

14 May 2026

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[REDACTED]

Kia ora [REDACTED]

Official information Request: Question on Sewage Plan from Initial Meeting

I am writing to you in response to your information request received on the 12 April 2026 entitled questions on sewage treatment plans from initial meeting. It is understood that this is a reference to a meeting on 12 February 2026 where the Martinborough Wastewater Treatment Plant – Stage 2 Improvements project was discussed.

We have assessed your requests under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (LGOIMA). I have received information to provide the following responses:

Your responses /queries to consultation questions	Our response
1. Monitoring & Testing	
1.1 Please provide a complete description of what monitoring and testing (scientifically described so they could be fully understood and replicated) has been done to date on sewage processing facilities, including ponds, test irrigation fields.	Thank you for meeting with the Project Team on 20 April 2026. You confirmed that your queries relate only to how the Martinborough Wastewater Treatment Plant (MWWTP) is currently being run, so that you can understand the extent of operative environmental planning and what might be excluded from a responsibility perspective if things went wrong. Monitoring and testing are specified in the resource consent conditions of the MWWTP. These conditions are available at: https://swdc.govt.nz/wp-content/uploads/Martinborough-Decision-Final-Conditions-14-March.pdf. For example, refer Schedule 1 Conditions 5, 10, and 15 – 26.
1.2 Please provide the data in spreadsheet form for all of the results from the above monitoring and testing done to date.	Monitoring data for the last 2 years is available at: MWWTP monitoring including Dashboard, Quarterly and Annual monitoring.pdf. Performance reports are available at Document library
1.3 Please provide a complete description of what monitoring and testing (scientifically described so they could be fully understood and replicated) is planned to be done on sewage processing proposed once operational.	It is understood that this question relates to change that might occur to monitoring once discharge to land occurs to land located north of Pain Farm. The monitoring that is currently being undertaken for MWWTP will continue as outlined above, once the new discharge to land occurs. Additional monitoring on land located north of Pain Farm will be proposed as part of those RMA applications. This will include monitoring of water that is collected in tile drains. The precise monitoring undertaken will be determined by GWRC as they administer the RMA process.
2. Contamination Risks	

2.1 Please provide an overview of how SWDC understands the risks of operating a human sewage disposal differs from farm animal sewage disposal (noting that SWDC has described their plans as 'farm operations').	The proposal is to discharge treated wastewater/sewage and that treatment processes significantly reduces risks compared with raw sewage, whether from animals or humans. The reference to farm operation relates only to the cut and carry baleage operation, which is a relatively common primary production activity in the Wairarapa. It is acknowledged that the use of treated wastewater is different and as such needs to be managed. The baleage is fed to non-lactating animals if the baleage customer is a dairy operation. SWDC currently contracts out the cutting, carrying, and selling to a company that understands this (Colton Bros).
2.2 Please provide a summary of what abnormal operating conditions the proposal is being designed to cater for without impacting the level of environmental protection provided. E.g. equipment failure, servicing, flooding.	These aspects will be covered during the next phase of detailed design, which will include development of a Discharge to land management plan (as required by the MWWTP consent condition: https://swdc.govt.nz/wp-content/uploads/Martinborough-Decision-Final-Conditions-14-March.pdf.)
2.3 Please describe how SWDC can give assurances or confidence on what chemical compounds are to be sprayed on the field given they have no control over what and how much is flushed into the system.	Chemicals will always be part of waste entering a treatment plant, as inputs are sourced from normal domestic and commercial activities. The Martinborough Wastewater Treatment Plant (MWWTP) is designed to receive and treat typical municipal wastewater under these conditions. The wastewater that is sent to the oxidation pond is automatically sampled and analysed at a laboratory. Historical information shows these levels to be very normal, and the pond hasn't experienced any deleterious effects of any toxic shock from these discharges.

2.4 Please confirm if SWDC is guaranteeing that long term contamination with potential bio-accumulation effects listed below will not be sprayed into the field? :

- Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) including Dioxins, Furans, Organochloride Pesticides, Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAH) and Polychlorinated Biphenyls.
- Emerging Contaminants including Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), Brominated Flame Retardants (BFRs/PBDEs), Polycyclic Musks, Triclosan, Plasticizers (Phthalates and Bisphenol A - BPA) and Methyl Siloxanes.
- Pharmaceuticals including Hormone Replacement Therapy, Antidepressants, Antibiotics and Lipid Regulators.
- Heavy Metals including Mercury, Lead, Cadmium, Copper, Nickel, Chromium and Silver
- Microplastics including Synthetic Fibers and Polymers.

