

Beware the Alarmists

An opinion piece by Councillor Doug Hall

I know it's easy to get wrapped up in numbers and listen to the people who are telling you that it's all doom and gloom. I've been on the other side now for eight months, and I can assure you: this too shall pass.

That brings me to my first topic: the sheer volume of reading. My dad talked about this before I was elected, but I thought he was being a bit overblown about the amount of reading you have to do. Oh my, he was not.

The amount of information is enormous. More importantly, the amount of knowledge you need just to understand what you're reading can be daunting. I've been doing everything I can to jam as much information into my brain as possible and, surprisingly, a lot of it's sticking.

One thing I've noticed since being elected is that there are still a few people around the council table who are in electioneering mode. Every time there's a camera or a reporter around, they're out there banging the drum. While it might get them headlines, it doesn't help the discord, and it doesn't help us get on with the job we were elected to do.

Eight months in, I still feel like I'm learning something new every hour. But I'm also gaining confidence.

As a computer technician, I mainly use one skill, and that is logic. Applying logic to a situation to achieve the outcome I want. The way I look at council decisions is fairly simple: in fifty years' time, how will people look back on the decisions we made today?

Will they thank us for fixing problems before they became crises? Will they appreciate that we invested in infrastructure before it failed? Will they understand that some decisions were difficult but necessary? That's the lens I try to apply to almost everything that comes across the council table.

Which brings me to another challenge. There is an incredible amount of noise coming out of central government at the moment. We already have a lot to do, and it isn't helped by unfunded mandates and constant reform proposals being thrown at councils.

Rates capping. New RMA changes. Local government reform. Unitary councils. The list goes on. It would be another story if it was a well thought out direction with a clear policy behind it. Instead, it often feels like we are being told, "We want fewer councils. Go figure it out."

What the government doesn't tell you is that fewer councils can actually mean higher rates. Any savings may be years away, but the cost of merging councils starts on day one. That's a difficult position for local government to be in.

At the end of the day, we are governors. We set direction, we represent our communities, and we make decisions based on the information available to us. It is unrealistic to expect councils to suddenly produce complete solutions to complex structural issues with little guidance and constantly changing rules.

Most of the work isn't about political theatre. It's about understanding complicated information, making practical decisions, and trying to leave the city in a better position than we found it. So, when you hear the latest prediction that everything is falling apart, take a breath. Ask questions. Read beyond the headline. Understand the context.

And remember: this too shall pass.

WHERE YOUR RATES GO

PART 1 OF THE SERIES 3 WATERS

Water, wastewater and stormwater are the pipes, pumps, drains and treatment systems most of us only notice when they fail.

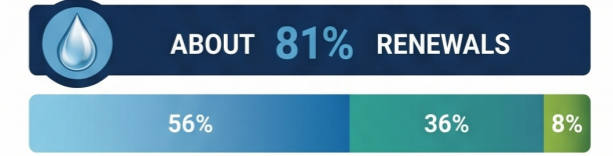
In 2026/27, most planned 3 Waters capital spending is for renewals, replacing and upgrading existing assets.

It is not flashy spending, but it protects public health, the environment and the city's resilience.

WHAT THIS COVERS



2026/27 PLANNED CAPITAL PROGRAMME: ABOUT \$92 MILLION



Drinking treatment, treatment, reservoirs, pipes, pumps and connections.



Sewer pipes, pump stations and treatment plants.



Drains, pipes and flood protection infrastructure.



RENEWALS: ABOUT \$74.6 MILLION (AROUND 81%)

Replacing and upgrading existing assets to keep services reliable and avoid higher costs down the track.



WHY IT MATTERS

- Keeps drinking water safe
- Protects public health and the environment
- Reduces the risk of leaks, overflows and flooding
- Supports growth and future generations

Figures rounded from DCC 2026/27 3 Waters budget material.
dunedin.govt.nz/services/water-supply/3-waters-projects



For more information go to:

www.doughall.nz