

Transforming Taranaki



David MacLeod,
Chairman, Taranaki
Regional Council

A region transformed

Since the 1990s, landowners and farmers on the Taranaki ring plain and coastal terraces have voluntarily protected rivers, streams and wetlands with 5.6 million plants and 13,000km of fencing, with more of each to come. This work is:

- Transforming the landscape, breaking monotonous grassy monoculture with dense green ribbons, rich in biodiversity values, radiating from all sides of the mountain.
- Transforming rivers, streams and wetlands from their degraded state in the 1990s, after decades lying stripped of riparian vegetation and used as disposal channels for pasture run-off and raw waste. Today our waterways are at or near the best ecological state ever recorded, thanks to streamside fencing and planting along with major investments by communities and industries to clean up their acts.
- Securing the future of native plants and wildlife on the ring plain, where riparian protection now offers 6,000 hectares of protected native habitat alongside waterways. The community is currently rallying around an ambitious new campaign to build on this by ridding the region of introduced predators to help indigenous biodiversity recover and thrive.

Video: www.bit.ly/TransformTaranaki

Why this project is unique

- Scope and scale – it captures every waterway of any size, whether permanent or seasonal.
- It doesn't stop at stock exclusion but also includes the far bigger task of planting. This brings greater ecological and freshwater-health benefits.
- Fencing and planting plans are individually tailored for each property – because clearly, one size cannot fit all.
- Landowners (mostly farmers) meet the cost of the physical work and materials. There are no subsidies.
- It is voluntary, not required by regulation. Farmers know it is the right thing to do and have taken ownership of it. Therefore compliance and enforcement are not costly issues.
- It is a happening reality, not a concept. It's well-established and heading towards completion.



more than
70%
funded by
farmers

**Supporting
livelihoods**

15,409 km
streambanks



13,756 km
fenced

8,928 km
riparian
vegetation



5.6
million plants

6,000 ha
native habitat
protected

\$128
million
spent to date

Waterways report card 2019

Tēnā koutou. This year's annual waterways report card is more timely and important than ever. Amid the national conversation on the Government's new proposals seeking to improve rivers and streams, this report offers a chance to assess regional progress so far, reflect on the lessons learned, and think about the best way forward.

We all want our waterways to be healthy. And the Taranaki community has not been standing idly by waiting for the right regulations. The facing page outlines the enormous voluntary effort by landowners to fence and plant thousands of kilometres of ringplain and coastal rivers and streams. The finish line is in sight. And as the results summarised here show, the effort is getting good results. That's been confirmed in an independent NIWA report.

Industries and communities have also had a role in the freshwater gains we're seeing, investing millions of dollars to eliminate or heavily curtail the environmental impacts of wastewater discharges.

A report by Business and Economic Research Ltd found that region-wide, the Taranaki community invested \$117 million in environmental improvements in the six years to 2014. A large portion of this was devoted to waterways, with \$279.7 million being spent on capital and annual operating costs in the same period.

And the quest for improvements continues. The Council is requiring dairy farmers to switch to land-based effluent disposal as current consents expire. We're still working with the community to formulate other measures.

In summary, the region is making major efforts and spending big money to improve rivers and streams. The actions it's taking are the result of careful consideration. They're happening at a measured pace. And clearly, they're getting good results.

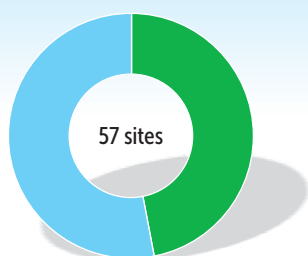
That's a useful template for assessing and evaluating the Government's latest proposals: Will they get good results? Is the science sound? Are they practical, efficient and reasonable? And most importantly, what impacts will they have on families and communities?

The information supplied so far by the Government and its advisers would appear to fall short of adequately answering these questions. We hope that Wellington will give the Taranaki experience the careful consideration we believe it deserves.

A major concern is that as they stand, the Government's proposals would frustrate and set back the good work happening here. The last thing New Zealand needs is productive regions like Taranaki being hit with blunt, one-size-fits-all regulations that cause massive upheaval but achieve little or no improvement in the health of our rivers and streams.

