

Submission on proposed amendments to the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management

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Freshwater is key to the survival of planet earth and its inhabitants. Despite this we ignore warnings from leading scientists, and the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development. We allow practices that continue to degrade our water quality as we grow our primary industries and our population, increasing urban sprawl and infrastructure.

The prognosis is grim. The Prime Minister's chief science advisor Sir Peter Gluckmanⁱ pointed out recently that *"The lag effects associated with flushing contaminated groundwater, for example, means that it will be decades or longer before results are noticeable in many places, even with immediate management interventions."* The latest national report from the Ministry for the Environment and Stats NZ about the state of freshwater reveals that New Zealand's rivers and lakes are under increasing pressure and the implications for our freshwater species are *"really critical"*.

Proposed amendments to the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2014 will not allay concerns expressed by the experts. They would endorse the current poor state of our waterways, and allow freshwater to become more polluted, by elevating economic considerations to the same level as environmental. They would make it clear that *"regional councils must consider the community's economic well-being when making decisions about water quantity, deciding what level or pace of water quality improvements will be targeted, and when establishing freshwater objectives."*

We all want the best for our children and grandchildren. So why are we denying them a future without quality water, because without it there is no future. Already I and my family and friends suffer ear infections when we swim, surf and dive in our favourite river and surf spots. The proposed new "swimming" standards, which redefine what is safe for swimming, will worsen swimming standards. Our drinking water is so heavily chlorinated that we've been sourcing an alternative supply from the Lower Hutt aquifer drinking fountain. That source is now closed off to us because of E-coli in the aquifer. I fear for the future as we continue on our agenda of growth at all costs.

I ask you face up to the dire warnings that have been made by the scientists, and listen to them, rather than the polluters, to rewrite the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management. As current “guardians” of the land we have a responsibility to ensure that our rivers and lakes are able to support a healthy population into the future, and the ecosystems critical to the survival of our planet.

There are means of achieving economic well-being without the intensified farming practices and rapid urban growth that are polluting our lakes and rivers. These are outlined in the various reports to government, and evident in best practice here and overseas. Some farmers are already using this best practice to protect our natural environment. Those who don't should be required by law to meet stringent environmental quality standards before they can sell their products. Water use should be regarded as a privilege, not a right. I support a call by freshwater ecologist Dr Mike Joy, for the diversion of a \$400 million fund used for irrigation (“*which only intensifies dairying*”) to riparian planting and other mitigation measures.

We should examine what is being done in more populated parts of the world to integrate water cycle management into the built environment. There are numerous examples of such plans, including Water Sensitive Urban Design in the UK, produced by the Construction Industry Research and Information Association (CIRIA).

To quote again from Sir Peter Gluckman: “*Despite the challenges outlined above, there are important choices that New Zealand has to make. No single strategy will be enough. Major changes will be needed in some sectors of the economy, and in planning and consent activity. These changes will be neither instantaneous nor cost-free. Investment over time will be needed..... Many policy decisions will be needed, supported by land-use planning and commercial decisions both by large companies and by farming businesses.*”

We need to start immediately on implementing and enforcing these changes. We must stop thinking about short term gain and urgently focus on the needs of our future generations.

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ⁱ New Zealand's fresh waters: Values, state, trends and human impacts. 12 April 2017, Sir Peter Gluckman