

Ivan Sowry
[withheld]

In Lincoln University's 2013 survey of perceptions of the state of the environment, respondents said freshwater management was the most important domestic environmental issue facing New Zealand, just as they did in 2010 and 2008. Some 41% of 2,200 respondents rated the state of our rivers and lakes as bad or very bad.

The National-led Government's response to an unprecedented decline in Kiwis' confidence in the state of our freshwater is not to introduce strong rules for clean water, as the Greens would do, but to propose weak bottom lines in the proposed National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management (NPSFWM).

I want strong rules that protect our rivers and ensure that they are safe for swimming. The proposed changes are inadequate. Ensuring rivers are clean enough to swim in should be a compulsory standard, not optional.

Too many recognised water quality indicators are absent from the proposal. If councils don't have to monitor these indicators then we don't get an accurate understanding of the state of our waterways.

The rules should ensure:

- * water clarity and periphyton cover (a measure of how much algae, bacteria and detritus is covering the river bed) are monitored, to ensure our rivers are safe for swimming;
- * monitoring of aquatic insects to ensure our rivers are healthy;
- * there is a limit on both problem pollutants nitrogen and phosphorus so they don't cause nuisance algal growth; and
- * a limit on sediment to ensure our rivers are healthy.

The proposed changes to the NPSFWM mean that the current NPS policy to maintain and enhance water quality will not apply to individual rivers and lakes, but rather to water quality across a region as a whole. This would allow some rivers to be heavily polluted as long as some (usually upper catchments in the conversation estate) stay clean.

I do not consider that to be satisfactory. Any exemptions to the rules should be limited to a list of specific water bodies.

One certain way to help protect our rivers is to ensure that we look after them and that the water is clean enough for swimming, not just wading or boating. Human health and our economy depend on safeguarding our environment.

Ivan Sowry