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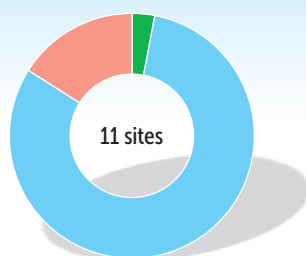
River ecology trends 1995-2018



47% Improvement
53% No obvious trend
0% Deterioration

The ecological health of waterways is assessed by studying the small critters and organisms in streams and rivers, and is the primary measure of freshwater quality. Across the region, our rivers and streams are improving or not showing any significant changes. At more and more sites, we're seeing the best results since monitoring began in 1995.

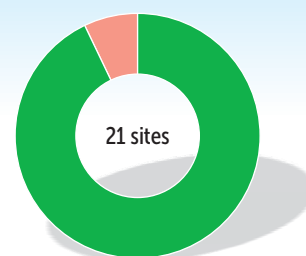
Physical and chemical trends 2011-2018



3% Improvement
81% No obvious trend
16% Deterioration

Measuring organic contamination, nutrient concentrations and aesthetic quality can flag pressures on waterways and indicate where to best focus our attention. The picture in Taranaki is largely stable but our aim is to achieve more improvements and fewer declines. Fewer sites are showing deterioration, particularly in nutrient concentrations.

Algae growth 2016-2018



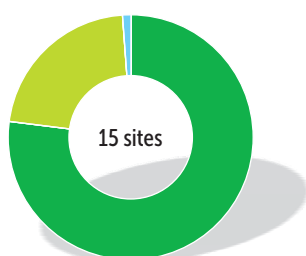
93% Met guidelines
7% Exceeded guidelines

Algae, or periphyton, is essential for aquatic ecosystems but excessive levels can cause environmental and/or health problems. Just about all of Taranaki's monitored sites meet national guidelines all the time.

National standards

The Government has set compulsory standards for a number of water-quality measures year round. All the toxicant measurements at the Council's monitoring sites meet the standards, with more than two-thirds achieving the best score.

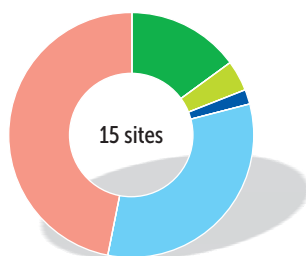
Suitability for ecosystem health 2015-2018



77% A Best
22% B Intermediate
2% C Acceptable
0% D Unacceptable

Recreational suitability at non-recreational sites 2015-2018

- Sampled all year, all flow conditions.
- Many of the sites are too shallow, cold and/or small for recreational bathing activities.

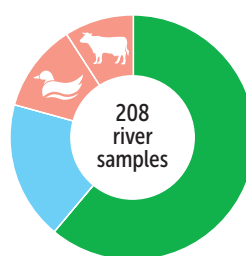


15% A 1% risk of infection
4% B 2% risk of infection
2% C 3% risk of infection
32% D Over 3% risk of infection
47% E Over 7% risk of infection

Can I swim?

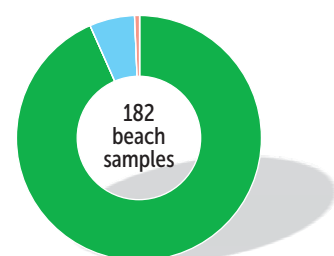
Over summer, the Council monitors popular swimming spots on the coast (where most people swim) and at our rivers and streams. Freshwater sites are mostly good, with contamination by wildfowl and gulls the main problem at two urban sites. Coastal sites are consistently good with all sites meeting the swimming guidelines apart from one sample at one site.

Recreational freshwater quality - popular bathing sites Summer 2018-2019



127 Acceptable
38 Acceptable (monitoring alert)
24 Unacceptable (source: birds)
19 Unacceptable (source: cows)

Coastal recreational water quality - popular bathing beaches Summer 2018-2019



170 Acceptable
11 Acceptable (monitoring alert)
1 Unacceptable



Improving lifestyles