

Your submission to Clean Water

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Clause

What are your thoughts on the proposed swimming targets, for example, on the timeframes and categories?

Notes

Looking at fresh water health from a swimming perspective may be useful for people to understand where or where not they can't swim, but is a very human centred way of looking at freshwater. It is more focussed on things that are directly detrimental to human health such as E coli and heavy metals, nitrogen loading etc. While this also has a bearing on the wildlife that is supported by a healthy stream it is not necessarily the same thing and therefore a better measure would be the level of wildlife health- fish present and the Macroinvertebrate Community Index. So a river might be deemed alright for swimming but have a paucity of wildlife due to the low oxygen concentrations caused by poor riparian management upstream. It also implies that if it is a waterway that no-one is likely to swim in, because of its remoteness in the middle of a large private farm, or because it is too small to swim in, that it would not matter so much if it failed - after all, if there is no one around to swim in it, what does it matter? Swimmability as a measure also seems to have become very confusing with debate now being focussed on whether a 20% chance of getting E coli is acceptable or not. So I think the measure of a stream's health needs to be on the MCI count primarily. 2040 seems to be a very long time to wait for better water health especially as the causes of poor health are widely understood - the intensification of farming (encouraged by present government policy) and poor urban management- more stringent vehicle requirements would help, as would encouraging/subsidising people to have electric cars and use public transport. So I think the proposed timeframe of 2040 is inadequate and disappointing given our image in the rest of the world as being world leaders in a clean green country.

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What do you think about the proposed amendments to the Freshwater NPS?

Notes

Too little and too late- and in some cases are a step backward from the current situation. At the moment the desires of the farming community to take water to further intensify production seems to carry much more weight than the health of the waterway. Local governments need far more finance from central government to enforce regulations instead of giving grants to farmers for irrigation projects which makes things worse.

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What are your thoughts on the proposed stock exclusion regulation, for example, the timeframes and stock types to be excluded?

Notes

We have been hearing for years that farmers should exclude cattle from waterways and I understood that Fonterra was insisting on it. But a drive through the Waikato and many parts of the King Country show that it is not happening. Hectares of open muddy paddocks with no shade for the beasts which makes it an animal welfare issue too. Unless enforced, fenced waterways with no plantings, are often just grazed anyway when grass becomes short. If they aren't grazed they tend to become full of weeds like gorse which acts as a further incentive for the farmer to graze the area which is supposed to be excluded. The proposals miss a great opportunity to insist that farmers not only have to fence off the waterway, but they have to plant it too. There needs then to be enforcement that the plantings actually survive. I have heard many stories about farmers who have planted riparian strips, often aided by grants, and then open the gates to it so it becomes just another grassy strip. So for better stream health as well as better stock health, all fenced waterways should be planted too and this should be happening right now, instead of the opposite - trees and stock belts being removed so that larger and larger irrigation circles can be put in. There also does not seem to be any reference to high county stock exclusion from waterways which is a serious omission.

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Do you have any other comments on the contents of the Clean Water discussion document?

Notes

I have now lived in NZ for nearly 16 years and am horrified at the way we seem to be sacrificing our environment for the purposes of producing cheap milk powder. I am appalled that public money is being used to accelerate this degradation in the form of irrigation schemes and also in the conversion of government owned land to intensively farmed dairy land. I find it ironic that the rivers and streams of the densely populated UK that I left for 'clean green' NZ are probably now cleaner than most of the waterways here. As more and more tourists come here it is going to be obvious that we are lagging way behind Europe in our protection of our environment - the lack of shade and riparian planting is glaringly obvious in many of the places that tourists will pass through. I do not think that even the intention behind this document is well intentioned - it seems to be more about assuaging the anxieties of the public by telling them their favourite waterways are swimmable (when in fact they are probably not) whilst the trend towards farm intensification increases steadily in the background. Meanwhile the fate of the rare and often endemic aquatic life, such as fish, mayflies and stoneflies that we have here, will continue to decline - yet their survival is the true indicator of a healthy environment and also an indicator of a civilised and educated country that recognises that protection of its most important resources (water and soil) needs strong and effective leadership with the legislation and finance to back it.