

MILESTONE BYLAW

Trade Waste Bylaw ‘respects dignity of our deceased’: Ruru

by Alice Angeloni

A “RESPECT and dignity” bylaw has been passed in Gisborne banning the culturally abhorrent practice of sending mortuary waste to sea.

Gisborne district councillors voted in favour of the Trade Waste Bylaw 2021 yesterday morning, moments before the Government announced its sweeping three waters reform proposal.

Ian Ruru, who leads the KIWA group set up to provide cultural advice and technical support to the district council, said it was a big day for water reforms and Te Mana o te Wai — the health and wellbeing of water.

“It’s official, our respect and dignity bylaw was passed,” Mr Ruru said.

He acknowledged “the many hearts and minds that guided us to this nationally significant milestone”.

“It’s a first for New Zealand and I’m sure other regions will follow.”

Tangata whenua and the wider community of Tairāwhiti have long petitioned for mortuary waste to be separated from the public wastewater system because it is deemed “culturally abhorrent” for such waste to be discharged into Turanganui a Kiwa/Poverty Bay.

Mortuary waste is made up of arterial blood and chemicals that mostly arise through the embalming process.

Plans are for mortuary waste from the region’s funeral home to be trucked into Taruheru Cemetery and disposed of through a Wisconsin mound system.

“I acknowledge the many that have driven this kaupapa over the decades and the significance of the outcome that respects the dignity of our deceased and protects Te Mana o te Wai,” Mr Ruru said.

It comes as the Government announced its three waters proposal — to transfer drinking water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure responsibilities from 67 councils to four large publicly-owned entities.

Mr Ruru, who is also deputy chairman of new crown water entity Taumata

Arowai, said three waters reforms were a step change for New Zealand and Maori rights and interests.

Under the Government’s proposal, mana whenua and local government representatives would have equal joint oversight of the four new water entities.

“While the big news out of Wellington signals huge, New Zealand-wide water reforms, Gisborne has been quietly doing its part to give effect to Te Mana o Te Wai.”

Cabinet papers on the three waters proposal said the new water entities would have the powers and responsibilities relating to trade waste and obligations to operate three waters services in compliance with resource consents.

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— KIWA group’s Ian Ruru



CONTINUED ON PAGE 4