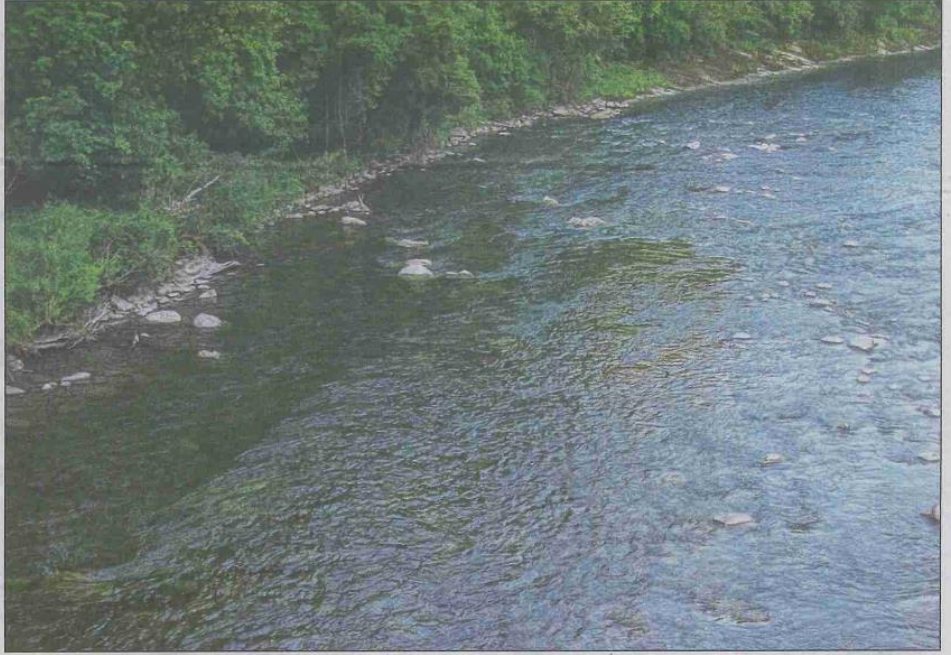


□ Upstream of the Waihi dam, as it was last Monday with silt waiting to go down the river.



□ The Waiiau river, at the Putere bridge, above the Waihi dam outlet.

Dam silt issue 'inexcusable'

THE overflow of silt into the Waiiau River has given local farmers a headache.

The issue arose when Eastland Network opened the gates during dam repair work after damage caused by the September deluge and associated debris from the Waihi Dam's catchment.

Cricklewood farmer Sheena Martin described the state of the Waiiau River as disgusting.

She claims Eastland Network has dumped hundreds of tonnes of silt and sludge from the Waihi

Dam into the creek below the dam, which feeds into the Waiiau River and flows into the Wairoa River.

"If a farmer did this, we'd have the book thrown at us.

"The roading companies aren't allowed to drop anything in a river or creek when they're clearing slips, so why are Eastland Network allowed to do this?"

"The Hawke's Bay Regional Council knows this is happening and has let it happen!"

Ms Martin wonders why

the work was not done earlier in October when she believes the rain would have washed it away.

"They have absolutely

'This is unacceptable.'

no consideration for all the other users of the river — swimming, fishing, water sports."

She said the worst part is farmers have had all the El Nino drought warnings,

and now the pumps which provide summer stock water have been destroyed by silt.

Ms Martin said they had pumps which supported a large scheme and serve four properties with summer stock water. One had been destroyed and another cannot be used until the river clears — which could be months away.

Another local farmer said the river had been filthy since November and several farmers had pulled their pumps out just as their stock needed more water.

Adding to the frustration was the lack of response from local councils over the state of the river, the Christmas-New Year period and the ongoing damage to the river and creek in the meantime.

"A gate was still open so mud was still entering the Waiiau and Eastland Network would not close it because they had concerns about the integrity of the dam if it was closed.

"We are going to be left with a muddy river until a couple of flushes clean it up."

Eastland Network manager Brent Stewart said the company was in further discussion with Hawke's Bay Regional Council over the Christmas-New Year period about all the options to stem any flow of silt and what could be done downstream.

