

12 October 2023

Tēnā koutou and good afternoon to you all,

I want to start this message by once again thanking you all for your continued patience and support as we work through the Queenstown Cemetery restoration process. We appreciate your kindness and understanding as we progress this work.

The most pressing question on everyone's mind is likely, when will the restoration be done and when can you, as the families with impacted plots, return to see your loved ones. This is a difficult question to answer, but we would like to provide you with the best estimate that we currently have of the potential timeline of works:

- Now till 20 Oct (estimated): Uphill risk mitigation above cemetery
- After Labour Day till Early November: Larger debris removal
- Early November till Late November: Further silt and smaller debris excavation
- Late November till before Christmas: Detailed cleaning of site & potential monument restoration

We want to be fully up front that it is going to be a while before the cemetery reopens, and that is because of the care that we need to take to not damage any graves, either the features above ground or the burials below. For those who are currently in the Queenstown area and have noted that it appears no cleanup activity has taken place yet, I do understand how frustrating this is, but please know that the uphill works are the focus both this week and next week and we'll be shifting our attention to the cemetery very soon!

Currently, Skyline is clearing the upslope areas, removing loose soil and material and installing more water control infrastructure in order to make the entire hillside safer, and therefore the cemetery down below will be better protected as well as safer to work within. They have indicated that a couple of weeks is a realistic time frame to complete this work, so with an estimated finish date of around 20 October. After Labour Day, we can then hopefully move the crane in along Brecon Street and get to work on the large debris.

While the hillside is getting sorted, we have been working on the details of the restoration project plan and have brought in two Ngāi Tahu emergency response advisors (one is still actively assisting up in Hawkes Bay as well) who have worked specifically within event-impacted cemeteries. Their expertise is proving invaluable in terms of informing exactly how best to organise our work site, what equipment can be used to ensure the cemetery and its features (e.g., headstones and grave surrounds) aren't damaged further, as well as to help us make sure that we're proceeding with site protocols that take into account all the necessary cultural considerations. This will include a variety of guidelines both to uphold tikanga but also multi-ethnic and denominational sensitivities. I want to acknowledge that while each person holds their own beliefs and faiths, the Queenstown Cemetery is a multi-cultural, multi-denominational space and we are going to proceed by safeguarding this equality and inclusivity for everyone.

The detailed cleaning phase is when we would like to bring in volunteers, so we will be tentatively planning for that as we go. I know this seems a long time to wait, and if all goes well then hopefully this timeline can be brought forward.

One thing we are considering is holding a public meeting or forum (either in person and/or online) to provide greater details and the possibility of answering questions directly. I have added a poll into this email above to gauge your interest in us holding an information session (again, could be in person or online). If you could click 'Yes' or 'No' above then I can see what the interest is and hopefully get something organised shortly?

I want to continue to make myself available for any questions or concerns you have, I am always at the other end of the phone, or these emails, so do please reach out as I want you all to feel informed and supported throughout this process. We're going to be adding more information and updates to the 'Weather Event – September 2023' webpage on our website, but I'm still working with our Communications Team to try to have a dedicated page solely for the cemetery updates. So for now, I'll link you to the emergency response page and then will send round a specific link for the cemetery when I have one!: <https://www.qldc.govt.nz/community/emergency-management/weather-event-september-2023>

Please let me know if there is anything else I can do to help and support you all during this time. I know that 'waiting and watching' is a difficult space to be in, and I want to reassure you that I am working at this end to advocate for you and your loved ones interred in the Queenstown Cemetery. I will be in touch again early next week with another update and further information as well.

Noho ora mai