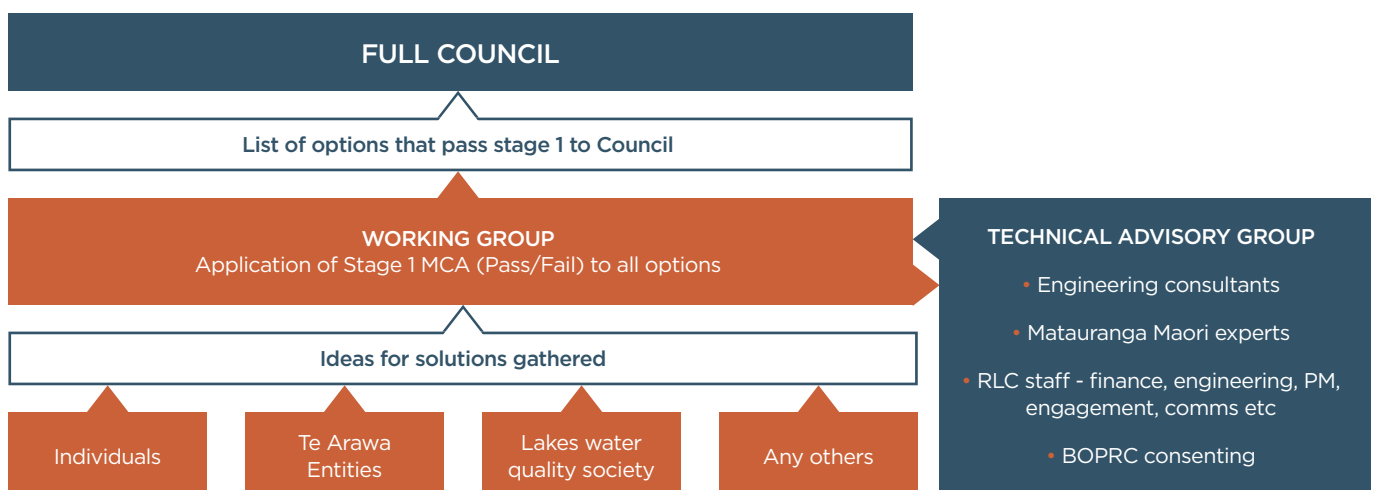
The working group receives the submitted solutions. Conducts a **Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA)** using agreed criteria (e.g mana whenua, feasibility, cost, environment impact). Filters out solutions that don't meet baseline criteria.

### 3. Technical Advisory Group (TAG) Review

Reviews filtered solutions from the working group. Conducts **technical investigations** to assess technical feasibility, risks, compliance, and potential implementation pathways.

### 4. Feedback Loop

TAG provides it's analysis back to the working group. Working group integrates MCA outcomes with technical assessments.





## 4. ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

**The overarching aim of our engagement for the Recovered Water Project aims to achieve the following:**

- Establish and maintain strong, trust-based relationships with key mana whenua and community stakeholders.
- Provide clear, consistent, and culturally appropriate updates on working group progress.
- Facilitate meaningful targeted engagement on proposed solutions, allowing for genuine influence.
- Ensure that feedback from mana whenua and the wider community is captured, communicated, and considered by the Council.
- Identify and promptly address any risks arising within the engagement space.
- Maintain transparent and ongoing communications with landowners throughout the process. This includes providing clear, timely, and accessible information at key stages, so that landowners are informed, able to prepare, and have further opportunities to contribute meaningfully as the project progresses.



## 5. CULTURAL CONTEXT

Rotorua Lakes Council is committed to working alongside mana whenua in a way that recognises and upholds tikanga, mātauranga Māori, and the cultural relationships that connect people to land and water.

By embedding these values into the project, we ensure the solutions we explore are not just technically sound, but also culturally appropriate and enduring.

Through the Recovered Water Management Working Group, mana whenua representatives will sit alongside Council, technical experts, and community representatives.

This group provides a space for genuine engagement, where all perspectives are respected and where iwi and hapū retain the ability to shape and express their own views through their decision-making processes.

We are committed to ensuring landowners are actively involved throughout the entire journey of this project.

Their guidance and knowledge are critical to ensuring that any exit from the forest is managed in a way that respects and restores the land.

Ongoing engagement ensures cultural values, responsibilities, and expectations are central to decision-making and that the forest is cared for in accordance with tikanga Māori and the aspirations of those with ancestral connections to the whenua.

By bringing together cultural, environmental, social, and economic considerations, the project is guided by both mātauranga Māori and scientific knowledge.