Council isn't guaranteeing any of the contaminants that you have listed won't enter the municipal wastewater stream and so make their way to the irrigation field.

SWDC is not aware of any treatment plant in NZ that can guarantee that these chemicals will be fully treated if they enter the system and won't be discharged to land or water. The regional approach (supported by national standards) is to discharge treated wastewater to land ahead of discharge to rivers.

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2.5 Please confirm if SWDC is guaranteeing neighbours (including potential future buildings on Pain Farm land, existing properties and consented future buildings) that the facility will not impact their ability to collect safe drinking water from their roofs.	SWDC isn't guaranteeing this because under the Resource Management Act, Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) is responsible for assessing the proposed discharge to land and determining whether consent should be granted, including what conditions are required. The proposed irrigation (discharge) can only proceed if GWRC is satisfied that actual or potential effects, including any effects on drinking water, are appropriately avoided, remedied, or mitigated. SWDC is required to comply with resource consent conditions, and GWRC functions include checking and enforcing compliance with the conditions. The proposed irrigation activity is being designed so that potential effects are appropriately avoided or minimised through setbacks, performance standards, and operational controls. Roof-collected rainwater systems are privately owned and managed and are not regulated drinking water supplies under the Water Services Act. Responsibility for treating roof-collected water for potable use rests with the persons who collect and use that water, and such systems typically include filtration, UV disinfection with associated maintenance, and treatment systems.
2.6 Please provide a copy of the latest draft of the Operation and Maintenance Manual which SWDC is required to submit when applying for resource consent, and any previous versions submitted to GWRC or other bodies for review. Please include any feedback received on these documents.	A draft Operations and Maintenance Manual will be prepared and lodged as part of the resource consent applications. This will be provided as soon as it becomes available.
3. Finances and Long Term Planning	
3.1 Please confirm if SWDC has quantified the cost and considered the feasibility of the work required to return the proposed spray field land to its current condition when the sewage facility is decommissioned in the future? If so please provide these estimates and confirm if this liability is tracked in SWDC's accounts.	The proposed irrigation has been designed to avoid deterioration in the condition of the soil or the land.

3.2 Please could you advise if SWDC has at any point quantified the cost of the work to return the Waste Transfer Station land area on Pain Farm back to its original condition (including rectifying the historical land fill and contamination underneath the Waste Transfer Station).	In general, historic landfills are not restored to their original condition. Standard practice (as is proposed at Waste Transfer land area on Pain Farm) is for such sites to be capped, monitored, and managed, with post-closure uses commonly including grazing. Following a prolonged aftercare period (typically around 20 years), sites may also be planted with native vegetation to support long-term restoration. The closed landfill area (on Pain Farm) is intended to be used for grazing once a sufficient depth of mulch and green waste has been established to protect the clay liner. The area currently operating as a Waste Transfer Station is expected to remain in active use for a considerable number of years.
3.3 Please confirm how much SWDC has spent on legal advice on the topic of sewage management, from 2013 when SWDC first engaged with GWRC on the original resource consent application and AEE. How much of this was for the revised plans for the new land proposed?	From the available records, expenditure on legal advice in relation to RMA processes for MWWTP since 2013 is estimated at \$9,000. Please note that these figures represent the costs as recorded at the time they were incurred, and no adjustments have been made for inflation.
3.4 Please confirm how much SWDC has spent on specialist sewage engineering & design advice on the topic of sewage management, from 2013 when I understand SWDC first engaged with GWRC on the original resource consent application and AEE. How much of this was for the revised plans for the new land proposed?	From the available records, expenditure on specialist sewage engineering and design advice relating to the MWWTP since 2013 is estimated at \$761,000. Please note that these figures represent the costs as recorded at the time they were incurred, and no adjustments have been made for inflation.
3.5 Basic calculations using the land area proposed, suitable days for discharge and volume of water to be disposed of indicate the plans are fundamentally unfeasible. Please summarise what plans SWDC has in place in the likely event the land proposed is simply insufficient to meet demand? Please list the assumptions that SWDC are relying on to inform the business case / financial plan and feasibility assessment	A feasibility assessment of the capability of the land to accommodate treated wastewater is provided as Appendix 1 to the paper found at SWC Public Excluded Meeting 16 April 2025 Redacted.pdf. Ongoing technical investigations indicate that approximately 38 hectares of the 74 hectare site is required to manage the projected treated wastewater irrigation demand to the year 2060. This assessment allows for population growth and corresponding increases in wastewater volumes for Martinborough over that period. This means that, SWDC does not consider it necessary to develop contingency plans for a scenario in which the land is unable to accommodate the proposed irrigation volume.
4. Community Impact	

