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Drinking Water Quality Assurance Rules

Level 3: What's Changing in the 2026 Rules

The 2022 (revised 2024) Rules are being revoked and replaced. A plain summary of the main changes for Level 3 (large networked) supplies: source water classes, virus barriers, cyanobacteria, disinfection, chemicals, sampling and storage.

REPLACES	NEW INSTRUMENT	IN FORCE
DWQAR 2022 (rev. Nov 2024)	Water Services (DWQA) Rules 2026	1 July 2027

Prepared by Lutra from the 2022 (rev. 2024) and 2026 Rules. Always work from the current legal text.

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THE SHORT VERSION

Ten key changes

1. New **legislative structure** under the Water Services Act 2021, in force 1 July 2027.
2. Source water classes go from **Class 1 to 4** to **Class A to D** including a class option for high quality groundwater that needs no primary treatment barrier (only a network residual.
3. **Cyanobacteria**: no more response plan, prescribed cell-count thresholds instead.
4. **Viral compliance** is now in the rules, combined with bacterial compliance .
5. Number of acceptable **protozoal barriers** have reduced.
6. Treatment **chemicals**: build your own schedule of treatment chemicals and by-products, and every dosed chemical needs a certificate of analysis..
7. **Monitoring and sampling** sees new continuous monitoring obligations for all source classes, removal of some event-based monitoring, and changes to the source water determinand suite
8. **Reporting** frequency increases across Level 2 and Level 3; grab sample results move from annual to monthly; new mandatory fields in every report.
9. **Storage and distribution hygiene**: storage management plans must now explicitly cover security and contamination protection; standpipe access
10. Several assessments require a **suitably qualified person**.

CHANGE 01 · STRUCTURE

Restructured as a clean legislative instrument

The biggest structural shift is the document itself. The familiar guidance-style consolidation has been rewritten as a formal legislative instrument.

2022 RULES (CURRENT)

Consolidated guidance style

- Sequential rule numbers (T3.1, T3.2, T3.3 etc.)
- Guidance prose and explanatory footnotes embedded throughout

2026 RULES (NEW)

Rules under s49 WSA 2021

- Hierarchical rule codes organised by module and sub-module (e.g. T3.BF.2, S3.AB, D3.RD)
- Explanatory guidance stripped out — interpretation will be covered in separate Taumata Arowai guidance documents

Practically, the rule content is reorganised into clearly scoped modules: **S3** (source water), **T3** (treatment, split into bacteria and virus, then protozoa) and **D3** (distribution). That makes the obligations easier to map to monitoring and reporting workflows.

New class A needs no treatment barrier

The old Class 1 to 4 system (plus Interim Class 1) is replaced with Class A to D. The existing Class 1 becomes Class B. Class A allows an additional classification that needs no primary treatment barrier (only a network residual).

<table>
<tr><th>2022 class</th><th>2026 equivalent</th><th>Protozoa log credit</th><th>Bacterial and viral compliance</th><th>Residual Protection</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Class 1
>30 m bore, sanitary head, E. coli / coliforms clear 3 yr</td><td>Class A
Networked supplies only
Additional viral indicator sampling</td><td rowspan="3">0-log (no barrier)</td><td>Barrier not required</td><td rowspan="6">Required</td></tr>
<tr><td>Class B</td><td rowspan="5">Barrier required</td></tr>
<tr><td>Interim Class 1</td><td>Class A (Interim) / Class B (Interim)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Class 2
10 to 30 m groundwater</td><td>Class C
plus roof water, springs not under surface water influence</td><td>3-log</td></tr>
<tr><td>Class 3
<10 m, springs, surface water</td><td>Class D</td><td>4-log</td></tr>
<tr><td>Class 4
4 to 3-log where low protozoa risk</td><td>Folded into Class C
Class D surface water, spring water or groundwater with low protozoa risk</td><td>3-log</td></tr>
</table>

Interim classes still give time to build a monitoring record, but the 24-month limit now steps down explicitly: A (Interim) goes to Class B or C, and B (Interim) goes to Class C if full status cannot be demonstrated.

Prescriptive thresholds replace the cyanobacteria response plan

The low / medium / high assessment remains, but the required response plan, with its vigilance and alert levels, is replaced by prescribed cell-count thresholds.

A

No response plan required

The 2022 duty to prepare a cyanobacteria and cyanotoxin response plan, with vigilance and alert levels, has been removed. Suppliers now follow the rules directly rather than a self-written plan.

B

Named cell-count thresholds

Medium or high likelihood sources trigger testing against **specific cell counts**: 550 cells/mL for anatoxin producers, 65 for microcystin and nodularin, 220 for saxitoxin, 50 for cylindrospermopsin, plus a picocyanobacteria biovolume trigger.

C

Planktonic versus benthic, and a season

The assessment now separates planktonic and benthic (mat-forming) cyanobacteria, names a likely season (October to May), and sets benthic triggers such as ***Microcoleus*** and 20% mat cover. Treated-water testing frequency scales with the result: weekly, twice weekly or daily against percentage of the MAV.

D

Low likelihood supplies

Low likelihood still means action. Previously a low-risk source needed nothing further. Now low-likelihood sources must carry out monthly visual (or other suitable) inspections through the risk season (October to May), and repeat the full assessment if cyanobacteria are found.

A named response plan is gone, but a bespoke written assessment is still required, including the at-risk habitats and locations and the season, which then define the monitoring. Site-specific documentation is therefore still needed, just in a different form.

Virus protection is now explicit

The old "T3 Bacterial Rules" become the "Bacteria and virus treatment rules" (T3.B). Viral contamination is named directly, both in source classification and in the treatment barrier.

A

New viral indicator for Class A

Class A (networked supplies only) requires **F-specific RNA bacteriophage** not detected over a year, by three evenly spaced samples, on top of the E. coli and total coliform record. Class B keeps the deep-groundwater “no protozoa barrier” status **without** the bacteriophage requirement.

B

Disinfection must address bacteria and virus

For Class B, B (Interim), C and D source water, an effective **bacterial and viral barrier** must be provided each day using one or more of FAC, chlorine dioxide, ozone or UV.

C

Common plant-exit limits

Water leaving the plant must meet **FACE of at least 0.2 mg/L**, turbidity **below 5 NTU for at least 98%** of operating time, and **never above 10 NTU**, alongside continuous FAC, pH and turbidity monitoring.

Some processes are out

The turbidity-based log credits are not new: conventional filtration carried the same 3 / 3.5 / 4-log tiers in 2022. What changed is which processes count as a protozoa barrier, and how direct filtration is tiered.

Protozoa process	2022 credit	2026
Coag/floc/sed, no filtration	0.5-log	removed
Second-stage filtration	0.5-log	removed
Slow sand filtration	2.5-log	removed
Coagulation and direct filtration	2.5 to 3.5-log	2.5 / 3.0-log
Coag, floc, sed and filtration	3 / 3.5 / 4-log	unchanged
Cartridge filtration	2-log	unchanged
Membrane (MF/UF)	up to 4-log	unchanged
Ozone / UV	0.25-3.0 / up to 4-log	unchanged

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Slow sand is no longer a Level 3 barrier

It survives only as a basic filter type for >30 m groundwater at Levels 1 and 2. Any slow sand plant relied on for protozoa at a Level 3 supply will need another recognised barrier.

Recycling rules have changed. Recovered water from backwash, thickening and dewatering must now undergo effective solids and liquid separation. It can then be returned in one of two ways: to raw water storage (kept under 20% of the stored volume), or upstream of the first treatment stage (with full treatment and flow held under 10% of plant inflow).

CHANGE 06 · DISINFECTION AND TREATMENT CHEMICALS

Tighter chlorine dioxide, a self-built chemical schedule

Most disinfection targets carry over. The real movement is on chlorine dioxide and on how treatment chemicals are tracked.

Parameter	2022	2026
Chlorine dioxide C.t	**15 min.mg/L**	**33 min.mg/L** (95% of day)
Chlorine dioxide dose cap	not specified	**below 0.8 mg/L** total dose
FAC C.t	15 min.mg/L	15 min.mg/L (unchanged)
Ozone C.t (bacteria/virus)	1.2 min.mg/L	1.2 min.mg/L (unchanged)
UV RED dose	40 mJ/cm^2	40 mJ/cm^2 (unchanged)

+

Prescribed determinand table removed

The 2022 rules told you which determinands to monitor for each chemical (the old Table 34 lookup) and ran a 15-sample characterisation programme. Now you must prepare your **own schedule** of all chemicals used and formed, flag which have a MAV, and monitor those monthly, with a 50% MAV step-down to annual.

New duty: every dosed chemical (except on-site generated hypochlorite and chlorine dioxide) must be shown safe by a per-batch certificate of analysis, or a certificate of conformance to a standard. Weekly chlorate monitoring for hypochlorite carries over; chlorine dioxide now carries an explicit weekly chlorite and chlorate check.

Where sampling has changed

Source monitoring sees both new obligations and removals. Treatment chemical monitoring is simplified. Distribution sampling rates are largely unchanged.

WHAT CHANGED

More or less

- Continuous conductivity, pH and turbidity now apply to all classes, including deep groundwater
- Class A adds F-specific RNA bacteriophage: three evenly spaced samples per year
- Iron and manganese gain a 50% MAV step-down to annual; the annual chemical suite drops barium, calcium and magnesium and adds boron, hardness and fluoride.
- Event-based sampling for severe or extreme weather events has been removed.
- The obligation to monitor any determinand identified as a risk in the Source Water Risk Management Plan no longer has an explicit rule; risk-based monitoring at source now sits outside the Rules
- Event-based chemical monitoring at the treatment plant (T3.96) removed.
- The 15-sample treatment chemical characterisation programme (T3.92) has been removed

WHAT CHANGED (DATA RECORDING)

Continuous monitoring

- Treatment monitoring (C.t, UV dose, plant exit turbidity) allowable data interruption reduced from 15 consecutive minutes or 72 minutes total per day to 5 consecutive minutes or 15 minutes total per day (G.CM.4)
- Grab samples can substitute but only cover up to 60 minutes of lost data per event, for a maximum of 24 hours
- Plants with older instrumentation or unreliable SCADA comms should assess compliance before July 2027.
- Distribution FAC continuous monitoring: outage tolerance extended to **48 hours** before grab sampling must commence (G.CM.5)

CHANGE 08 · REPORTING

Reporting changes impact more than just level 3

Reporting frequency increases across Level 2 and Level 3. The content required in every report is more prescriptive.

