



## Lake Taupo – The Ministry for the Environment’s perspective

Clean, abundant water is a key component of our economic prosperity, health, environmental values and cultural identity. Lake Taupo, our largest lake, is a treasure, but past and current land use activities are threatening its water quality. The Government has acted with its partners Environment Waikato, the Taupo District Council and Ngati Tuwharetoa to protect it. The Ministry for the Environment is responsible for leading a cross agency programme, working with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and with Te Puni Kokiri to help protect the lake.

The Ministry for the Environment’s focus is the environment of New Zealand and how people behave towards it. We want a good environment where biodiversity and natural areas are protected and enhanced, but we must also have an environment where productive resources are managed sustainably, and the places where people live are clean, healthy and safe. We believe in a New Zealand that is reinforced by its sense of place.

Problems with Lake Taupo’s water quality are due to excess run-off of nutrients particularly nitrogen. This threatens our sense of place, as a thriving and healthy country to live in and visit. Water quality helps underpin New Zealand’s clean, green image. Trout fishing and the future of tourism in the Taupo region depend on the condition of the lake. Managing excess nutrient run-off is also an issue that affects other parts of New Zealand. What we learn from Lake Taupo we can apply to other resource issues.

This is why we are giving priority to a programme for water quality improvements in Lake Taupo and have assigned senior staff to work on the programme. It is a programme that our Minister for the Environment Marian Hobbs has taken a personal interest in and which she is committed to seeing succeed. We will all learn by doing in the context of Lake Taupo.

In July this year, the government confirmed funding of \$36.7 million towards an \$81.5 million programme to improve Lake Taupo’s water quality. Environment Waikato and the Taupo District Council have committed to funding the remainder.

This package will encourage pastoral farmers to diversify to low nitrogen land uses through a mixture of financial incentives and advisory services over 15 years, and will:

- Reduce manageable nitrogen levels in Lake Taupo by 20 percent.
- Develop robust land use controls that will secure the gains made when land owners opt to change from pastoral to alternative lower nitrogen leaching land uses.
- Provide practical advice and assistance to farmers and other land owners for business planning, research into land uses that are low nitrogen producing and to help maintain a viable rural economy.

The Lake Taupo programme is a practical example of sustainable development in action. It is helping implement the Government’s *Sustainable Development Programme of Action*. We are seeking to protect a high quality environment while promoting economic development to sustain the social and cultural values of the community. It is a challenging path ahead for our partners Environment Waikato, the Taupo District Council, Ngati Tuwharetoa and us – but the key issues are agreed and we are making good progress in addressing them.

The work that the Ministry for the Environment has been involved in includes:

- Leading partner relationships with Ngati Tuwharetoa, which has large landing holdings in the lake catchment, and which needs and seeks a sustainable development solution to help it protect, sustain and enhance the lake and, at the same time, its culture and economic base.
- Providing help from the Ministry for the Environment’s Sustainable Management Fund. This supported 2020 Taupo-nui-a-Tia, the community initiated project aimed at developing a long-term vision for Lake Taupo and its catchment. This project did some vital underpinning work by identifying shared community values and aspirations, and how they can be protected and enhanced through real and relevant and practical actions. Its action plan sets out what needs to be done and who should do it.



- Funding a review of the science underpinning the 20 percent nitrogen reduction target for Lake Taupo.
- Working with other central government agencies including the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and Te Puni Kokiri on research work investigating the feasibility of nitrogen trading options and alternative low nitrogen emitting land uses.
- Working with Environment Waikato, the Taupo District Council and Ngati Tuwharetoa on nitrogen capping rules and the options for a nitrogen trading regime in the catchment (including options for the initial allocation of nitrogen credits).
- Promoting amendments to the RMA which would facilitate such a trading regime should it ultimately be considered a worthwhile option.
- Working with Environment Waikato and the Taupo District Council to develop the administrative structure responsible for allocating the \$81m for the Protecting Lake Taupo Strategy.
- Working with other stakeholders and landowners in the catchment, including other government agencies (Department of Corrections), the state owned enterprise Landcorp, foresters and farmers.

The Ministry for the Environment is committed to the success of this project. There is still a way to go but we are confident that with the continuing commitment, desire and innovative thinking of the partners, and the communities they represent, we can save our largest lake and its critical values of clear, clean water for future generations.

**WANT TO KNOW MORE?**

Contact the **Ministry for the Environment** by phoning (04) 917 7400, emailing [info@mfe.govt.nz](mailto:info@mfe.govt.nz), or see our website: [www.mfe.govt.nz](http://www.mfe.govt.nz)