

Summary of the proposed Drinking Water Acceptable Solution for Rural Agricultural Drinking Water Supplies

What are Acceptable Solutions?

Acceptable Solutions are a new concept introduced in the Water Services Act 2021 (the Act). They provide owners and operators of some types of drinking water supplies with an approved ready-made option to meet their compliance obligations.

Taumata Arowai developed Acceptable Solutions in collaboration with sector reference groups from various drinking water suppliers across Aotearoa. The reference groups included representatives from rural agricultural water supplies, Federated Farmers, Māori communities and local authorities.

According to the Act a drinking water supplier who complies with an Acceptable Solution (appropriate for their water supply) must be regarded as having complied with the relevant legislative requirements. They still have a duty to supply safe drinking water and to comply with the New Zealand Drinking Water Standards (the Standards).

An Acceptable Solution is not the only means of complying with the legislative requirements applicable to a particular water supply. If a water supplier is unable to apply an Acceptable Solution, they can follow the Drinking Water Quality Assurance Rules (the Rules).

Drinking water suppliers must follow all the requirements and obligations specified in an Acceptable Solution. These cover the design, configuration, installation, operation, maintenance, testing, monitoring, record keeping, emergency management and auditing required.

Water suppliers who adopt an Acceptable Solution are not required to prepare and submit a drinking water safety plan (including a source water risk management plan). However, all drinking water suppliers adopting an Acceptable Solution are still responsible for identifying and managing risks to their water supply and consumers. As such, all drinking water suppliers are encouraged to implement the broad risk management approach that informs the development of a drinking water safety plan and source water risk management plan.

What are rural agricultural water supplies?

In a rural agricultural water supply, water is provided at an agreed quantity over a period of 24 hours (called trickle feed) to a storage tank. These supplies primarily provide stock water or irrigation water. These supplies can also provide water to houses or buildings at farms that are connected to the stock water or irrigation supply.

The water provided by rural agricultural water supplies may or may not be safe to drink. If the water is to be consumed by people at households, or other buildings, it needs to comply with the Standards made under the Act.

It may not be economic to treat all water in a rural agricultural water supply at a centralised treatment plant. A 'point of entry' treatment system (being the treatment of water at the point it enters a property) provides a way of ensuring that consumers receive water that complies with the required Standards and is safe to drink.

It is estimated there could be 300-500 rural agricultural water supplies with each one supplying drinking water to between 10 to 2,500 people. Currently there is no reliable register of all rural agricultural water supplies.

Key criteria for use of the Acceptable Solution for Rural Agricultural Drinking Water Supplies

- Water is supplied through a network system to a farm (or farms) to support farm activities (e.g. stock water) but some of the water may be used at households for domestic purposes. Up to 35% of water from the supply may be used for domestic purposes (and therefore goes through a compliant treatment system). At least 65% of the water must be used for stock water, wash down, irrigation or other non-domestic uses.
- The water from any household treatment system must be used for domestic purposes only; i.e. drinking, food preparation, washing and oral hygiene for dwellings and farm accommodation or buildings.
- All water used within a building fitted with a treatment system must be treated by that system. Water provided for outdoor water use may be untreated but must be marked as non-potable in accordance with the Building Code (clauses G12 Water Supplies and F8 Signs).
- There is no upper or lower limit to the population served by the rural agricultural water supply.
- End point treatment systems, which comply with the requirements for this drinking water Acceptable Solution, are installed for each single dwelling or building (e.g. shearers' quarters) serviced with drinking water or one treatment system which supplies water for up to three buildings.
- Each property that is connected to the rural agricultural water supply that adopts the drinking water Acceptable Solution, can install treatment systems at ten or fewer dwellings or buildings. Properties connected to a rural agricultural water supply that serve more than ten buildings, require a dedicated, centralised treatment system to provide potable water to all those buildings.
- All dwellings and buildings requiring drinking water must be supplied with water from a treatment system. Individual buildings or dwellings cannot opt out.
- Any treatment system must serve no more than 30 people (within a single dwelling or building).

- Buildings serving more than 30 people require a treatment system specifically designed for the volume of water required.

This Acceptable Solution sets out the source water testing a drinking water supplier must undertake. It also sets out the operational requirements for the rural agricultural water supply and defines what is required for a point of entry treatment system at the dwellings and buildings being supplied.

Drinking water suppliers considering using this Acceptable Solution must meet all the criteria described.