

## **Bill for water says lobby group** - Sunday Star Times, 05 April 2009

Free water to New Zealand homes could dry up if a major water lobby group gets its way.

In a policy document to be released this week, Water New Zealand argues that more of the country's local authorities should be charging for water, a move that they say would slash demand, reduce costs for councils and benefit the environment.

Water New Zealand, an environmental management umbrella group which has 1500 industry members, will now advocate for the policy and encourage public debate on the issue.

Only 11 of the 73 territorial local authorities currently have metering systems that measure - and attach a price tag - to the amount of water that comes into homes and gets flushed down the drains.

Auckland councils charge residents by volume, while Wellington's charge a base fee adjusted according to the value of the property, and Christchurch measures but does not charge.

Both Wellington and Christchurch are currently considering metering and charging.

Proponents of a universal metering scheme argue that keeping tabs on water use can change attitudes to the resource. Monitoring water use can also identify leaks, prevent wastage and avoid the need to increase supply.

But not everybody is happy about the suggestion of paying for water. Ratepayers' associations have in the past protested against the idea, and Family Budgeting Federation chief executive Raewyn Fox said many families in Auckland struggle to meet payments. She said families around the country would be similarly affected by a nationwide rollout of metering.

Water New Zealand's research revealed that usage varies dramatically around the country.

Of the councils that responded to the survey Nelson had the lowest daily per capita consumption with 160 litres. The highest was Queenstown Lakes District with 750 litres. Others included Auckland with 166; Tauranga, 216; South Taranaki, 450; Kapiti, 650; Kaikoura, 450; and Dunedin, 207.

Some of the variation can be explained by different measuring systems or the possible inclusion of horticultural use being folded into domestic totals.

Water New Zealand's policy is aimed at homes hooked up to town supply. Chief executive Murray Gibb said the best cost savings would be seen in larger areas which were facing high expenditure costs such as building new multimillion-dollar water treatment facilities.

While New Zealand had an abundance of water, supplies were starting to come under pressure, most notably in Waikato and Canterbury. The Nelson/Marlborough district and Auckland were expected to notice pressure on water resources by 2012.

While residents often reacted negatively to proposals to charge for water, metering systems do lower demand. Tauranga adopted the system in 2002 to combat rising water use and the prospect of having to build a \$70 million new water treatment plant.

Average per-capita water consumption has now reduced by 25%, with a 30% drop over peak times during the summer months.

Tauranga Council water supply manager Peter Bahrs says installing the meters cost \$10m but has delayed the need to spend on water supply investments by more than 10 years.