

1 May 2025

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Sent via email to [REDACTED]

LG25-0095 - Shotover Wastewater Plant

Dear [REDACTED],

REQUEST FOR OFFICIAL INFORMATION – RELEASE OF INFORMATION

Thank you for your request for information held by the Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC). On 30 March 2025 you requested the following information under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (LGOIMA):

In light of the Council’s decision to discharge treated effluent from the Shotover Wastewater Plant directly into the Shotover River, we have questions for the Council to address urgently and provide a response to us. It is unacceptable that this “emergency action” continues for five years as stated by the QLDC.

- 1. On what date will the disposal field be emptied to ensure birds are no longer settling on the field?**
- 2. Explain why bird netting (as suggested by the Queenstown Airport Corporation (QAC)) is not being implemented as a matter of urgency if this decision is being made as a result of the bird strike concerns raised by QAC.**
- 3. Provide evidence of the public health risks that are imminent and the reasons why this is considered an emergency situation, including historic test results that show an increasing public health risk.**
- 4. What are the contingency plans in the event that main plant failures occur (as they have in the past), or test results show contaminants present in the effluent that exceed consent levels?**
- 5. Public trust in the QLDC is poor. To show transparency as promised by Tony Avery and Simon Mason, commit to publishing all daily, weekly and monthly test results on the QLDC website for the public to view.**
- 6. Confirm that the section of the Shotover River covered by the Water Conservation (Kawarau) Order 1997 (from the area of the river adjacent to the plant all the way down to where the Shotover and Kawarau Rivers converge) will meet Class CR Standard during the period that treated effluent is being discharged directly into the Shotover River. Namely, that the river adjacent to the wastewater plant: (1) will have visual clarity of the water shall not be so low as to be unsuitable for bathing; (2) the water shall not be rendered unsuitable for bathing by the presence of contaminants; and (3) there shall be no undesirable biological growths as a result of any discharge of a contaminant into the water.**

7. **Confirm when work to remediate the disposal field will begin and when it is expected to be completed.**
8. **Confirm that the discharge of treated effluent is a temporary solution until the disposal field is repaired, and that once repaired, treated effluent will no longer be discharged to the Shotover River and can again be discharged into the disposal field.**
9. **Confirm that any time treated effluent is being discharged directly to the Shotover River, this will be published on the QLDC website with appropriate signage installed in the immediate affected area.**

QLDC RESPONSE

Release of information

In response to your request, we consulted with the QLDC Property and Infrastructure Team who provided the following information.

1. **On what date will the disposal field be emptied to ensure birds are no longer settling on the field?**

The Council commenced Emergency Works on Monday, 31 March. Since then, there has been no discharge into the disposal field. As a result, the disposal field has largely drained, with only limited areas of shallow standing water remaining in some zones.

2. **Explain why bird netting (as suggested by the Queenstown Airport Corporation (QAC)) is not being implemented as a matter of urgency if this decision is being made as a result of the bird strike concerns raised by QAC.**

The installation of bird netting was not pursued as an urgent solution because it would not have provided an immediate outcome. The process would have involved process time for installation and consenting, and the Council also had concerns regarding the long-term maintenance of both the nets and the Shotover Wastewater Treatment Plant. These factors made bird netting a less-than-optimal solution, particularly given the heightened aircraft safety risks identified by the Queenstown Airport Corporation (QAC).

3. **Provide evidence of the public health risks that are imminent and the reasons why this is considered an emergency situation, including historic test results that show an increasing public health risk.**

The primary focus of the Emergency Works was the increased risk of bird strikes. We recommend contacting QAC for detailed information on the monitoring of this risk. Regarding public health risks, the Council has consistently communicated its position and continues to make its sampling test results publicly available on the designated [QLDC Shotover WWTP webpage](#).

Additionally, the Otago Regional Council (ORC) also publishes its independent test results on its website [here](#).