ALL LEVELS

- Rule numbers, supply ID and component, reporting period dates
- Whether results are from continuous monitoring or grab sampling
- Submitter name and email address
- Compliance year shifts to 1 July–30 June
- Where an online analyser is used in place of required grab samples, the worst recorded value across the compliance period must be reported along with any periods where data was not recorded

LEVEL 2

- Monitoring rules with annual compliance period now reported annually rather than quarterly
- Reports must now include actual test results and per-rule compliance status, not just a yes/no summary

LEVEL 3

- Grab sample rules with a one-month reporting period move from annual to **monthly** reporting (G.RR.6)
- Several assurance rules reclassified as non-reporting including backflow notification, mains repair hygiene, storage equipment disinfection, UV dose calculation methods among others

Storage plans expand

The distribution hygiene rules mostly carry over. The storage management plan scope increases.

A

Storage management plan content

Still required (D3.FO.1), but the mandatory content now explicitly adds **security measures** and **protection from contamination**, on top of minimum and maximum levels, target turnover, inspection and cleaning.

B

Inspection and return to service

Annual storage inspections must now identify ingress points, security breaches and contamination, and be recorded. Cleaning, disinfection and an E. coli test before a tank is brought back into service carries over.

C

Mains hygiene unchanged, new standpipe limit

Watermains repair hygiene (risk assessment, clean materials, disinfected tools, mains disinfection, SOPs) is essentially the same. New: standpipe access to the network is restricted to the supplier's staff, agents or contractors, Fire and Emergency NZ, and emergency services.

The new sign-off points

The 2026 Rules name several assessments that must be done, and recorded in writing, by a suitably qualified and experienced person (SQEP). Most run on a 5-year cycle.

Assessment requiring a SQEP	Rule	Cycle
Representative sampling of bores	**Rule 7**	5-yearly / post-seismic
Source water class determination	**S3.CR.1**	5-yearly / on change
Sanitary bore head assessment	**S3.AB.1**	5-yearly
Cyanobacteria likelihood assessment	**S3.CD.5**	5-yearly / on change
Backflow prevention programme	**D3.BF.1**	Ongoing
Backflow device testing	**D3.BF.4**	12-monthly

How Lutra can help: our process engineers can carry out and document the source water classification and risk, sanitary bore head reviews, cyanobacteria likelihood assessments, recycle and process design, and backflow prevention programmes that these rules require.

Timeline and final 2022 reporting

The 2026 Rules do not take effect until mid-2027, but the changeover has fixed reporting dates under the old Rules.

18 JUNE 2026
2026 Rules made by Taumata Arowai, notified 19 June 2026.

UNTIL 30 JUNE 2027
Keep complying and reporting under the 2022 Rules.

1 JULY 2027
2022 Rules revoked, 2026 Rules in force. A new compliance year begins under Class A to D. Annual compliance year runs 1 July to 30 June, replacing the calendar year (1 January to 31 December) used under the 2022 Rules.

14 JUL, 28 JUL, 22 SEP 2027
Transitional reporting of the final 2022 monthly (by 14 Jul 2027), quarterly (by 28 Jul 2027) and listed annual rules (by 22 Sep 2027).

WHAT DIDN'T MAKE IT

Since the draft· What changed?

Not everything proposed made it through. A few significant changes between the 2025 consultation draft and the final 2026 Rules.

DIDN'T SURVIVE / SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGED

- Pressure monitoring requirements — dropped entirely (D3.PM)
- Enteric viral indicator programme for Class A — replaced by F-specific RNA bacteriophage test
- Cyanobacteria regime substantially restructured
- Plant exit pH limit (6.5–8.0) — removed
- Class A restricted to networked supplies only — tightened
- Recycle rules restructured
- Plant exit turbidity: draft had simple <5 NTU with no time qualifier; final adds 98% of time requirement and a hard 10 NTU ceiling

REINSTATED OR RELAXED

- Chlorine dioxide as a bacteria/virus barrier — reinstated
- 3.0-log direct filtration credit — reinstated
- On-site generated hypochlorite/ClO_2 exempt from certificate requirement
- Iron and manganese step-down to annual monitoring if <50% MAV
- Colour exempted from Class C(a) groundwater source monitoring
- Benthic mat threshold raised from 5% to 20%