

**Date:** Thursday 15 February 2024  
**Time:** 10.00am  
**Meeting Room:** Reception Lounge  
**Venue:** Auckland Town Hall  
301-305 Queen Street  
Auckland

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## **Komiti mō te Whakarite Mahere, te Taiao, me ngā Papa Rēhia / Planning, Environment and Parks Committee**

### **OPEN ATTACHMENTS**

**ADDITIONAL ATTACHMENTS  
UNDER SEPARATE COVER**

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**Note:** The attachments contained within this document are for consideration and should not be construed as Council policy unless and until adopted. Should Councillors require further information relating to any reports, please contact the relevant manager, Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson.

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## Memorandum

13 December 2023

**To:** Planning, Environment and Parks Committee and all local boards

**CC:** Barry Potter – Director Infrastructure and Environmental Services, Megan Tyler – Chief of Strategy, Craig McIlroy – General Manager Healthy Waters

**Subject:** **Update on the Safeswim programme 2023/2024**

**From:** Holly Foreman – Safeswim Principal, Nick Brown – Regional Planning Manager

**Contact information:** Hana Perry – Senior Advisor – Infrastructure and Environmental Services ([hana.perry@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:hana.perry@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz))

### Purpose

1. To provide an update on the performance of the Safeswim programme during the 2023/2024 swimming season, and to brief elected members on programme developments ahead of the 2023/2024 summer swimming season.

### Summary

2. Safeswim is Auckland Council's programme for managing public health risk from swimming in the natural environment. Safeswim allows users to make informed decisions on when and where to swim in beaches and freshwater sites across Auckland.
3. Between 1 November 2022 and 30 April 2023, Auckland's beaches complied with national guidelines for recreational water quality 75 per cent of the time on average. This figure is lower than previous summers because of the Anniversary weekend flooding and Cyclone Gabrielle. These events resulted in extensive water quality issues across Auckland's beaches for several weeks during the summer. Attachment B provides a list of beaches ranked by how often the water quality was suitable for contact recreation during the summer season.
4. Safeswim is a collaboration between Auckland Council, Auckland Regional Public Health Service, Surf Life Saving New Zealand, Watercare Services Limited, Northland Regional Council and Drowning Prevention Auckland. The programme provides real-time advice on the level of health risk associated with swimming at specific locations and other targeted water safety advice.
5. Safeswim continues to act as the primary channel to communicate beach related water quality information to the public via the Safeswim website and digital signage. Safeswim collaborated with Watercare, Auckland Emergency Management, Auckland Regional Public Health and international public health experts to communicate incident management messaging during the Anniversary weekend flooding in January 2023, Cyclone Gabrielle in February 2023 and the Ōrākei main sewer collapse in September 2023. Safeswim was used to communicate the rāhui placed on the inner Waitemata by Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei in response to the impact of the wastewater overflows.
6. Northland Regional Council and Surf Life Saving New Zealand have continued to utilise Safeswim to communicate real time water quality and water safety information at over 160 sites. Safeswim is now the preferred public communication tool for both organisations, which are funding Safeswim services outside of Auckland.
7. Ahead of the 2023/24 summer season, five new Auckland sites will be added to Safeswim which will enable more communities to get the best available information on water quality and safety at their favourite swimming spots. The new sites are Algies Bay (Rodney Local Board), Manuka Reserve (Kaipatiki Local Board), Island Bay (Kaipatiki Local Board), Ōrākei Basin (Ōrākei Local Board) and Karanga Plaza (Viaduct Steps) (Waitemata Local Board).

