

## **Letter to Ministers & Local MP from Concerned Upper Hutt Residents**

**To:** *The Hon. Simon Watts, Minister for Local Government The Hon. Casey Costello, Minister for Seniors The Hon. Chris Hipkins, MP for Remutaka Electorate*

**From:** *Retired Superannuitants (Concerned Upper Hutt Residents)*

**Date:** *4th July 2025*

**Subject:** ***Submission from Retired Superannuitants: The Unaffordable Burden of Water Reform***

*Dear Ministers,*

### **1. Who We Are: A Lifetime of Contribution**

*We are a retired couple from Upper Hutt. We have lived in this community for 36 years, where we have worked, paid our taxes, and raised our family. We write to you today not just as individuals, but as a household whose financial stability is now under direct threat from the government's water reform policy.*

*We did everything we were told to do to prepare for a secure retirement.*

*We lived frugally to buy our home and support our children. To build a small nest egg for our later years, I (Wife) worked until I was 67, and my husband worked until he was 70. We have always managed our finances carefully, believing that this lifetime of effort would grant us security and dignity.*

*Now, that dignity is at risk. The dream of a 'golden years' retirement, where we could support our children and enjoy our grandchildren, is slipping away. Our daughters have started their families in Australia and the South Island. If we are to have a meaningful relationship with our four beloved grandchildren, we must be able to afford to travel. I fear that the coming water costs will make this impossible. The thought that we will become isolated and lonely in our old age, unable to be part of our growing family's lives, is heartbreaking. It feels less like a reward for a life of hard work and more like a betrayal.*

### **2. Our Reality: A Budget with No More Room**

*The planned financial security is vanishing. The current cost-of-living crisis is hitting low and fixed-income households like ours the hardest. We have watched the cost of food, insurance, petrol, and power rise relentlessly, while our income remains static. Our budget is now a constant source of stress, a daily exercise in deciding what we can go without.*

*This is not just our story. The Massey University "[Retirement Expenditure Guidelines](#)" (2024) proves this mathematically. It shows that even a 'no-frills' lifestyle costs significantly more than what NZ Super provides. For us, this means we are already making difficult choices that impact our health and well-being, such as reducing heating in winter and cutting back on food. We no longer have Life or Contents insurance.*

### **3. The Tipping Point: Water Costs Will Push Us Over the Edge**

*Into this already precarious situation, we now face the prospect of massive, unavoidable increases in our rates to pay for water infrastructure. Our local council has been clear that under the "Local Water Done Well" model, the costs will be significant.*

*For us, this is the tipping point. An extra cost of this magnitude is not something we can "absorb". It is a cost that will push our household budget into crisis. It raises the terrifying prospect of going into debt simply to pay for basic utilities or being forced to sell the home we have worked for decades to achieve.*

*This is not the dignified retirement we were promised. It feels as though the social contract—that you can work hard and be looked after in your old age—is being broken.*

#### **4. Our Ask: A Call for Central Government to Uphold its Responsibility**

*The problem of funding our country's water infrastructure is a national one, born of decades of neglectful decisions by elected officials at both the central and local levels.*

*It is, therefore, fundamentally unfair to place the full burden of fixing it onto the shoulders of local ratepayers, especially those who are the most vulnerable.*

*We urge you, as our current elected leaders, to intervene and create a system that is both effective and humane.*

*We ask the government:*

- **Legislate a National Affordability Standard:** *Create a law that requires all councils to ensure water charges do not exceed a set percentage of income for low and fixed-income households. Do not leave affordability to chance or to 67 different interpretations.*
- **Urgently Reform and Expand the Rates Rebate Scheme:** *The current scheme is completely inadequate for the scale of the coming rate hikes. The income thresholds must be raised substantially, and the maximum rebate amount must be increased to provide meaningful relief.*
- **Provide Direct Central Government Co-Funding for Water Upgrades:** *Treat critical water infrastructure like other national assets, such as hospitals and state highways. Use general taxation to co-fund these essential projects, spreading the cost fairly across the whole country and all taxpayers, rather than concentrating it on small groups of ratepayers.*
- **Place a Moratorium on councils passing on full infrastructure costs** *until these national affordability protections are put in place. Protect citizens like us from being pushed into poverty while the details are worked out.*

*We trusted the government to provide a framework for a secure and dignified retirement. We ask you now to honour that trust. Please do not create a policy that solves an infrastructure problem by creating a social crisis for your seniors.*

*Thank you for your consideration of our submission.*

*Sincerely,*

*Sue & Murray*

*Retired Superannuitants (Upper Hutt Residents)*