

Waiheke Island local board steps up over water crisis

Diana Worthy 10:06, Dec 19 2017

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Waiheke Aqua manager James Falconer (right) and hose runner Nico Lorenzato are being kept busy delivering water on the island.

Waiheke Island is in crisis as the summer dryness continues, with the list of people needing water deliveries growing daily.

At present, there is a 12-week waiting list at each of the three companies which deliver water.

Most island homes and businesses have their own water tanks, which are normally filled by rain.



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Sonia Christiansen takes a shower at Palm Beach, a move that can help save water.

But the dry weather has seen tank reserves running low, with some people running out of water altogether.

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The island's water companies - Waiheke Aqua, Wai Water and Island Water - draw supplies from aquifers but the amount they can take each day is capped.

Waiheke Local Board members John Meeuwsen, Cath Handley, Paul Walden and Shirin Brown (not pictured) are taking fast action over the water crisis.

A fourth water company - Waiheke Water - is out of action because its premises were flooded in March and April 2017.

The other companies are fully booked until March 16, 2018, or later, with tanker drivers working flat out to meet demand.

Some companies prioritise people who are sick or have young children if they have run out.

Islanders have faced water shortages before, the most recent being January 2017, so know how to conserve the supplies they have.

But Waiheke's population rises from around 9,000 people to at least 40,000 during summer months as holiday home owners arrive along with tourists and visitors.

Waiheke Local Board has launched a campaign to educate visitors about saving water by taking short showers, with a bucket in the shower tray to catch water that can be used in toilets instead of flushing. Each flush uses around seven litres of water.

People are also encouraged to swim in the sea and use showers at the beach to wash. Leaving a tap on to clean teeth is a 'no-no'.

Countdown supermarket in Ostend has been stocking up with bottles of water for people to drink but there are also new drinking fountains at parks on the island.

"A number of people have been asking what the Waiheke Local Board is doing on this. The answer is - plenty," board member John Meeuwsen said.

"We have repeatedly sought assurances that the supply from the aquifer is comfortably adequate to meet all contingencies - and been assured it is.

"We are reprinting the *Waiheke Water Wisdom* pamphlet for wide distribution, including to property managers.

"And we have met with the water supply companies to discuss giving them more flexibility on their daily quotas and other ways Auckland Council may be able to help."

Meeuwsen said the board had approached WINZ to ensure beneficiaries could access their full entitlement to assistance with funding water deliveries.

Now, the board is appealing to the community and visitors to be vigilant about fire hazards.

"We are particularly concerned about the use of any fireworks at New Year," board chairman Paul Walden said.

"A stray firework could start a fire that would spread very quickly in this dry weather."

He said firefighters could struggle to put a major fire out, given the lack of water supplies.

