



Hon Mark Patterson
Associate Minister of Agriculture
Parliament Buildings, Wellington

8 November 2024

Dear Minister

I noted your comments in the House on 23 October concerning water quality in which you cited me as the source for your claim that “Otago is a shining example of water quality”.

I am afraid this is not correct. The map reproduced on page 14 of my *Going with the grain* report clearly shows that part of the Otago region is facing some of the most concentrated risks. This is, in fact, the middle and lower parts of the Clutha catchment in which even very large changes in management practices would not bring water quality contamination of nitrogen, phosphorus and/or sediment within the existing bottom lines.

This map is based on recent modelling by the Our Land & Water National Science Challenge. Incidentally, the reason we have to rely on modelling is that the monitoring network is not detailed enough to provide a more fine-grained picture. I would urge you and your colleagues to take seriously the advice I have been tendering for seven years now that public investment in environmental information is not something that is ‘nice to have’ but a core governmental responsibility. One of the difficulties we face is public scepticism about environmental claims because we’re not prepared to make the investments needed to get an accurate handle on the risks we are taking. The Our Land & Water National Science Challenge represents a valuable but one-off investment that needs follow-through. Pending that, it is the best information we have to date.

I try to bring accurate material to help Parliament debate some of the difficult issues we face such as water quality in rural New Zealand. I am pleased that members should take an interest in my work. But if it is inaccurately cited, it risks becoming a source of contention that will not help the debate.

I do hope I can count on your cooperation on this score.

With kind regards

Simon Upton

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment
Te Kaitiaki Taiao a Te Whare Pāremata