

Rivercare Te Wai o Pareira Update

The Ōrākei Sewer Line Collapse- What does it mean for Te Wai o Pareira?

The recent Ōrākei main sewer blockage was a big deal for the environmental health of the Waitematā Harbour and the effects may be long lasting. However, for Te Wai o Pareira this is not the only environmental pressure experienced; on top of this large scale event there are regular wastewater overflows into Te Wai o Pareira causing the same risks.

As you are probably aware, the discharge of sewage into water introduces harmful pathogens, potentially disrupting the delicate balance of the ecosystem. The release of excess nutrients can lead to an overgrowth of algae, depleting oxygen levels and suffocating marine life.

The Ōrākei event raised concerns for public health, prompting warnings against swimming or fishing. In addition, the placement of the 'rahui' on the harbour caused the SafeSwim 'Black Flags' to remain at all locations within the harbour. For the watersport clubs that operate on Te Wai o Pareira it meant that they either couldn't train or had to travel long distances to do so. This was an added stress for clubs who already have activities interrupted regularly by other overflow events.

Due to the complexity of the collapse it took around three weeks to install the bypass, There was an estimated 150 litres a second of waste water flowing directly into the harbour, this would equate to 5.18 olympic sized swimming pools worth per day, or over 108 olympic pools for the three weeks before the bypass was installed! The wastewater included sewage, greywater and anything else had been put down the drains above the break.

Watercare (in conjunction with Auckland Council's Healthy Waters team) undertook testing at many points around the harbour to determine the level of contaminants observed away from the direct source of the spill. Interestingly, many points showed little to no readings above normal which surprised many people but may reflect the complex hydrology of the harbour.

However, photos taken by Grant Routen, showing what appeared to be sewage sludge at the end of Harbour View Road on Te Atatu Peninsula raised questions. We alerted Watercare to this, and they responded with urgency, but by the time their measurements were taken, levels appeared to be normal. The testing results from the Peninsula told an interesting story, with Chapman strand coming back within safe levels but further up the awa at Taipari Strand pathogen levels were very high suggesting we may be dealing with a separate additional overflow.

Te Wai o Pareira experiences numerous overflows each year, resulting in many hundreds of liters of waste entering the awa. These overflows create the same risks that the Ōrākei events did, however unlike this event which received national press and immediate action, very little is done to improve infrastructure of even our most prolific, polluter, Manhole 10. Rivercare are thankful that the collapse in Parnell was given serious attention but we want to see all sewage entering the harbour being treated with urgency to fix the root causes. Whilst we acknowledge that a fix for Manhole 10 is complex and expensive, we would like to see equity in how this is treated when we look at the expense and urgency afforded this recent emergency.

Tawa Esplanade- Before and After

If you follow us on Facebook you may have seen some before and afters of the transformation at Tawa Esplanade in Te Atatu Peninsula, but they are too good not to share again. This is what three rounds of planting and lots of weed removal looks like.

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