



Reporting on our Environment

Good environmental reporting is critical if we are to know whether or not government policies and business and community actions are having the intended results.

The Reporting and Review Group at the Ministry for the Environment ensures New Zealanders have credible environmental information to make good decisions and measure progress in maintaining a healthy environment.

By using environmental data and information provided by councils, central government agencies, and the research and scientific community, we can create a national environmental picture.

Local government monitors the environment in their regions or districts under the Resource Management Act. Reporting this information informs local policy and decision-making as well as informing local stakeholders and residents.

At the Ministry, we aim to provide useful environmental information in areas identified as government priorities. Current priorities are: air quality, biodiversity, climate change, contaminated land management, freshwater, land, oceans, transport, toxics and waste.

HOW DO WE REPORT ON THE ENVIRONMENT?

The Ministry has developed a framework to support its reporting function and to include a review function. The framework allows us to report on:

1. monitoring – collection of environmental indicator data and other information
2. implementation – are things in place to implement the policy?
3. effectiveness – has the policy delivered what it is supposed to?

By applying this framework across the Ministry's main work areas over time, we will be able to report on both the state of the environment and the implementation and effectiveness of policy.

WHERE DO WE GET THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONTENT FROM?

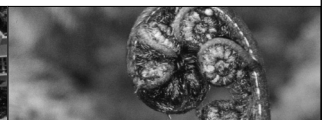
We use **environmental indicators** to produce data that informs our reporting. Rather than gathering information on all aspects of the environment, we are near to finalising a core set of indicators which are representative of the environment. The list of proposed indicator areas is listed on page 3 of this information sheet.

Most of the data we use is collected as a result of **information-sharing agreements** with local government and central government agencies.

Access to accurate and timely environmental data and information is essential because it enables us to effectively measure how well New Zealand has achieved the intended environmental outcomes.

We have developed or supported the **development of a variety of tools** which make data gathering and analysis easier. These include the Landcover Database and geospatial datasets such as:

- Land Environments of New Zealand (LENZ) – is a classification of environments mapped across New Zealand's landscape that works at a range of scales and comes complete with information about climate, soils and landforms.
- The River Environment Classification (REC) – which maps by river segment the physical characteristics of New Zealand's rivers, for example their climate, the source of flow of the river water, the geology of the catchment and catchment land cover, such as forest, pasture or urban.
- Marine Environment Classification (MEC) – provides a general map showing variation in the physical and biological characteristics of New Zealand's marine area within our Exclusive Economic Zone.



WHAT DOES ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING LOOK LIKE?

Current trends in environmental reporting have moved away from large single volume reports that attempt to cover the whole environment. We have produced a range of smaller reports and products that vary according to information available and audience needs. We are exploring more targeted and focused documents that are timely and meet the interests of specific target audiences. Recent examples include the greenhouse gas emissions web pages and the report on air quality in Auckland and Christchurch.

We produce a range of reporting products targeting specific audiences (our primary audience after the Government is environmental decision-makers across central and local government as well as in industry). These reports are usually available in hard copy but are also available on our website or on CD or DVD (eg, our various classification tools).

HOW OFTEN DO WE PUBLISH ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS?

The reporting schedule acknowledges that timeframes vary depending on monitoring and reporting requirements, and the frequency of data collection. For example, data collection may occur daily and contribute to annual indicator data updates (for example, air quality data at certain sites) which then feed into a three-yearly performance review.

Reporting timeframes may also be prescribed by external reporting obligations such as the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants or the annual Greenhouse Gas Inventory as prescribed by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol.

Reporting must be ecologically meaningful if it is to be effective. While indicator data can be reported annually, it may take 15 years of data before meaningful trend information can be assessed.

WE WOULD LIKE YOUR VIEWS ON ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING

The Ministry for the Environment is seeking feedback about your specific needs for environmental information. We have recently published *Gentle Footprints Boots 'n' All* and are interested in your views on this and our other publications.

We are also keen to discuss *Environment New Zealand*, a 2007 update of the 1997 State of the Environment report which will use the core indicators to provide a national report on the state of the environment.

We welcome your views on:

- **usefulness** – how have you found the usefulness of these publications?
- **format** – how do you regard accessing technical publications on the web only and having general summary publications available on the web and as a hard copy?
- **content** – our reporting and review framework involves a three level process – monitoring, implementation and effectiveness. Where possible, should a publication report on all levels?
- **structure and layout** – how well do our publications communicate the content?
- **level of detail** – is the information provided in sufficient detail?
- **pitch** – are our publications at the right level?
- **improvements** – what, if any, improvements would you like to see?
- **information** – is there any other information regarding the topics we currently report on that you would find useful?

CURRENT AREAS OF ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITY AND THE PROPOSED INDICATORS

Air quality:

- **Number of exceedences of National Environmental Standards for air quality** *shows where changes in air quality may impact on human health.*

Freshwater:

- **Trends in national freshwater use** *shows changes in water availability (surface and groundwater) and how much of that water is allocated through resource or other consents.*
- **Trends in national water quality** *shows where changes in water quality may impact on human health.*

Climate change:

- **Trends in emissions and removals of greenhouse gases** *shows how New Zealand is meeting its commitment on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and Kyoto Protocol.*

Waste:

- **Trends in volume and composition of solid waste to landfill** *shows waste stream patterns reflecting our consumption and resource use.*

Contaminated land management:

- **Change in the total number of contaminated sites that fall into the category of either: a) confirmed contaminated, b) remediated or c) discovered** *shows how we are identifying and remediating contaminated land.*

Land:

- **Change/trends in land cover and land-use** *shows changes in land cover and land-use.*

Ecological footprint:

- **A sustainability indicator** *that shows the amount of land required to support the lifestyle choices of a given population.*

Biodiversity:

- **Change in distribution of selected native species** *shows whether selected native species, such as kiwi, are present or absent in any given area.*
- **Extent of indigenous vegetation cover and protected areas by Land Environment New Zealand classification** *shows what proportion of environments are covered by indigenous vegetation and what proportion are protected.*

Oceans:

- **Extent of marine protected areas by Marine Environment Classification (MEC)** *shows what proportion of MEC environments within the Exclusive Economic Zone are protected.*
- **Percent fish stocks above maximum sustainable yield** *shows what percent of all managed fish stocks are being maintained within an agreed level of catch.*

Transport:

- **Trends in total vehicle kilometres travelled by vehicle type** *shows the types of vehicles we drive and the distances travelled.*
- **Trends in total consumer energy by use, by fuel type and by sector** *shows the type of energy we use and for what purpose.*

Consumption:

- **Trends in real household consumption expenditure** *shows our consumption patterns (as expressed in money spent) for specific goods and service areas.*



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

You can contact the **Ministry for the Environment** by phoning (04) 439 7400, emailing information@mfe.govt.nz, writing to PO Box 10362, Wellington, or see our website: www.mfe.govt.nz