He said prior to undertaking repair work, some time was required to complete an on-site investigation in order to fully determine the issues and devise a suitable repair plan, and to engage and mobilise a specialist contractor.

"We are working as hard as we can with the regional council to come up with some answers.

"The heavy September rain and influx of silt from up the valley, logs and debris into the dam has damaged it, causing the gate issue.

"We are hoping to have it sorted by

mid-January.

Currently one gate was still open, he said.

Hawke's Bay Regional Council chairman Fenton Wilson said no-one was happy with what was happening and they were taking it very seriously.

"It would have been nice to have known earlier and now the river is in low flow, it will take a winter of storms to clear it.

"This is unacceptable."

He was made aware of the damage around December 23 when regional council staff went up there after a farmer contacted them about the damage.

"We served an abatement notice to Eastland Network to stop what they were doing and their engineers told us they can not shut the last gate because of a risk to the structure of the dam if a big flow happened.

"Quite simply the damage from this is incredible and inexcusable.

"Why they thought they could do this around Christmas with fishing and water demand for stock is incomprehensible — the regional council will be taking this further.

"The problem is all theirs and they need to fix it.

"They have a consent to run the dam and they have to meet certain conditions which do not include damage to the river."

The council was meeting formally with Eastland Network today on the issue.

What's on over SUMMER

THERE'S a lot happening locally. Check out the following dates and enjoy a hummer of a summer in Wairoa.

JANUARY

9 Whangawehi Catchment Group guided tour, 9am from the Mahia Fishing Club.

10 Mohaka Whanau Fishing Competition.

14, 15, 16 Wairoa A and P Show.

15 Whangawehi Catchment Group guided tour, 9am from the Mahia Fishing Club.

20-22 Wairoa Yacht Club junior sail camp.

23 Long River Swing live at the Gaiety Theatre.

27 Wairoa Library summer reading programme grand finale party

30-31 Wairoa Water Ski Club Bridge to Bridge.

FEBRUARY

7 Wairoa Club surfcasting competition.

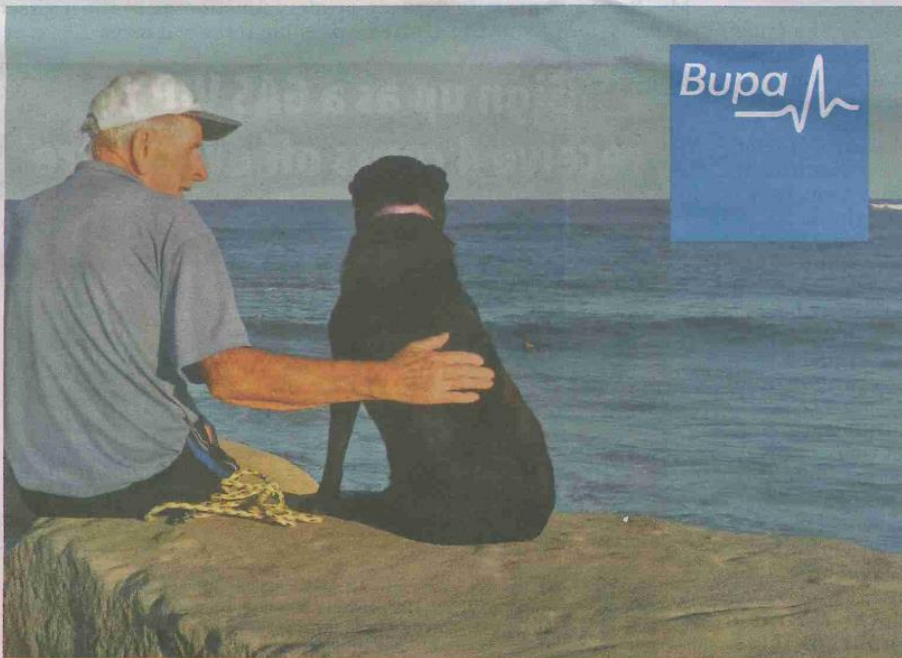
19-21 Mahia Boating and Fishing Club Tuna Big Game tournament.

25 Wairoa Races.

28 Wairoa Races.

MARCH

12 Mahia Boating and Fishing Club Police Tournament.



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