Your submission to Action for healthy waterways – consultation

Raelene Mercer, NEMS - National Environmental Monitoring Standards project (Raelene Mercer)

Reference no: 1941

Submitter Type: Local Government

Clause
Proposals as a whole - please refer to questions 1-3 on page 19 of the discussion document

Notes
The NEMS Steering Group is made up of representatives from regional councils and NIWA who have significant expertise in the environmental data collection space. The project is dedicated to increasing consistency and comparability of environmental data collection across the nation, with a view to being able to confidently report environmental trends and state against standards, guidelines and objectives. The proposals here are strongly focused on measuring and monitoring environmental indicators and attributes. There is a clear requirement for this data collection, management storage to be conducted in a transparent, consistent, integrated and effective manner so that ultimately council (and other agencies’) investment in monitoring is useful, justifiable and appropriate. More National Environmental Monitoring Standards will be required across a range of attributes not already covered by existing NEMS. This raises the issue of resourcing for NEMS development, not just in terms of finance, but also availability of appropriately qualified personal to develop and guide implementation of the NEMS. To date, the NEMS project has completed 17 NEMS and guidance documents, funded largely by MfE and significantly resourced ‘in-kind’ by regional councils ans NIWA. This model may not be sustainable longer-term, and this is something that the NEMS Steering Group feel must be considered in implementing the proposals outlined here. The availability of appropriate trained and qualified staff to design and undertake monitoring programmes is another issue that must be considered. Repeatedly the NEMS SG has been asked where council staff can gain guidance on developing monitoring networks - the development of which, we believe, sits with an agency at national level, such as MfE. Data management, transfer and accessibility is an on-going issues across the environmental monitoring sector, despite the excellent work being undertaken by initiatives like NEMS, EMaR, and by Regional Council Special Interest Groups (SIGs) like the Environmental data SIG, and SWIM. As always, these initiatives are carried out on top of existing work requirements of most staff, and are not adequately resourced in the longer term. This includes ongoing maintenance and review of standards and guidance, implementation in the field and office, and data storage and transfer for reporting. In summary, the NEMS SG strongly encourages the Ministry to consider all aspects of the monitoring that is being mooted here, from network design to data transfer and reporting. This is necessary to do justice to the significant investment that councils and other agencies will be required make to meet the requirements of the proposal.