4.1 Please confirm if the proposed design includes discharge to the river (or contributing waterways) during substantial floods and / or equipment breakdown, servicing or malfunction.	Yes. As per our response to your queries of 22 March 2026, the proposal is to increase land-based discharge to at least 42% by 2030 and at least 73% by 2035, with a target of 95%. It is acknowledged that during high rainfall events, some discharge to the Ruamāhanga River will still be required, and it is not practicable to avoid this entirely.
4.2 Please confirm if the proposed design mitigates flooding of the existing sewage ponds (the existing settlement ponds which feed the proposed dispersal field) which themselves already sit in the flood plain of the river (these are shown to be below the future flood levels predicted by NIWA / GWRC). Please describe SWDC's understanding of the impact on the dispersal field operations and food producing land downstream of the river from raw sewage contamination caused by a flood which breaches the settlement ponds.	No physical works to reduce flood risk at the existing MWWTP settlement ponds are proposed as part of this project. The Operation and Management Plan includes procedures for managing adverse events, including flooding. It is noted that the oxidation ponds are located above, or outside of, identified flood risk areas (Combined District Plan - Proposed Wairarapa Combined District Plan Map Viewer). In the unlikely event that a flood of sufficient magnitude was to breach the oxidation ponds, such an event would involve extensive flooding across the wider Wairarapa, with very large volumes of water present in the environment. Under those circumstances, any wastewater released would be subject to significant dilution. The primary risks arising from such an extreme flood event would relate to the flood itself, including risks to human life and property, rather than wastewater contamination effects on downstream land uses.
4.3 Please confirm that SWDC will pay for valuations, legal advice and other support for parties who feel they are suffering Injurious Affection (as defined in the Public Works Act 1981) due to SWDC's sewage processing proposals? Please provide information on how impacted parties can register for this financial support?	SWDC confirms that it does not provide funding for valuations, legal advice, or other support to parties whose land is not being acquired and who consider they may be suffering injurious affection as defined under the Public Works Act 1981. Applications under the Resource Management Act to authorise the proposed discharge to land will be processed by Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC). As part of this process, GWRC will consider any actual or potential environmental effects of the proposal and determine what conditions or controls, if any, are appropriate.

4.4 Please confirm SWDC has consulted with the community to understand the potential impact on the reputation of Martinborough as a premium food producing region before making public announcements? Please provide evidence of the engagement and an explanation why I have not been included in this as a local olive oil grower.	Council undertook community-wide consultation on the proposals between 6 March and 31 March 2026 (Martinborough Wastewater Treatment Plant - Stage 2 Improvements - SWDC). This engagement was intended to provide the broader Martinborough community with information on the proposals and an opportunity to provide feedback. We acknowledge and regret that you were not aware of, or did not participate in, that consultation process. The engagement was conducted using standard Council communication channels and was not targeted to specific individuals or sectors, which may explain why you did not receive direct notification as a local olive oil grower. We note, however, that you attended the pre-engagement meeting with residents of Olive Grove on 12 February 2026, and also that you are now actively engaging with Council through this process, and your correspondence clearly outlines the concerns you hold regarding potential reputational impacts on Martinborough as a premium food-producing region. These matters are being carefully considered as part of Council's ongoing investigations of the proposal.
4.5 Please confirm SWDC has consulted with owners of local food and animal feed production to understand how their proposals might impact New Zealand's international reputation as a food exporting nation before making public announcements?	As above consultation occurred earlier this year. No part of the broader community was excluded from this process.

