



4 February 2014

Water Submissions  
Ministry for the Environment  
PO Box 10362  
Wellington 6143

Nga mihi nui kia koutou katoa – Greetings

**Re: Submission on National Policy Statement for Freshwater January 2014**

This is a submission on amendments to the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management.

Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand is a Catholic religious congregation of vowed women. We are engaged in the works of Mercy with our companions in mission throughout New Zealand and in Samoa and Tonga.

Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa work alongside and with Mercy International Association. Mercy International Association is an organisation of the leaders of Mercy Congregations, Institutes, Unions and Federations throughout the world. The Association represents over 9,000 sisters globally together with thousands of associates and co-workers who work in a variety of Mercy projects that involve health, education and social justice.

It is encouraging that the Government is looking extensively at the management of New Zealand's freshwater resources. Water is of cultural, spiritual and economic importance for all New Zealanders. This important resource is also expressed in *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*. *Te Tiriti* reminds us of our obligations to be responsible guardians of whenua through which water flows as the whenua life-blood.

Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa, endorses the submission prepared by Betsan Martin (Methodist Public Issues) on behalf of the Methodist Church of New Zealand.

The submission prepared by Methodist Public Issues has used information from environmental organisations and the Land and Water Forum and Professionals with expertise in Freshwater.

Yours faithfully

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## National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management

This submission refers to the Ministry for Environment **discussion document on proposed changes to National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management** includes information from Environment organizations and the Land and Water Forum.

The 2011 National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management requires regional councils to:

- maintain or improve overall water quality within a region
- safeguard the life supporting capacity, ecosystem processes and indigenous species (including their associated ecosystems) of fresh water
- set freshwater objectives and limits for all water bodies.

Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa has serious concerns about the standards for water quality being set too low, and makes proposals accordingly. We would also like to introduce some new concepts on values for consideration and inclusion in the amended National Policy Standards – Freshwater Management.

### 1. Tangata Whenua Values, Iwi/Māori as Treaty partners

We support inclusion of a statement of tangata whenua values in the Preamble and in the text as proposed. Such a statement needs to include the integrated world view of *Te Ao Maori*, spiritual values as well as tikanga of *Te Mana o Te Wai*. Some suggested references include mauri, mahinga kai, food security and irrigation, and the preservation of natural form and character, and spiritual values.

*Te Tiriti o Waitangi* is important for National Policy on Freshwater. This is to be included in the Preamble, with an explanation of Article Two guarantees for protection of rangatiratanga and of water as a taonga.

Some Iwi, such as Tainui, have set very high standards for water quality, defined as bringing water to a drinkable quality. The National Policy Statement needs to include recognition of water standards set by Iwi Management Plans and ensure provision for reconciling Iwi standards with National Standards.

### Proposal

- The Preamble include a statement of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- An explanation of tino rangatiratanga and of water as a taonga be included in the Preamble.
- The overall Objectives proposed in A2 include safeguarding *Te Mana o Te Wai*.
- The legal precedence accorded to freshwater standards in Iwi Management Plans need to be recognized in the National Policy Statement on Freshwater.

## 2. Compulsory Values

The intention of introducing two compulsory values of ecosystem health and human health is welcome.

In recognition of Freshwater as a '*Commons*' and we propose consideration of vesting water as a Public Trust. Public Trust, as exemplified in Hawaiian constitutional law moves the focus from *use rights* to putting an onus on responsibility for present generations to act as trustees of the Earth's ecological systems to ensure continuity of ecological health for future generations.

Similarly the concept of *ecological integrity* which we promote as a further value is an objective with requirements to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the nation's waters. These approaches move us towards an understanding of humanity as a component of the biosphere and our need to seek a relationship of mutual benefit that is oriented to human responsibility for environmental integrity.

### Proposal

- We request consideration be given to including responsibility for achieving and maintaining ecological integrity of Freshwater as a compulsory value.
- We request consideration of vesting Freshwater as a Public Trust.

## 3. National Objectives Framework

We support the objective to 'improve integrated management of fresh water and the use and development of land in whole catchments, including the interactions between fresh water, land, associated ecosystems and the coastal environment'. (MFE Proposed amendments to NPS, P. 57)

Land use is the key issue for river management and water quality (Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment. *Water Quality in New Zealand* Nov. 2013 < [www.water-quality-in-new-zealand-land-use-and-nutrient-pollution](http://www.water-quality-in-new-zealand-land-use-and-nutrient-pollution)>). Land use is not reflected in the proposed amendments and Attribute Tables.

The Attribute tables are not currently complete. Fish, especially native fish, Macro-invertebrates (insects) are important in river ecosystems and are strong indicators of water and ecosystem health. Good numbers of stonefly and mayfly nymphs mean good water quality.

Biological communities such as macro-invertebrates need to be included, as they are strong indicators of the health and well-being of river ecosystems. Indices of biological diversity are able to be measured with protocols for fish and invertebrates. Assessments of the impact of dams, barriers and stop banks are available from some regions and can be interpreted for the Assessments.

