



# Summary

## *Reflecting on our work about water management*

People expect the water from their taps to be clean and safe, wastewater and stormwater to not pollute the environment, and our rivers, lakes, and oceans to be healthy ecosystems that are safe to swim in and to gather kai moana from. Failure to meet these expectations can cause lasting damage to the public's trust and confidence in public organisations.

For that reason, the work under our water theme during the last two years looked at how well public organisations are managing water resources and delivering water-related services now and in the future.

Although much good work is being done, all of the elements we expected were not in place. What we saw were public organisations trying to do the right thing while working with the resources they have, within the limits of their own roles and responsibilities, and in a context of increasing complexity and uncertainty.

What we did not see was clear agreement across central and local government about the vision for New Zealand's water resources. For public organisations to manage water well, they need to know what they are trying to achieve and to monitor progress towards those goals.

The lack of clarity about what the issues are, how to address them, and who will deliver programmes of

work increases the risk that public organisations are not directing their efforts towards the same outcomes.

Public organisations' understanding of water resources and water assets needs to improve. In particular, we need better information at a national level so we can understand where the risks lie and make well-informed and deliberate decisions.

We acknowledge the work under way to address water management challenges. However, there remains a need for greater national leadership. What is required is agreement on a shared vision that sets out the strategic objectives and priorities for water management more generally and how public organisations and others will collectively deliver this over the long term. Developing a vision also requires considering the capacity of public organisations that will be involved in its delivery, particularly in local government, and how to build community agreement in an often contested area.

Those involved in addressing water management challenges need to make sure they are working together in the way that best enables them to agree on the common goals to work towards over the long-term and how these will be achieved.

