



Managing water quality: Examining the 2014 National Policy Statement Frequently Asked Questions

What is the report about?

The report is an examination of the Government's main policy for managing fresh water – the 2014 National Policy Statement (NPS) for Freshwater Management. The purpose is to explain the Commissioner's concerns about aspects of this policy and recommend improvements that will better protect water quality in New Zealand.

Why is water quality important?

Our rivers, lakes, estuaries, wetlands, and aquifers are integral to our national identity and underpin the clean green brand on which our tourism and agriculture depend. The relationship of Maori with their awa lies at the very heart of their spiritual, physical and cultural wellbeing.

The water quality of some water bodies is already poor. In others, it continues to decline, making the task of improving it that much harder and more costly.

Is New Zealand doing enough to improve fresh water quality?

The Commissioner sees the 2014 NPS as a major step forward. The Government has invested heavily in developing new water quality policy in recent years, assisted by the work of the Land and Water Forum and the Iwi Leaders Forum.

However, she notes that New Zealand has a long way to go to address poor and deteriorating water quality in many places. In the report, the Commissioner identifies six key areas for improvement in the 2014 NPS. The Government is planning to review the NPS next year.

What has the Comissioner recommended?

The Commissioner has made six recommendations aimed at improving the effectiveness and clarity of the Government's fresh water policy.

- “Maintaining and improving” water bodies should mean what it says.
- Criteria should be provided for dividing regions into water management zones.
- Exceptions policy (allowing certain water bodies to remain in a poor state) should be tightly defined.
- Regional councils should be required to prioritise the protection of vulnerable water bodies and catchments.
- The health of aquatic ecosystems should be measured using an indicator called the Macroinvertebrate Community Index.
- The policy should be expanded to include estuaries.

What are the implications for the economy?

The Commissioner has previously said that continued expansion of dairy farming creates a classic economy versus environment dilemma. Her 2013 report on water quality showed there is a clear correlation between land use change to dairying and nitrogen pollution entering waterways.

However, the Commissioner is encouraged by increasing interest in improving economic returns while protecting water quality. For instance, there is growing recognition that increasing product *value* rather than production *volume* can reduce economic risk and environmental impacts.