Acceptable Solutions

Central government | June 2025

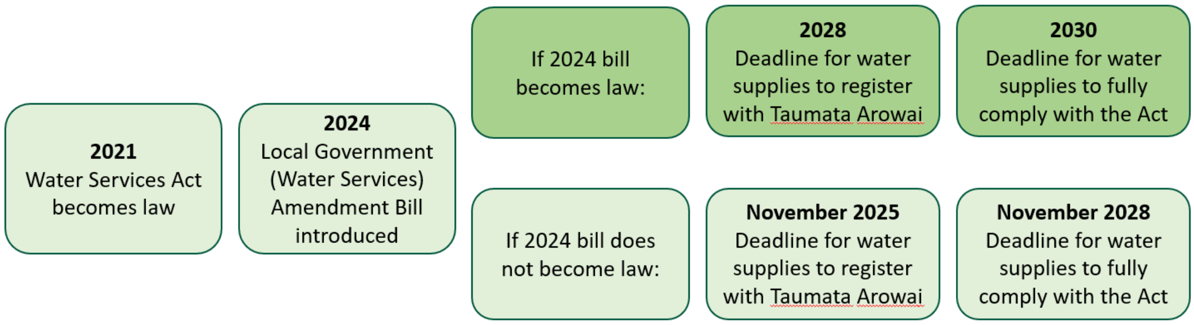
What are Acceptable Solutions?

HortNZ recently submitted on changes to the regulations which aim to keep drinking water safe for human consumption. This summary describes some of the changes possibly underway, but not yet decided-upon by the Government.

The Government's consultation proposal clarifies the compliance pathway for drinking water supplies and aims to reduce effort and costs for some lower risk or smaller scale suppliers. Drinking water suppliers can choose to meet their compliance requirements via what is called an Acceptable Solution if they are lower risk or a smaller scale supplier. This may be more "straightforward and cost-effective" than the alternative – following the Drinking Water Quality Assurance Rules, submitting a Drinking Water Safety Plan, and submitting a Source Water Risk Management Plan.

Water supplies serving 25 people or less only for residential (not commercial) use may be excluded from compliance with the Water Services Act 2021 under the Local Government (Water Services) Bill. The Bill would also push back dates for compliance with the law for a few years, shown in the timeline below. The bill which is not yet a law, so it is not yet official.

Figure 1: Water Services compliance timeline



Horticulture and drinking water supplies

This policy affects growers and irrigation schemes only if they are considered drinking water suppliers under the Water Services Act. That means they take water from a waterbody (not town supply) that is used for drinking in more than one household. If someone only supplies drinking water to their own home, they are exempt.

Under Acceptable Solutions, water suppliers will be required to treat drinking water (e.g. in staff accommodation or smoko rooms) with a filter and UV treatment system. Depending on the level of risk, growers may be required to use "validated" systems that meet an international standard. Water for flushing toilets or outdoor use does not require treatment under the rules.

Growers may qualify for an Acceptable Solution under one of the following categories, shown in Table 1 and described below:

Table 1: Government's policy proposal for Acceptable Solutions

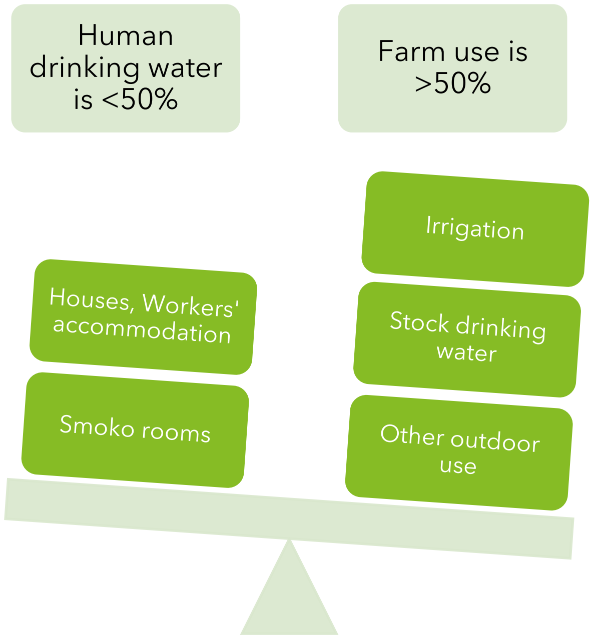
Acceptable Solution	Water supply use	# people supplied	UV system validation required?	Buildings per treatment system
Mixed-use rural supplies	• At least 50% is for farm use (e.g. for irrigation or stock). • Up to 50% is used as drinking water.	No limit	Unvalidated if <25 people Validated if >25 people	3
Small and medium-sized networked supplies	More drinking water than farm use	Max. 500 people	Unvalidated if <25 people Validated if >25 people	3
Self-supplied buildings	Buildings on one property or neighbouring properties all owned by same person/group of people	Max. 500 people	All validated	10

1.1.1. MIXED-USE RURAL SUPPLIES

These are supplies where most of the water is used for farming or growing, even if the water also serves people (shown in Figure 2).

Example: A grower pumps water from a bore, mainly for irrigation. Less than half of that water is also used for drinking in the staff smoko room and seasonal workers' accommodation. The drinking water can be treated on site with a filter and UV light. If the water is for fewer than 25 people, the grower can choose a less expensive treatment system that doesn't necessarily meet an international standard. One treatment system is needed for every three buildings.

Figure 2: Mixed-use rural supplies eligible for Acceptable Solutions



1.1.2. SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED NETWORK SUPPLIES

These are supplies where more than half the water is used for drinking, and they serve 500 or fewer people. The buildings may or may not all be owned by the same person or group.

Example: A grower takes water from a bore. Most of it is supplied to workers and nearby homes for drinking, with less going toward irrigation. Drinking water is treated at each location (e.g., houses, staff accommodation) using filters and UV light. If fewer than 25 people will be drinking the water, a lower-cost system is acceptable. One treatment system is required per three buildings.

1.1.3. SELF-SUPPLIED BUILDINGS

These supplies serve buildings on the same or neighbouring properties, as long as they're owned by the same person or group, provide drinking water to 500 or fewer people, and more than half the water is used for drinking.

Example: A packhouse takes water from a bore for two buildings on neighbouring sites, where 100 staff at peak times of year drink water in the staff rooms. Drinking water must be treated on-site with a filter and UV light. All treatment systems must meet an international standard. One treatment system is required per ten buildings.

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Taumata Arowai (Water Services Authority) website
- Read HortNZ's submission on Acceptable Solutions on our website
- HortNZ's 2021 summary of Water Services Act requirements
- Contact HortNZ: Emily Levenson, Environmental Policy Advisor (emily.levenson@hortnz.co.nz)