

Submission by:

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[withheld]

To whom it may concern

Water is a finite and precious taonga.

It is worth noting that all human activities are reliant on the continued functioning of ecosystems and that our activities ought to be limited by the capacity of the ecosystems which surround us to support them.

We ought only to do, or to take, what the world around us can sustain. This requires us to understand the ecosystems around us and to act with great caution where our activities may damage them.

I have dealt with all proposed changes separately:

1. ACCOUNTING

All decisions regarding water management and allocation must be founded on a comprehensive understanding of water systems and their temporal fluctuations in all regions.

Any accounting system for water use and quality must be designed to capture all human impacts on natural systems, as well as human impacts on human activities. This means a broad spectrum of water contaminants and indicators of indigenous biodiversity must be included in the accounting regime.

In general, all permits for consumptive use of water ought to be able to be quantified, measured and compared against concrete and specific guidelines for natural flows in waterways and for negotiated water quality standards.

2. NATIONAL OBJECTIVES FRAMEWORK

The selection of values for management by communities should not allow important environmental considerations or national priorities to be abrogated. Communities' prioritisation of local needs should always ensure that national standards are further exceeded in those areas, without being degraded below standard in other areas.

The needs of consumptive water users, and farmers in particular, should be given comparatively less weight than environmental, cultural and social needs when establishing transitional arrangements and adjustment timeframes to meet improved standards. Intensive dairy farmers, for example, have benefited greatly at the expense of other water users, and of the environment, under preceding regimes, leading to catastrophic declines in water quality nationally. The balance of new regulations ought to recognise such historic imbalance and proactively limit further expansion of environmentally destructive water use at the expense of water quality.

In general, the private financial or material benefit of the few ought not to occur at the expense of the common good or the environment.

3. COMPULSORY VALUES

Ecosystem health and safety for all forms of contact recreation ought to be compulsory values for management planning across New Zealand. The specific values placed on local waterways by Tangata Whenua ought also to be included in planning at a local level.

4. NATIONAL BOTTOM LINES

Specific baseline standards for water quality, sufficient to protect indigenous biodiversity and human health, must be instituted at a national level through a rigorous and open scientific process.

Higher, aspirational standards ought also to be established for communities to consider aiming for, as they manage their waterways above the minimum standards already suggested. This will help ensure national minimum standards are seen as something to be bettered, rather than simply met.

All catchments ought to see a long-term increase in water quality and availability beyond these standards under the new regime.

5. EXCEPTIONS TO THE NATIONAL BOTTOM LINES

Exceptions to the national bottom lines ought only to be granted as a temporary measure, where the exception is founded on the basis of historical human activity. We have a moral obligation to remediate the damage we do to waterways, and historical failure to safeguard water quality is no excuse for contemporary inaction.

In the unlikely event that an exception is required on the basis of naturally occurring contamination, there ought to be additional limitations placed on further, downstream contamination by human processes. This will ensure that minor contamination from natural sources cannot be used as an excuse for increased human contamination.

Local communities must be adequately consulted on any proposed exceptions to national standards, as they will bear the weight of those exceptions' cost, in human, cultural, ecological and financial terms.

6 TANGATA WHENUA VALUES

Tangata Whenua values must be central to all decision making at a national and local level. All regulatory bodies must explicitly set out how the identified tangata whenua values, for their jurisdiction, will be given effect to.

Given the persistent and oppressive historical neglect of these values by Pakeha land users and government, effort ought to be made to prioritise the remediation of areas and waterways identified by tangata whenua as being of especial significance.

7 MONITORING

The precautionary principle ought to sit at the heart of any monitoring regime, with the broadest possible spectrum of contaminants and species being tracked on both short term and long term bases. This will allow damage to waterways to be avoided, rather than remediated at deferred and greater cost.

All water takes that are permitted ought to be monitored, where feasible. Where a financial benefit accrues to the taker of water, they ought to bear the cost of that monitoring.

I do not wish to be heard in support of my submission.