

# Increased nitrate in Glenavy water

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Extremely high levels of nitrate were found in a South Canterbury town.

Last week, 59 Glenavy residents took samples to the town hall to get tested.

Their tests consistently registered above 8mg of nitrate per litre of water, Greenpeace Senior Campaigner Steve Abel said.

This is the highest nitrate readings for any town that Greenpeace has tested in.

Elevated nitrate levels have the potential to cause health issues, such as bowel cancer,

particularly in pregnant woman and infants under 6 months.

Dr Tim Chambers from the University of Otago attended a public meeting in Glenavy last week to help inform residents of those risks.

"There's been a few quite big, robust studies that have been done that indicate that this is an issue. But, trying to say exactly, precisely what level of exposure [to nitrate in drinking water] is leading to those types of outcomes is quite difficult," he said.

A new water treatment plant, which was programmed to be built before the increased nitrate levels were recorded, is being constructed by the Waimate District Council.

The addition of a denitrification process at the treatment plant is now being investigated by the council, asset group manager Dan Mitchell said.

"Given that nitrate levels are likely to fluctuate in the future, we are working with the contractor to establish options for nitrate removal, and more specifically, for the reduction of



Tim Chambers

nitrates to achieve compliance with the standards should another spike occur in the future."

The denitrification process could be added by

mid-2023, he said.

Dr Chambers said a denitrification plant would be a "band-aid" solution.

"In terms of not really addressing the core issue of nitrate contamination but being able to patch it up to a reasonable quality.

"It could be a long-term fix, but it's also a long-term financial commitment then, because there's ongoing operational costs of running a facility like that.

"And the costs have been estimated in other councils, in the millions of dollars.

"So, it's just whether or not that's the most cost-effective approach for such a small water

supply."

The council would consult with the public before any official decisions were made, Mr Mitchell said.

"Given that denitrification will have significant capital and operational costs, we intend to meet with the affected community in the coming weeks to discuss options and the supporting science in order to establish the preferred solution."

In the meantime, the council would continue to provide access to potable water until final decisions were made about the operational arrangements and commissioning of any solution, Mr Mitchell said.

Tanks are being refreshed with safe drinking water at Glenavy Hall and Morven Hall, and there is also safe drinking water that can be accessed at the Victoria Park potable water tap.

High levels of nitrate in the water were first recorded back in August.

In a statement, Environment Canterbury said it was likely that severe weather conditions in July contributed to the high

nitrate concentration levels.

"The heavy rain caused excess nitrate in the soil to get 'flushed' down to the groundwater flows. We are seeing sharp increases in nitrate concentrations in many of our monitoring wells across the region this spring.

"Because the Lower Waihao supply is a shallow groundwater well, located in an area of intensive farming, it was particularly impacted."

Mr Abel disagreed with this statement.

"The claim that that was simply because of a one-off weather event, a rain event, made by [Environment Canterbury] doesn't hold true if two months later you've still got an elevation of eight milligrams. That means you've got a bigger problem than a one-off flush through of nitrate."

Dr Chambers said how the land was being used had a big impact on the nitrate levels.

"Ultimately, the land use practice is what's causing the nitrate contamination. So, really, there needs to be consideration, potentially, in the area of the type of land use."

## Oamaru Mail



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**Necessity...** Glenavy School's ICT provider New Era Technology acted swiftly to gift the school water bottles to help ease the thirst of its pupils who are unable to drink from the school taps because of the high nitrate levels in the community's water supply.

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED

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# IT company helps school distribute drinking water

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A South Canterbury school has received a generous gift from an unlikely source.

Glenavy school pupils were supplied with more than 100 drink bottles from the school's technology service provider, New Era Technology, last week.

They have been unable to drink from the taps and water fountains at the school due to the high levels of nitrate that was found in the water.

The Waimate District Council had placed a water tank at the school to help provide safe drinking water for pupils and staff.

This solution was only part of the puzzle, Glenavy School principal Kate Mansfield said.

"The problem with the tank is that you needed a drink bottle, or a cup, or a mug, or something, to fill from the tank.

"We had children consistently coming to school with no drink bottle."

She reached out to the Ministry of Education for support, but received nothing back.

"I actually rang the Ministry of Education and I [told] them 'this is not good enough. We can't run a school where we've got no water.'

"And they basically said well, they've given us a tank, that's all we're going to do for you."

Before it received the bottles, the school had tried a couple of different methods to allow the students to drink the water.

"We were putting out a hundred plastic cups which we were throwing away. Well, that's not sustainable.

"The last option was we had glass cups and we were putting out 50 to 100 of those a day and we had to wash those. So, it was extra work."

The time it took to put the cups out and keep them clean "cut into valuable time for teaching", she said.

"My staff are actually taking time... out of teaching children to do things [like] washing rotting containers and bottles and glass and things like that.

"I actually don't think they should be doing that. They should be actually putting that time [into] educating children and supporting their children's learning."

The school was very grateful to receive the drink bottles, Mrs



Refill... Glenavy School pupils Lexi Tukaki (9, left) and Ella Manna (9) fill up their new water bottles last week. PHOTOS: SUPPLIED

Mansfield said. "They have come to our rescue." And her message to the ministry was simple. "Students need water to learn," she said.

In response, Ministry of Education infrastructure and digital leader Scott Evans said the ministry was in contact with the school to consider longer-term solutions.

"All schools must have access to safe drinking water. We have discussed the current arrangements with Glenavy School and Waimate District Council and are satisfied that they do have this. But we recognise the challenges the school is managing with this temporary solution, in having to manually transport drinking water from the tank into school buildings."

# Penguin death spurs reminder

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The death of a penguin as the result of an attack by a dog at Oamaru Harbour last weekend prompted the Waitaki District Council and the Oamaru Blue Penguin Colony to remind pet owners of their obligations around the harbour.

Dogs are more than welcome to enjoy a dip in the ocean, but there are areas they cannot go, council senior compliance officer Tristan Hope said.

"It is nice for dogs to have a swim, but owners need to think about where they do this."

Under the Waitaki Dog Control Bylaw, dogs must be kept on a lead in the Oamaru Harbour area and there are signs in place that inform the public about that. Additionally, dogs are prohibited in the harbour area between sunset and sunrise.

The council is working with the penguin colony to update the signage to ensure everyone is aware of the rules and wanted to remind the public of the severity of disturbing a protected species in New Zealand.

Any dog owners found breaching the bylaws are liable to receive a fine of \$300.

Little blue penguins are also a protected species, and owners of dogs that cause the death of protected wildlife are liable for up to three years' imprisonment or up to a \$20,000 fine if convicted.

A dog that attacks wildlife may also be put down.

Mr Hope encouraged dog owners to make sure their pets are properly trained to help reduce the chances of this happening again.

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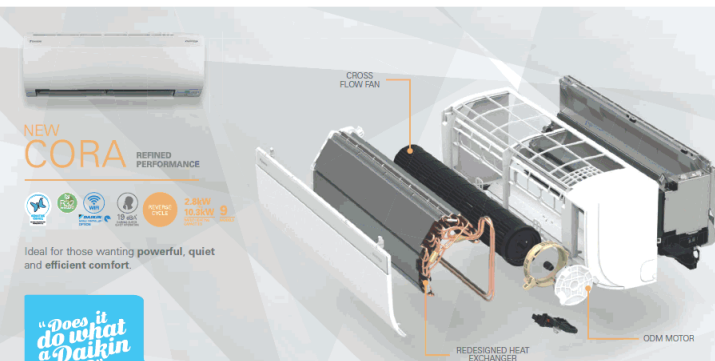
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