

Banks Peninsula residents fighting plans to dump Akaroa wastewater on their properties

TINA LAW

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JOSEPH JOHNSON/FAIRFAX NZ

Robinsons Bay residents are opposing a plan to dump Akaroa's treated wastewater on to properties and build a storage pond.

Two small Banks Peninsula settlements are fighting a proposal to dump Akaroa's treated wastewater on their land.

The Christchurch City Council proposal would turn Robinsons Bay and Takamatua into sewerage ponds and severely impact property prices, residents say.

The council is building a new \$33m wastewater treatment plant in Akaroa and has to find somewhere to put the treated wastewater. It had planned to send the wastewater into the middle of Akaroa harbour through a pipeline, but Environment Canterbury declined the consent due to opposition from Ngai Tahu.



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Residents of Robinsons Bay on Banks Peninsula are against plans to dump treated wastewater in their area.

The existing consent to discharge into the harbour expires in 2020, so time is running out for the council to find a solution.

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Five other options were originally considered and have now been reduced to two possibilities, including using 26 hectares of land to plant kanuka trees and irrigate them with the treated wastewater. This would cost between \$5.7m and \$5.9m, depending on the location



A map showing Akaroa's proximity to Robinsons Bay and Takamatua.

The other option involved about 31 hectares and would result in the wastewater being used to irrigate pasture at a cost of between \$7.3m and \$9.4m. Both options, would involve building storage tanks and a small pump station.

Ngai Tahu supports both options, but local residents are vehemently opposed and have put signs up on the road to Akaroa to raise awareness of their situation.

The council does not own any land in the bays and would have to purchase, lease or gain a licence to go ahead with the proposals. Compulsory purchases under the Public Works Act have not been ruled out.



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Takamatua residents protest against a Christchurch City Council proposal to dump Akaroa's treated wastewater on their land.

Another location has been suggested by the council at Pompeys Pillar, 9.5km east of Akaroa. This location is more palatable to residents because there are not many homes nearby, but the cost is between \$11.2m and \$14.9m.

Residents in the two valleys would not have access to the sewerage system and would have to continue using septic tanks.

Robinsons Bay resident Sue Church said the council had failed to adequately answer residents' questions about the impact the scheme would have on the land, environment and their drinking water.



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The Akaroa township is popular with tourists and day-trippers.

"We feel it's all a big experiment."

The council said a detailed assessment of environmental effects would be done at the stage of preparing a resource consent application.

Church's family has lived in Robinsons Bay since 1980 and while their 2.8 hectare property was not earmarked for the development, their land would be surrounded by it. They also received their drinking water from a spring on a neighbouring property, which was right in the middle of the area proposed to be irrigated with the wastewater.

The council said the new plant would treat the wastewater to a "very high standard", but Church said council had also admitted the process would not completely remove antibiotics and hormones or metals from the water.

Bacteria would almost entirely be removed, the council said, but viruses would remain although they would naturally die off in the environment and be filtered out by the soil. There were no industries in Akaroa so the concentrations of metals would be low.

Church's mother Dianne Carson said the proposal had added stress to the lives of many residents, including herself.

"We don't know what's going to happen. We're fighting to continue what we have," she said.

"We chose a rural lifestyle and have lived a certain lifestyle that would be completely turned upside down."

Takamatua resident Mark Wren said he and his wife, Denise, had been considering getting their property, which holds 250 walnut trees, organically certified, but a wastewater scheme in the valley would put an end to that idea.

People were also concerned about property prices, because of the stigma attached to wastewater disposal.

The council has been talking to residents, holding two meetings during 2016. It had failed to address the issue that residents did not want the scheme in the two bays, Wren said.

The council plans to launch public consultation in early 2017.

- Stuff