On the negative side, pine forestry is likely to be associated with erosion and sedimentation. Therefore it is important to include Attributes which include these indicators of water health as well as indicators of negative impacts.

Dissolved oxygen is a strong indicator of pollution in rivers. Under the National Policy Statement it is proposed to measure dissolved oxygen below wastewater plants. Pollution from oxygen (and nitrogen) from dairy farms is the most likely impact on water quality. The measures need to be done in dairy farming catchments.

The Macro-invertebrate Community Index, Sediment and Dissolved Oxygen all need to be included in the Attribute Tables.

The following aspects of ecosystem health and integrated management need development for the National Policy Statement on Freshwater:

- a. National freshwater management needs to provide an account of the effects of land use on water quality.
- b. The expansion and intensification of dairying is the main cause of nitrogen pollution in groundwater and rivers, and degradation is set to rise.
- c. Urban issues include storm-water management with solutions such as rain water collection and cleaning up contaminated industrial sites.
- d. Wetlands and estuaries are mentioned in the MFE narrative proposals (p, 20, 21, 47), estuaries (p. 47) and groundwater (p.20) – which is specifically excluded from the assessments. There are therefore no Attribute Tables for Wetlands, Estuaries or Groundwater (re p. 20). We urge inclusion of ground water levels as nitrate levels are increasing and the time-lag effect on water must be accounted for and assessed.
- e. Biological communities need to be included. Macro-invertebrates are important in river ecosystems and are strong indicators of water and ecosystem health. Good numbers of stonefly and mayfly nymphs indicate the likelihood of good water quality. The condition of fish, including native fish such as Tuna, is an important indicator of ecosystem health. Indices of biological diversity are able to be measured with protocols for fish and invertebrates. Assessments of the impact of dams, barriers and stop banks are available from some regions and can be interpreted for the Assessments.
- f. Water clarity and quality. These are linked to human health attributes of swimability and drinkability.
- g. Pathogens and Periphyton/Cyanobacteria: These are significant for human health. Measures for E.Coli, Cyanobacteria and benthic levels should be measured at a level of safety for swimming using Ministry of Health guidelines.
- h. Many Treaty settlements have strong provisions for freshwater management with legislation that takes precedence over National policy. Some Iwi, such as Tainui, have set high standards for water quality, defined as bringing water to a drinkable quality – a much higher standard than that proposed in the National Policy on Freshwater. An account of Iwi Management Plans needs to be included in benchmarks for regional objectives with timeframes.

- i. Water temperature. Water temperature is a poorly recognized aspect of river dynamics. Temperature contributes to the regulation of sediment and shade is therefore a further indicator of river health.

## Proposals

- The Attribute Tables include criteria for wetlands , estuaries and groundwater as part of water ecosystems.
- That Attribute Tables include specific measures for land use and the effects of these on water.
- Attributes and Assessments for ecosystem health include Fish and barriers to fish migration, Macro-invertebrate Community Index, Sediment and Dissolved Oxygen.
- Human health indicators of pathogens, Periphyton, Cyanobacteria and water clarity to a swimmable level be included in the Attribute Tables. Measures include Ministry of Health, Biggs standards and other appropriate guidelines.
- Attribute tables include identified indicators of *Te Mana o Te Wai*.

## 4. National Bottom Lines

The requirement of no further degradation is an important criteria, particularly as a standard of responsibility for future development.

The level of nitrogen proposed for the Bands in the Attribute Tables is of significant concern. We understand that there is a serious discrepancy between the current guidelines and the proposed levels of nitrogen.

There is discrepancy between the current guideline for Band A, which is .44mg/Litre, whereas the proposed level of nitrogen allowed is 1mg/Litre. This is double the allowance of the current guidelines.

The requirement for 'overall' standards within Council jurisdiction may allow for degradation within a region, by allowing high standards in one river to be offset by low standards in another. We therefore propose that standards be set for each river in a catchment.

The minimum standards are set at the bottom of Band C (fair) in the Attributes table. This is a 'secondary contact' level of water quality (for boating and wading). With 90% of New Zealand Freshwater being below swimmable standards we consider a higher standard is appropriate and propose a minimum standard be set in the B Band (good).

## Proposals

- The levels of nitrogen in the Bands be amended to levels that set levels to at least the current guidelines, which correspond to .44mg/L in Band A.
- Standards to a swimming level be set across New Zealand.
- That Objective A2 in the Preamble require that each Freshwater Management Unit within a region be required to be maintained or improved.
- The Minimum Standards should be set in the B Band.

## Conclusion

Nga Whaea Atawhai Sisters of Mercy New Zealand affirms support for the long term care, stewardship and responsibility for Freshwater, including full regard for Iwi/Māori interests. It allows for the principles and underlying values of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* to be more deeply understood and realised.

Nga Whaea Atawhai Sisters of Mercy New Zealand speaks for the ethical commitments to environmental integrity, and is pleased to contribute to decision-making on National Standards for Freshwater

With respect.

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Mercy Global Action, NZ

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Leadership Team Contact  
Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa  
Sisters of Mercy New Zealand