4. What are the contingency plans in the event that main plant failures occur (as they have in the past), or test results show contaminants present in the effluent that exceed consent levels?

The treatment plant has been designed with several redundancy measures to help enable continuous and reliable operation. These include 'hot' standby components—such as inlet screens, key pumps, and centrifuges for sludge dewatering—that can be activated automatically if needed. Critical spare parts are also stored on site, allowing for prompt replacement in the event of equipment failure. Regular preventative inspections and maintenance are key practices that support the Plant's reliability.

Recognising that no system is immune to failure—and given past incidents at the Shotover WWTP—we have reviewed and strengthened operational practices to enhance early detection capabilities and improve response procedures.

If a process failure compromises treatment performance, the immediate priority is to diagnose and resolve the issue. Plant performance is monitored daily, and operational adjustments are made as needed to optimise treatment. Given the biological nature of the process, some short-term performance fluctuations are expected, which is why consent conditions are framed around rolling means and upper percentile thresholds.

In the event of a significant and prolonged treatment issue, we currently have the option to utilise the disposal fields to help mitigate impacts on the river. Additionally, the current upgrade project includes the development of approximately 24 hours of emergency storage within the decommissioned 'Pond 1' oxidation pond. Once the second MLE (Modified Ludzack-Ettinger) process train is completed, the plant will benefit from a substantial increase in redundancy, with a second, largely independent treatment stream available.

5. Public trust in the QLDC is poor. To show transparency as promised by Tony Avery and Simon Mason, commit to publishing all daily, weekly and monthly test results on the QLDC website for the public to view.

QLDC is committed to transparency and publishes weekly and monthly test results, processed through Eurofins, an external accredited laboratory, on the designated [QLDC Shotover WWTP webpage](#). Daily operational test results from the onsite lab are not published, as they are not accredited, do not include E. coli testing, and would be challenging to administer and maintain daily with current Council resources.

Additionally, the ORC also publishes its test results on its website [here](#).

6. Confirm that the section of the Shotover River covered by the Water Conservation (Kawarau) Order 1997 (from the area of the river adjacent to the plant all the way down to where the Shotover and Kawarau Rivers converge) will meet Class CR Standard during the period that treated effluent is being discharged directly into the Shotover River. Namely, that the river adjacent to the wastewater plant: (1) will have visual clarity of the water shall not be so low as to be unsuitable for bathing; (2) the water shall not be rendered unsuitable for bathing by the presence of contaminants; and (3) there shall be no undesirable biological growths as a result of any discharge of a contaminant into the water.

The discharge into the Shotover River consists of highly treated effluent, and water quality will be further improved once the second MLE plant becomes operational later this year. Ongoing river monitoring will assess the effects of the discharge, including compliance with the Water Conservation (Kawarau) Order 1997.

7. Confirm when work to remediate the disposal field will begin and when it is expected to be completed.

Council will continue to provide updates on the designated [QLDC Shotover WWTP webpage](#). Based on the information available to date, remediation of the existing disposal field is unlikely to be a viable or prudent short-term option.

8. Confirm that the discharge of treated effluent is a temporary solution until the disposal field is repaired, and that once repaired, treated effluent will no longer be discharged to the Shotover River and can again be discharged into the disposal field.

Council is working on a long-term solution and this takes time. It has undertaken significant investigation under advice to fully understand the cause of the non-performance, and to improve performance in the short-term.

The existing disposal field cannot be meaningfully repaired and ultimately will be decommissioned. Council anticipates that treated wastewater will be discharged to the river for approximately five years, but this timeframe will be highly dependent on the selected option. Opportunities to accelerate the project delivery will be explored as the project advances.

9. Confirm that any time treated effluent is being discharged directly to the Shotover River, this will be published on the QLDC website with appropriate signage installed in the immediate affected area.

Council publishes sampling test results which will appropriately inform the public, and it will also publish progress on long-term strategy for disposal on its website.

We trust the above information satisfactorily answers your request.

Kind regards,

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