

## **Selwyn Water: A Community Discussion Paper, by Zoran Rakovic, January 2026**

**Public meeting: Lincoln Events Centre, Baylis Lounge, Tuesday 10 February, commencing at 7.30pm**

### **Purpose of this Paper**

This paper is intended to support a calm, informed, and constructive community discussion about the future of water services in Selwyn. It is written for ratepayers, residents, councillors, and anyone with an interest in how decisions about water are made, paid for, and governed.

It is **not** a campaign document for a predetermined outcome. Its purpose is to:

- clarify where we are now
- explain why legitimacy and trust matter as much as technical delivery
- set out the key concerns repeatedly raised by the community
- outline realistic pathways forward, including dissolution or formal ratification of the Selwyn Water Company

This paper is designed to be printed, shared, and discussed.

### **Why Water Governance Matters**

Water is not just another council service. It affects public health, household costs, environmental outcomes, growth patterns, and intergenerational equity. Decisions made today will shape Selwyn for decades.

Because water assets are long-lived and capital-intensive, governance decisions tend to become locked in. That makes **democratic consent and transparency at the outset especially important**.

When people feel decisions are imposed from above, even technically sound systems struggle to earn public trust.

### **Where We Are Now**

The Selwyn Water Company (a Council Controlled Organisation, or CCO) has been established to deliver water services. However:

- the model was rejected by the public less than a year ago
- many current councillors opposed it prior to the election
- within the first 100 days of the new council, there has been limited visible reassessment or community re-engagement

This has created uncertainty and ongoing debate, not because residents oppose good water services, but because many feel the **decision itself lacks legitimacy**.

### **The Core Question**

The question is not simply whether the Selwyn Water Company can function.

The deeper question is:

**Does the current model have clear, renewed consent from the community it serves?**

If the answer is unclear, then a pause, review, and open discussion are not disruptive — they are responsible.

### **Thirteen Key Concerns (draft)**

The following issues are presented for discussion.

1. **Democratic mandate** – Lack of renewed public consent after rejection of the model.
2. **Accountability** – Unclear responsibility between council, board, and management.
3. **Governance costs** – Additional board, compliance, audit, and insurance overheads.
4. **Transparency** – Perception of reduced openness compared with in-house delivery.
5. **Incentives** – Risk of prioritising growth and complexity over cost discipline.
6. **Asset control** – Confusion about who ultimately controls public water assets.
7. **Procurement risk** – Potential for reduced competition or weak value-for-money discipline.
8. **Technical drift** – Engineering decisions that may not reflect community priorities.
9. **Integration failures** – Poor coordination with roads, growth, and other council works.
10. **Legitimacy perception** – Ongoing sense the model exists against the will of the people.
11. **Risk and liability** – Unclear responsibility when failures or incidents occur.

**12. Future reform risk** – Uncertainty around national water policy changes.

**13. Privatisation risk** – Fear of asset-sale creep or future private ownership.

### **Why This Is Not About Blame**

This discussion is not about blaming staff, engineers, or individual councillors. Many decisions were made under time pressure, regulatory uncertainty, and changing national settings.

However, **good governance allows societies to revisit major decisions when circumstances or consent change.**

Correcting course is not failure — it is democratic maturity.

### **Pathways Forward**

There are realistically two legitimate long-term pathways. Avoiding the decision only prolongs uncertainty.

#### **Option A: Dissolution of the Selwyn Water Company**

This would involve:

- bringing water services back in-house
- transferring staff, contracts, and assets
- absorbing governance functions into council

This option requires:

- clear costings
- legal and operational analysis
- a defined transition plan

It is not quick or free, but it restores direct democratic control.

#### **Option B: Formal Ratification with Stronger Safeguards**

If the community supports retaining the company, legitimacy must be rebuilt through:

- formal re-consultation with clear questions
- explicit council ratification of the model
- strengthened transparency and accountability
- clear protections against privatisation

- regular, open public engagement

Ratification without reform risks entrenching mistrust.

### **Why Open Public Meetings Matter**

Regular, open public meetings are proposed as a **temporary trust-building measure**, not a new governance layer.

They:

- allow early explanation of decisions
- surface concerns before conflict escalates
- support councillors with unfiltered community feedback

They can be discontinued once confidence is restored, or a final direction is chosen.

### **Questions for Community Discussion**

Participants may wish to reflect on:

- What water model best reflects Selwyn's values?
- What level of transparency is non-negotiable?
- How should community consent be measured?
- What safeguards are essential if a CCO is retained?
- How do we ensure affordability for future generations?

### **Conclusion**

Water decisions must be technically sound, financially responsible, and democratically legitimate.

This paper invites Selwyn residents to engage respectfully, ask hard questions, and help shape a future water model that communities can trust.

*Prepared by Zoran Rakovic, for community discussion. January 2026.*

