



Water and its relationship with just about every aspect of our lives is becoming a hot and rather scary topic in our region.

Preparing for water weirdness

Julie Nevin is a Wakefield resident and a member of Zero Carbon top of the South and Extinction Rebellion. As part of our ongoing series on sustainability she looks at the issues this region faces around water use.

Oh, the sweet sound of rain.

As I began drafting this, the first rains in weeks were streaming down outside and I almost wanted to go out and dance in them.

I bet the firefighters actually were. It's been such a dry summer that NIWA categorised parts of Tasman as in "severe drought."

Appleby, as one example among many affected areas, had less than 4 per cent of its usual rainfall over January and February.

I haven't heard even one celebration of our high sunshine hours in the last month. And, unfortunately, as Tasman District Council put it, "One shower does not a drought break."

Water and its relationship with just about every aspect of our lives is becoming a hot and rather scary topic in our region.

How is our economy going to cope if the drought doesn't break? Will I be able to irrigate my crops next week?

What if our groundwater gets so low that sea water enters our drinking water?

When will we be able to go back in our favourite wild places?

When can we light up the summer barbie without thinking of the fire risk, or fill up the paddling pool for the kids?

Will our fruit trees survive now that they are dropping leaves well before autumn? Is it OK to have a bath?

I think that's the upside of all this; our relationship with water is due for a revamp.

After all, predicted climate changes for the drier parts of the Nelson Tasman regions - Nelson and the Waimea Plain - include more and more time in prolonged drought.

That and more frequent heavy rain events. Too much water or too little.

Water patterns are going to be different and we need to adapt to that.

If every home and business became water-efficient by default - collecting rainfall, reusing tap water instead of letting it wash down the drains after a single use, and so on - our water supplies would last much longer into a drought and we'd use less



Climate change makes each weird water event more likely and more intense.

SUPPLIED

energy treating it and pumping it around.

If our farmers adopted methods that restored and protected our soils, they would become less reliant on irrigation while storing carbon in the soil to offset their greenhouse gas emissions.

If our pine forests were steadily replanted with diverse species, they would be less thirsty and more resilient to fire, disease and erosion. If we replanted wetlands and coastal ecosystems where we can, we might reduce flooding impacts from heavy rain events. And

perhaps it's time to rethink new subdivisions with water scarcity in mind.

A dam will increase our water supply but will neither protect our ecosystems from drought nor prevent fires, nor, in the end, prevent water restrictions - just ask Nelson City Council. Our unsettling new normal is a weird mixture of too much and too little water and we must plan for both.

Of course, the more heat is retained in our Earth systems by increased greenhouse gas concentrations, the more these measures will become an

essential part of life in this region.

Climate change makes each weird water event more likely and more intense.

The more we can collectively do to reduce our emissions and support our government and councils' efforts to regulate them, the less we will contribute to the problem and the more in control we can feel in this uncertain time.

This drought and the heavy rain events of the last few years are extra reasons, if you need them, to raise your voice in support of climate action.