This approach helps us to build stronger relationships, honour the role of mana whenua, and create outcomes that reflect Rotorua and its people: Now and for the future.





“

This is an important project for the whole community

”

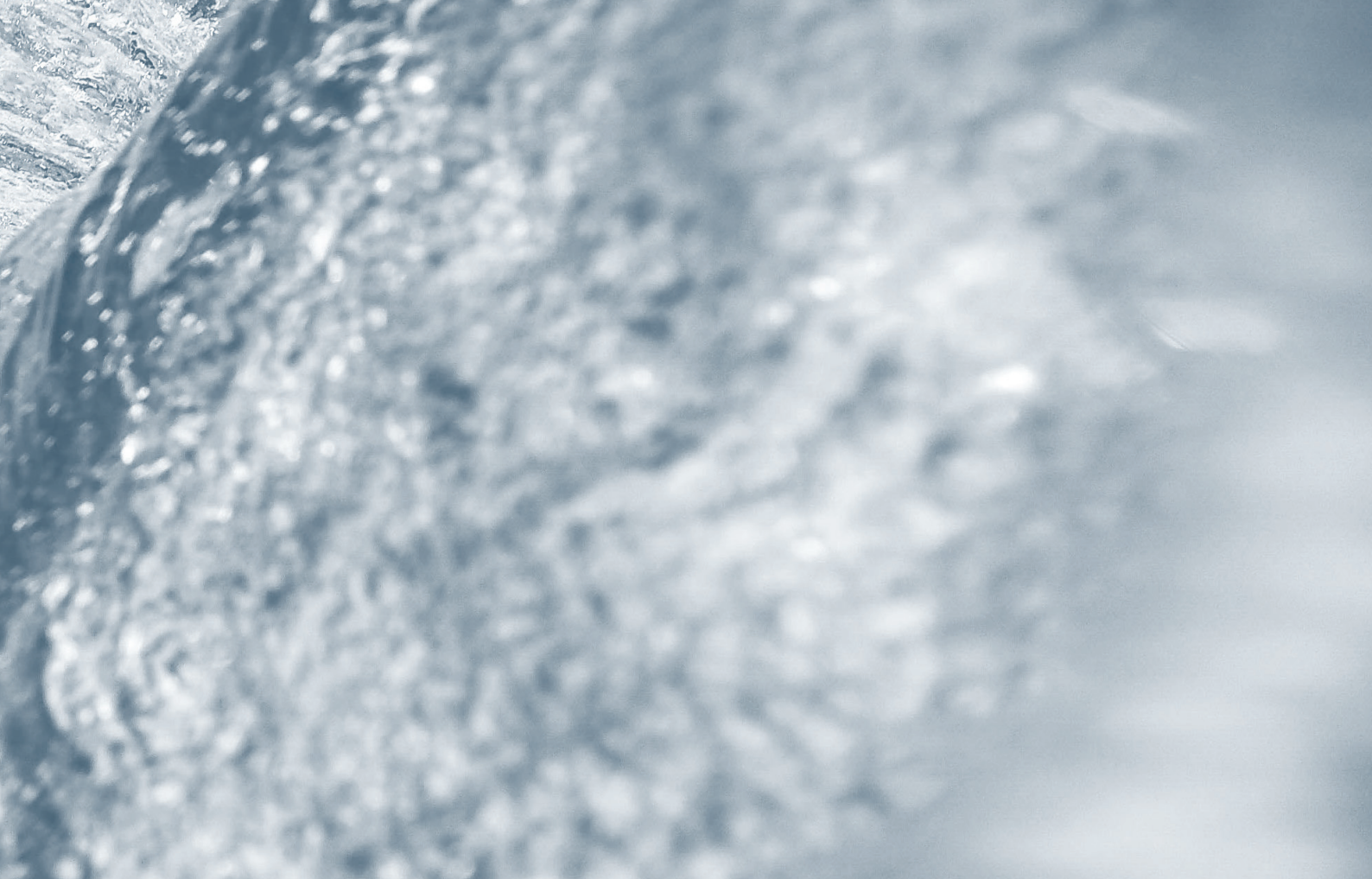
## 6. COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

Recovered Water Project webpage (contains information about the project and updates)  
[rlc.net.nz/recovered-water](http://rlc.net.nz/recovered-water)

### Key messages

- This is an important project for the whole community.
- Mana whenua, Council, technical experts, and community representatives will work together to assess and recommend a solution.
- The process respects all perspectives and ensures iwi and hapū can shape and express their views. Tikanga and mātauranga Māori are central to decision-making.
- Discharging recovered water into the forest is no longer sustainable due to cultural and environmental concerns.
- Everyone contributes to wastewater - so finding a sustainable, culturally appropriate solution is a shared responsibility.
- The upgrade will improve treatment significantly
- The recovered water after the treatment plant upgrade will meet strict nutrient limits and sustainability goals.
- The project supports the long-term goal of preserving and protecting the region's lakes.





