



Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern  
Prime Minister of New Zealand  
**by email**

16 May 2022

Dear Prime Minister,

**Citizens' concerns with the Three Waters reform**

We are a voluntary, non-political residents' group representing more than 8,000 households in and around the suburb of Avonhead in Christchurch. On 26 April 2022, we held a public meeting at which we invited local elected representatives to discuss the Three Waters reform and urban development with residents. More than 400 residents attended and there was almost unanimous consensus that the Three Waters reform should be scrapped.

Unfortunately, the local Member of Parliament, Ms Pallett, declined to attend and was not there to listen to what her constituents had to say. As a result, we have resolved to write to you directly to convey the community's deep concerns about the Three Waters reform. These concerns not driven by political outlook but a genuine fear about what the reform will mean for us and future generations of New Zealanders.

We appreciate that the Government's purpose in reviewing New Zealand's Three Waters infrastructure was to prevent a repetition of Havelock North. However, for the reasons below, the proposed reform is not the solution.

First, it will lead to the loss of local democracy. Until now, our elected representatives at local councils made decisions on Three Waters. The Government proposes to unilaterally disempower citizens by removing these assets from elected bodies to the management of appointed boards. If this happens, we will have absolutely no influence over decision-making on rates, upgrades, or priorities.

Secondly, there is no way that infrastructural issues at suburban levels can be reported effectively to a board which oversees Three Waters for most of the South Island. In our experience, excessive centralisation typically leads to bureaucratic blind spots and delays. We fear that pressing local issues will be overlooked in favour of grand-scale changes, until we have another "Havelock North" on our hands.

Thirdly, as ratepayers, we are especially concerned that the transfer of the Three Waters infrastructure to the Government will make a number of councils significantly poorer. Us ratepayers will bear the burden as local councils are forced to increase rates to make up for their loss.

Finally, we feel let down by the way in which the Government has pressed on with the reform despite widespread public concern. An opportunity for submissions at a select committee stage has little value, as by then there will be no scope for fundamental change to the intended reform.

As Head of Government, you have the ultimate say as to what goes ahead and what stops. Please listen to the public's concerns. By all means monitor local bodies more closely so that they maintain infrastructure better. But do not take away democratic control of Three Waters. Scrap the Three Waters reform.

If you do not feel that the vast majority of New Zealanders share our concerns, then we suggest that you hold a referendum before pressing ahead with the reform. You have held referenda previously on cannabis and euthanasia. The Three Waters reform is no less significant. Let New Zealanders decide their future for themselves.

Yours sincerely,

Prof S. S. Bagchi JP  
Chair  
Avonhead Community Group Inc.

**Copies to: Mr Christopher Luxon MP, Leader of the Opposition  
Rt Hon Trevor Mallard, Speaker of the House**