



Summary

Managing stormwater systems to reduce the risk of flooding

Flooding is New Zealand's most frequent natural hazard. It can have significant social, environmental, and economic implications when it is not managed well. We are interested in how local authorities manage stormwater systems because of their role in protecting New Zealanders and their homes from flooding.

We looked at how Dunedin City Council, Porirua City Council, and Thames-Coromandel District Council manage their stormwater systems to protect people and their property from the effects of flooding.

What we found

The three councils had an incomplete understanding of the flood risks in their district or city. Much of their assessment of flood risk has been in response to specific events or regulatory pressure, such as complying with resource consents. This reactive approach risks councils focusing on reducing the effects of the most recent flood and being caught unaware by unanticipated floods.

The three councils have gaps in their understanding of the current state of their stormwater systems.

These gaps limit their ability to make well-informed and deliberate decisions and have informed conversations with their communities about the costs of reducing the risks from flooding.

All three councils were already aware of some of the issues we identified and are planning improvements. Some councils are further along in making improvements than others. However, all have more to do.

In our view, the historical underinvestment in stormwater systems in New Zealand creates a level of urgency for councils to address our recommendations. Our main findings and recommendations are relevant to all councils. There is also an opportunity for councils to work together to address shared challenges.

Over the page, we have questions for councils to ask themselves, and for communities to ask councillors about how their council is protecting their home from the risk of flooding.

For the full report, visit oag.govt.nz/reports.



Questions ...

... for councils to ask themselves

- How extensive is your understanding of your current and future flood risk? What more do you need to know?
- Have you, with your community, defined what the level of acceptable risk is, and so the level of service (in terms of the level of protection that the stormwater system needs to achieve)?
- How do you know whether your stormwater system is delivering that level of service?
- How do you know that your maintenance regimes are supporting you in achieving the agreed level of service?
- How are you prioritising and planning your work programme to ensure that the stormwater system will, and will continue to, achieve the agreed level of service?
- Do you have the right people and skills to deliver your work programme?

... for communities to ask their councillor

- How often is my house likely to be flooded by stormwater?
- How much protection from flooding is the stormwater system going to provide me?
- Is the stormwater system delivering that level of protection?
- How is the council working to address any issues in delivering that level of protection?
- How long will it take?
- How much will it cost?

The stormwater system