## 8. SUPPORTING MATERIALS

- Kawenata agreement – [rlc.net.nz/Kawenata](https://rlc.net.nz/Kawenata)
- July 23 Report to Council on Recovered Water Project Plan:  
[rlc.net.nz/july-council-agenda](https://rlc.net.nz/july-council-agenda)  
[rlc.net.nz/july-council-minutes](https://rlc.net.nz/july-council-minutes)
- August 27 Report to Council on Recovered Water Management Solution Working Group Construct  
[rlc.net.nz/council-meeting-aug](https://rlc.net.nz/council-meeting-aug)
- RLC Recovered Water project page  
[rlc.net.nz/recovered-water](https://rlc.net.nz/recovered-water)
- Treatment Plant Upgrade project page  
[rlc.net.nz/WWTP-upgrade](https://rlc.net.nz/WWTP-upgrade)



## TIMELINE: ROTORUA WASTEWATER TREATMENT AND DISCHARGE HISTORY SUMMARY

- 1973 – 1978 Wastewater Treatment Plant constructed (1973) with several upgrades to serve about 60,000 people.
- 1991 Treated wastewater irrigated on several blocks in the Whakarewarewa Forest away from recreational tracks.
- Early 2013 Environment Court directs RLC to investigate alternative treated wastewater disposal methods because of concerns from tāngata whenua.  
  
Council signs deed to end spraying of treated wastewater in Whakarewarewa Forest by 2019.
- Early 2014 Rotorua Project Steering Committee (RPSC) established to consider alternative treatment systems and discharge options and provide recommendation.  
  
RPSC is a community-led committee with an independent chair, Te Arawa iwi and hapū representatives, a cultural impact assessment sub-committee, technical advisory group and local and regional council officials.
- Mid to late 2014 Five options shortlisted, feasibility studies undertaken. Rotorua Lakes Council public consultation on initiation stage of the project held and engineering technical report delivered, alongside preliminary cultural impact assessment and discharge locations and effects report.
- 2015 to mid-2016 RPSC selects preferred option (Land Contact Bed) and recommendation made – preliminary designs and final Cultural Impact Assessment (CIA) and consultation draft assessment of environment effects produced.
- Early 2017 Initial Land Contact Bed design signed off by RPSC. Further iwi consultation on development of the bed and discharge structure. Engagement plan developed with Mātauranga Māori expert group, exploring cultural requirements of the proposed bed and discharge structure.
- Late 2017 Hapū, iwi and stakeholder engagement, including public feedback to shape completion of CIA. Draft resource consent filed with Bay of Plenty Regional Council (BOPRC) for pre-lodgement review.

- Mid 2018 RLC submits resource consent application and BOPRC public consultation closes.
- Late 2018 Te Arawa Lakes Trust (TALT) opposes council's application seeking resource consent to discharge treated wastewater to the Te Arikiroa Channel and Lake Rotorua at Puarenga Bay (Sulphur Bay) via a contact bed.
- Mid 2020 RLC, CNI Iwi Holdings and TALT agree to work together towards finding a new long-term solution for discharge of treated wastewater. The agreement - Kawenata - Puarenga Catchment of Te Rotoruanui-a-Kahumatamomoe is guided by Te Tūāpapa o ngā Wai o Te Arawa (Te Arawa Cultural Values Framework).  
  
Agreement allows for discharge within Whakarewarewa Forest as a temporary measure with consent for continuation of existing system until an agreed reduced system is implemented.
- Early to late 2022 Work begins to further develop the 2018 Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) upgrade design and provide a price for construction. \$65m (approx) contract agreed for construction of the upgraded plant.  
  
Site works begin – December 2022
- Early 2025 Decision by Council to open the discussion around how to select a new discharge site out to a wider community group to provide input and guidance to this important operational decision
- As of June 2025 The WWTP build is approximately 80% complete, and currently envisaged to reach practical completion by Q3 2026, with the greatly improved (quality) of recovered water discharging to the existing discharge site in the Whakarewarewa forest from then, until such time as we are able to find, design, consent and commission the new discharge solution.
- 2026 - 2027 Performance testing of the WWTP to continue to ensure that the plant is working as designed and project completion currently envisaged for mid-2027