### Context

8. Safeswim is the primary means by which Auckland Council informs the public about health risks associated with swimming in marine and freshwater environments in Tāmaki Makaurau. It is a partnership programme with Auckland Council, Surf Life Saving New Zealand, Auckland Regional Public Health Service, Drowning Prevention Auckland, Watercare Services Limited, and Northland Regional Council.
9. Safeswim allows users to better understand their health risks and manage their safety while swimming. Safeswim enables the public to make their own informed decisions about where and when to swim in the natural environment and enables users to make future plans using three-day forecast information.
10. The Safeswim programme also helps to guide infrastructure investment and shows the benefits of these investments to the public. There is often a large time lag between identifying water quality issues and resolving them. Safeswim helps to manage public health risks from poor water quality prior to the issues being resolved through long-term investment in infrastructure. The simplest way to reduce health risks from swimming in the short term is to reduce exposure to contaminants.
11. Safeswim integrates real-time water quality predictions based on rainfall intensity, duration and location, as well as tide, wind speed and direction, and sunlight. Data from rain forecasts and council rain gauges are fed into the Safeswim system to ensure that current water quality predictions are accurate. These models are informed by targeted water quality sampling and real-time wastewater overflow alerts. The website can also provide real-time physical safety warnings.
12. Safeswim is required to meet globally accepted performance standards and is overseen by an independent panel of national and international experts. Safeswim's water quality predictions are under constant review and are refined regularly in response to ongoing water quality sampling. Independent reviews in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023, conducted by Audit NZ found that Safeswim's model predictions were robust, complied with international benchmarks for accuracy, and that no changes or improvements were required to the programme.
13. In 2023 the World Economic Forum (WEF) selected Safeswim as one of three winners of the Digital Twin Cities Global Pioneer Project. A digital twin city is a virtual analytical model that recreates a physical city or real-world object that enables simulation, monitoring, and control of complex urban scenarios, enhancing efficiency and sustainability. The award recognises technical excellence and acknowledges the careful planning and collaboration between public and private sector partners to design and deliver solutions to address pressing urban challenges. The WEF award comes less than two years after the World Health Organisation recognition of Safeswim as a global exemplar of recreational water quality communication.
14. The Safeswim programme continues to monitor the water quality at over 200 locations. Data from the ongoing Safeswim water quality sampling programme will help to build water quality models at these locations in the future. Once models meet international standards for accuracy, they will be added to the website.

### Discussion

15. There were 132 sites displayed on the Safeswim website in Auckland for the 2022/2023 summer. Water quality information is provided for 128 of these sites, of which 115 are marine sites and 13 are freshwater sites. The four sites where water quality information is not provided are two 'hazard only' pins and two location pins for Surf Life Saving patrol and water safety information.
16. The two hazard only pins communicate safety and hazard information at high-risk freshwater sites (Hunua Falls and Waitipu / Waitākere Quarry) and advise against swimming.
17. The two marine sites (Pākiri Beach and Karioitahi Beach) are marked by location-only pins on the website, due to insufficient water quality information at present. Including these marine sites on the Safeswim website allows Surf Life Saving New Zealand to provide safety advice about these popular beaches via the website when required. In addition to these two sites, Te Arai will

be added to Safeswim this summer to provide water safety advice and lifeguard patrol information only. Water quality information is not yet available.

18. Overall, the 115 Auckland beaches on Safeswim were estimated to comply with national guidelines for water quality on average 75 per cent of the time over the 2022/2023 summer. This is the lowest compliance percentage that has been recorded since the current programme was launched in 2017, see Table 1.

**Table 1: Summer reporting statistics for the Safeswim programme.**

Season	Actual statistics (all beaches in year)		Rain (mm) *
	Number of beaches	Compliance (%)	
2017/18	84	78.1	592
2018/19	99	83.4	492
2019/20	100	89.2	196
2020/21	105	85.0	393
2021/22	114	90.0	395
2022/23	115	75.4	1,196

\* Rainfall recorded at Auckland Council's Albert Park rain gauge during each summer reporting period (i.e. between 1 November and 30 April). This is an indicative measure of rain in central Auckland – it may not represent the amount of rain at individual Safeswim beaches.

