



Summary

Managing freshwater quality: Challenges and opportunities

The quality of water in our groundwater, lakes, rivers, and streams is important to New Zealanders' well-being and national identity.

In 2011, we published a report on how effectively Waikato Regional Council, Taranaki Regional Council, Horizons Regional Council, and Environment Southland (the four regional councils) managed the effects of land use on freshwater quality in their regions. In this report, we assess the progress they have made since 2011.

Regional councils are working in a difficult environment, with a range of stakeholders and often competing interests. Despite these challenges, the four regional councils have made improvements in aspects of their water management that support planning and targeting interventions to protect and improve freshwater quality.

However, the four regional councils could further improve how they share information about freshwater quality, strengthen relationships with iwi and hapū, and commit to using a full range of tools for compliance, monitoring, and enforcement.

Improved national-level reporting is needed

A detailed national-level picture of freshwater quality is central to understanding the significance of factors affecting freshwater quality and the degree to which those factors are significant to particular regions.

We are concerned that there is not enough information about freshwater at a national level to prioritise efforts on a national basis. Shortcomings in national-level reporting are caused in part by complexities in using regional council data to form a national picture. There are also significant gaps in knowledge about the effects of poor freshwater quality, including the effects of pollution on te ao Māori and human health. These issues need to be addressed.

Work has been under way for some time to improve how information about freshwater is reported and used, but leadership is needed for meaningful progress to be made. We urge the Ministry for the Environment and Statistics New Zealand to take this leadership role, working with regional councils and others to make the improvements that are needed.

