

Benefit of water meters obvious

What's stopping us from doing the obvious - letting the council install water meters?

The other obvious, I suppose: we all want to please ourselves when we water the garden or wash the car, double-flush the loo, ignore the suspicious sound of running water, luxuriate in the shower. And stop the council getting its hands on any more of our money.

Yes, we know meters make sense when New Plymouth District Council repeatedly shows us the numbers proving our profligacy. We're one of the worst places in the country, using twice as much water as Aucklanders do.

But yes, we'll still vote for councillors whose so-called appeal is "protecting" us from further raids on our wallets, even if we reluctantly acknowledge there's long-term benefit in saving water, tens of millions of dollars-worth.

We don't want to accept council projections because they're abstract and won't nourish the new plants springing up in our gardens from the supermarket seed giveaways. Vegetables don't grow on ideas.

Personally, I'm all in favour of meters, a position easily adopted after some of the living arrangements Lin and I experienced in Auckland and Wellington. Up north, we spent time away on yachts, then built a house on Waiheke where our water came from a tank.

I was reminded of New Plymouth people's attitude to water when Mum and Dad came to stay on the island. We were in a drought and I got up one morning to find Dad hosing down his already spotless car.

That further reminds me of whenever we repaid the visits and stayed in the flat beneath their Mangorei Rd home. We had to raise our voices to be heard over the roar of water in the pipes, even though nobody had a tap on. Dad shrugged: "Not going there, thank you very much..."

Earlier this decade, Lin and I spent several years travelling in a campervan and living in a caravan, both of which had limited water supplies. You made sure the tap wasn't running when you cleaned your teeth.

So, moving back into a house and continuing to be careful with water was natural; but we acknowledge we're in a minority.

In fact, water consumption is coming down in the district – from 336 litres in 2016 to 292 over the last year (a decent drop of 44l or 13 percent). Nobody in the council PR department wants to tell me precisely why, so I'm guessing some big industrial users are being more careful, some leaky mains have been fixed, the year was wetter, the summer sprinkler ban was better observed...and the council education programme, *Wai Warrior*, is having an impact.

I can picture the tyranny of 10-year-olds coming home from school and lecturing Mum and Dad about their tap habits. It'll be the same effect as the climate change and Covid-19 awakenings, a bottom-up revolution in being responsible citizens.

It's in fairness to those same kids that supposedly mature-thinking adults should listen to the council's messages about how much can be saved in the next few years if we spend \$15 million on installing meters now.

That, rather than shelling out hundreds of millions to compensate for unnecessary waste by a bunch of people holding on to the belief they're entitled to use water how and when they want.

I recall someone living in a large house nearby who feigned surprise last summer when I pointed out there was a ban on sprinklers. "Really!" she exclaimed. "I thought we were allowed to now. I rang some of my friends and they all thought so, too." I bet.

There was a recent *Taranaki Daily News* photo that says it all. It showed two vast storage tanks being built at the city boundary to give us more backup in the event of another mains break or harsh drought.

Both possibilities are real, given a big proportion of the district's water reticulation system is past its use-by date and climate change is making itself more obvious by the year.

The council wants to know what we think about all this before it sits down to frame up its latest 10-year plan. I'm hoping that no matter what we're telling them, the clued-up new councillors push for common sense – meters all round and a guaranteed consumption saving of 25 percent.

If you want to consume more than average, pay for it yourself.