19. The low compliance figure for the 2022/2023 summer was driven by the extreme weather events that occurred in January and February (i.e. the Auckland Anniversary weekend flooding and Cyclone Gabrielle).
20. The amount of rain received during these events exceeded the design capacity of the stormwater and wastewater networks across the city and resulted in widespread water quality warnings at Auckland's beaches.
21. The Safeswim team undertook extensive water quality testing following these events, which identified the extent and duration of water quality issues. Given the scale of these weather events, the Safeswim team developed emergency response protocols for managing the public health issues during and after the state of emergency periods following these events. The approach taken was developed and endorsed with the panel of independent public health experts who provide oversight of the Safeswim programme. The black water quality alerts (which indicate a recent wastewater overflow) were removed only after water testing results indicated it was appropriate to do so.
22. More recently, the protocols developed for the storm events were applied to the management of the Ōrākei main sewer collapse. Regular water quality testing (in collaboration with Watercare) was undertaken across the Waitematā Harbour to understand the impacts of the wastewater contamination from the Ōrākei main wastewater overflow.
23. The Safeswim team also received many requests about the water quality following these events. The emergency response protocols that were endorsed by public health experts and supported by water quality test results, helped to ensure beach users remained confident in the advice provided by Safeswim.
24. The Long-term Plan 2021-2031 measure for beach swimmability uses data from the original 84 Safeswim marine beaches (from 2017) and is adjusted for variability in rainfall. This approach is designed to provide a standardised measure of water quality that can reliably be compared from year to year.
25. This long-term plan measure was used to account for the effects of below average rainfall observed in the recent summers (e.g. 2019/2020). In years with below average rainfall, the

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standardised measure is usually lower than the compliance reported for all beaches. Rain is the primary driver of poor water quality at beaches. However, the rainfall received during the 2022/2023 summer was substantially higher than average, and as a result the standardised measure is greater than the compliance reported for all beaches.

26. The 2022/2023 standardised Safeswim long-term plan measure was 86 per cent, which exceeded the target set by four per cent.
27. A ranking of the 115 Safeswim marine sites is provided in Attachment B. Beaches are ranked according to the percentage of time that they were suitable for swimming (swimmable hours) between 1 November 2022 and 30 April 2023.
28. Ahead of the 2023/24 summer season, five new sites will be added to the Safeswim website to enable communities to find the best available water safety and water quality information for their beaches.

These new sites are as follows:

- Algies Bay (Rodney Local Board),
- Manuka Reserve (Kaipātiki Local Board)
- Island Bay (Kaipatiki Local Board)
- Ōrākei Basin (Ōrākei Local Board)
- Karanga Plaza (Waitematā Local Board).

Attachment A provides further information on these sites.

29. An independent panel of public health experts have reviewed the data from these new sites and have endorsed the Safeswim models most appropriate action from a public health perspective.
30. The Safeswim programme will continue to monitor the water quality at these new locations.

#### **Public health and safety messaging through our Safeswim website**

31. Analysis of traffic to the Safeswim website shows that user numbers remain high. During the 2022 and 2023 summer season, 365,000 users checked Safeswim with individuals accessing the site approximately 850,000 times.
32. Safeswim was cited in the media over 250 times throughout the summer.
33. The Safeswim website continues to act as the primary channel to communicate beach related information to ratepayers via the website and digital signage.
34. Safeswim continues to work with Surf Life Saving New Zealand to communicate hazard and safety information.

#### **Safeswim models and sampling**

35. The Safeswim programme uses models to help provide the best available water quality information to beach users. The models predict when water quality is likely to exceed national swimming guidelines based on forecast and real-time rainfall, wind and tide data, and water quality testing results for each beach.
36. The models are designed to provide real-time information on water quality conditions, which water quality testing cannot provide. It takes up to 48 hours to receive the results of a water quality test, which means the results of that test are out-of-date before they are received.
37. However, water quality testing is a critical part of the Safeswim programme. Water quality data is used to support Safeswim's models as it provides the data on which models are calibrated, and against which accuracy is assessed. This testing data is used by Audit NZ each year to ensure the accuracy of the water quality advice provided by Safeswim.
38. In addition to the predictive models, Safeswim also provides information about discharges from the wastewater system that may impact water quality at beaches. When a wastewater overflow (sewage spill) to a beach is detected by sensors on the network or reported to the wastewater























































































































































































































































































































