4.6 Please confirm SWDC has consulted with Ministry of Primary Industries, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade and the Ministry for the Environment on the above concerns for both Martinborough locally and New Zealand internationally? Please provide copies of any assurances, reviews, concerns or other documentation in evidence of this.	SWDC has not undertaken explicit consultation with the Ministry for Primary Industries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, or the Ministry for the Environment in relation to the matters raised. SWDC does not consider the concerns to be of a scale or significance that would necessitate consultation with the agencies identified. This position is because the Greater Wellington Regional Council's policy framework supports, in principle, the discharge of treated wastewater to land. In addition, the Wastewater Environmental Performance Standards Regulations expressly allow for this approach in certain circumstances, subject to appropriate controls. These indicate a level of established national and regional support for land-based discharge of treated wastewater, and therefore SWDC does not consider further inter-agency consultation to be warranted at this time.
5. Acting in Good Faith in Trustee Role for Pain Farm	
5.1 Please could you confirm that SWDC has formally ruled out the use of Pain Farm for sewage processing of any type in future? Please provide the minutes of the meeting in which this was agreed formally	SWDC through its elected members who act as the trustees of Pain Farm Trust has decided to pursue an alternative option to Pain Farm (Martinborough Wastewater Treatment Plant - Stage 2 Improvements - SWDC). The decision to pursue an alternative option was made at the 16 April 2025 Infrastructure Committee refer: SWC Public Excluded Meeting 16 April 2025 Redacted.pdf SWC Public Excluded Minutes 16 April 2025 (1) Redacted.pdf

5.2 Please could you confirm that in its role as Trustee of Pain Farm, that SWDC ensured Pain Farm was adequately represented as an impacted party to SWDC's proposed use of neighbouring land for sewage disposal?	Investigations into the proposed irrigation of treated wastewater to land located to the north of Pain Farm are ongoing and will be subject to a resource consent process under the Resource Management Act. This process will be administered by the relevant regulatory authority and will consider the appropriateness of the proposed activity and any actual or potential effects on surrounding land uses, including Pain Farm. Through the consenting process, the effects of the use on neighbouring land (including on Pain Farm) will be considered. Please note that the proposal on land north of Pain Farm is to discharge treated wastewater to land, not the disposal of sewage.
5.3 Please could you confirm that in its role as Trustee of Pain Farm, that SWDC ensured Pain Farm was adequately represented as an impacted party to SWDC's historical and planned future use of the land as a Waste Transfer Station and / or Landfill?	SWDC and the Elected members seeks to ensure that all decisions about the use of Pain Farm (current and any planned future uses/activity) are consistent with the purpose of the Trust.
5.4 Please provide all correspondence and notes produced in the role of Trustee of Pain Farm to support the answers given above.	The reason the land north of Pain Farm has been secured for the disposal of treated wastewater is a direct result of Council listening to the community and considering the use of the land from a trustee view. Details of these committee meetings (papers, recordings of meetings, minutes) etc are available at Past Meetings from 23 May 2007 – 1 January 1970 › All Committees › – SWDC
5.5 Please confirm if the Trustees of Pain Farm have taken independent (from SWDC) legal advice and professional land revaluation to quantify the long term impact to future uses of Pain Farm? Please provide copies of the legal advice and professional land revaluation if so, or confirm this has not been undertaken	We can confirm that SWDC through its elected members who act as the trustees of Pain Farm Trust in its capacity as Trustees of Pain Farm <u>has not</u> obtained or taken legal advice or professional land revaluation to quantify the long-term impact to future uses of Pain Farm.

We understand from the meeting on 20 April 2026 that you are concerned about the potential consideration of Pain Farm and surrounding area for industrial zoning, and that there is some uncertainty regarding how urban growth is being planned for Martinborough.

A spatial plan for South Wairarapa was prepared in 2021 ([Spatial Plan - SWDC](#)). This plan analysed projected growth and how it could be accommodated through to 2050. The process, which included public consultation, identified how growth would be distributed across towns in the Wairarapa and the locations where that growth was intended to occur.

The outcomes of this work informed the District Plan review process, which was also subject to public consultation and hearings, and resulted in the zoning of areas for urban development and growth under the Wairarapa Proposed District Plan ([Wairarapa Proposed District Plan](#)). This work has also informed the District's Long Term Plan ([Long Term Plan - SWDC](#)), which sets out planned investment in existing and new infrastructure to support the anticipated growth, following further public consultation processes.

The Council can confirm that none of these processes have identified a current or future industrial zone to the south of Martinborough in and around Pain Farm.

Please note that it is our policy to proactively release our responses to official information requests where possible. If this request is selected it will be published at <https://swdc.govt.nz/lgoima-proactive-release/>, with your personal information removed.

You have a right to request a review by the Ombudsman on this response. Further information about this process can be found on <https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/what-ombudsman-can-help/complaints-about-government-agencies/how-make-complaint> or email info@ombudsman.parliament.nz

Nāku noa, nā



Matt Vins
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