



**Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment**

Te Kaitiaki Taiao a Te Whare Pāremata

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**Natasha Lewis**

Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Stewardship and Performance  
Ministry for the Environment  
Wellington

**Mike Tully**

Deputy Director-General Organisation Support  
Department of Conservation – Te Papa Atawhai  
Wellington

Tēnā kōrua Natasha and Mike

**Health of Otago's deep-water alpine lakes**

Further to the concerns I raised at the end of 2022 regarding the health status of the Otago alpine deep-water lakes, and our subsequent correspondence, my Chief Scientist (Dr Geoffroy Lamarche) attended the Wai Wānaka workshop “Knowledge into Action for Otago’s Deepwater Lakes” on 2 October. This provided him an opportunity to gain first-hand insights into the research findings and the future trajectory of the work undertaken by this community group. They are dedicated to mitigating the deterioration of the alpine deep-water lakes and delivering outcomes that genuinely improve their health. Their efforts are commendable.

The purpose of the Lake Wanaka Preservation Act 1973 is *to provide for the preservation of the normal water levels and shoreline of the lake, and the maintenance and improvement of its water quality*. To achieve this purpose, close engagement of both the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) and the Department of Conservation's (DOC) with local community groups such as Wai Wānaka is necessary.

However, I was intrigued by the limited engagement of your agencies in the workshop with only one staff member from MfE, and one from DOC attending. This does not demonstrate commitment to the lake's future and deficient support to the community in their endeavours. While disappointing, it is consistent with the limited reference to the deep-water alpine lakes in the documents I received from DOC in May 2023. This was in response to my request for information concerning support the department provided to the Otago Regional Council in their research and monitoring activities.

I was also surprised to learn that neither MfE nor DOC has representation in the Otago Deep Lakes Management Working Group recently established by the Otago Regional Council (ORC). There is no doubt that the lake health, and that of the other deep-water alpine lakes, is connected to the quality of the upstream waters. Your representation in this group seems essential given the extent of the DOC estate over the three deep lake catchments (approximately 50% of the upper Clutha area –

which constitute a substantial part of Lake Wānaka's catchment - lies within Public Conservation Land).

In the absence of commitment and support from government agencies, I am further concerned about funding for Wai Wānaka. This is provided by the Freshwater Improvement Fund for their project 'Upper Clutha Lakes and Catchment Community Water Management Plan' and is only secured until June 2024. Following this, Wai Wānaka will face the prospect of closure unless funding can be secured. In such a scenario, the responsibilities the community group currently bear would need to be taken up by other mechanisms and organizations, to continue safeguarding the lake's health. Presently I do not see any organisations that are well placed to undertake this work.

Consequently, I recommend that you consider joining the Otago Deep Lakes Management Working Group and the Otago Inland Deep Lakes Technical Advisory Group (which advises the management group). The funding of the Technical Advisory Group also needs to be addressed and you may want to consider contributing to its funding.

These actions are crucial for maintaining the quality of the Otago deep water lakes, Wānaka, Wakatipu and Hāwea

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of fluid, connected strokes. The signature is positioned to the right of the text 'Yours sincerely'.

Simon Upton  
Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment