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Tēnā koe

## Follow up on Performance Audit on Managing Freshwater Quality: Challenges and Opportunities

Thank you for your letter dated 5 April requesting information on how Taranaki Regional Council (the Council) is managing implementation of the Office of the Auditor General recommendations to Managing Freshwater. Even though the Council received a positive audit report it has continued to make operational changes arising from the audit report and other factors. The responses below are from senior scientific and operational staff and respond to the five recommendations.

1. *The Ministry for the Environment and Statistics New Zealand lead work with regional councils and relevant land and freshwater management agencies to support better informed and co-ordinated management of freshwater by preparing a consistent approach to monitoring, analysis, and reporting of freshwater quality state and trend information.*

The Council continues to support the alignment of regional council environmental monitoring and reporting, including the development and implementation of National Environmental Monitoring Standards (NEMS), reporting of environmental data through the Land, Air, Water Aotearoa (LAWA) website, and through contribution to national reporting with the provision of data and information to the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) and Statistics New Zealand (StatsNZ). It is our view that both organisations, have key roles to play in terms of supporting these initiatives.

We encourage MfE and StatsNZ to take stock of the strategic priorities set out in the [Research for Resource Management Regional Council Research, Science & Technology Strategy 2020](#), and the priorities identified in other Council special interest group (SIG) strategies and roadmaps which are available on the Envirolink website at <https://envirolink.govt.nz/>.

We encourage Government to explore further opportunities to support the environmental science needs of the regional sector. For example, there is a pressing need to develop and make available national datasets, including soils and land use data.

There is also a need to better understand the influence of climate (and climate change) on environmental state and trends, and environmental outcomes.

2. *Waikato Regional Council, Taranaki Regional Council, Horizons Regional Council, and Environment Southland consider how they might use the analysis conducted by National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research Limited to improve their monitoring of freshwater quality.*

The Council continues to undertake work to align with new requirements outlined in the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (NPS-FM). During the past two years we have continued to make improvements to our air quality, groundwater and surface water quality monitoring networks, reconciled and updated our summer recreational bathing monitoring programme, and introduced a dedicated lakes monitoring programme.

We are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of our state of environment monitoring network, the scope of which includes addressing a number of points raised by NIWA in their review for example, the representativeness and statistical power of the network. In undertaking this review we are also mindful of the many end-users of environmental monitoring data, such as council river management and emergency management teams who also utilise important data and information from our networks.

We continue to collaborate with other councils, not only in terms of the state of environment monitoring and reporting, but also in relation to freshwater policy implementation. For example, we have been able to draw on data from our neighbouring regions (Horizons and Waikato) to improve our own water quality modelling. We are also currently working in collaboration with Horizons Regional Council and NIWA to undertake modelling of mitigations to address *Escherichia coli* loads in our catchments.

3. *Waikato Regional Council, Taranaki Regional Council, Horizons Regional Council, and Environment Southland support and inform wider community discussion of freshwater quality issues by ensuring that the information they make available to their communities is clear, complete, up to date, consistent, accessible, and readily understandable.*

In addition to contributing to the LAWA website, environmental data and accompanying visualisation tools are also made available to the wider community via the Council's website [www.trc.govt.nz](http://www.trc.govt.nz).

Council recently published Our Place: Taranaki State of Environment 2022, reporting on current state and trends in environmental data across the domains of air, land and water. During the past two years we have also produced state of environment domain reports on air quality, recreational use of lakes, rivers and coast, Lake Rotorangi, groundwater quantity, groundwater quality and periphyton. Copies of the reports are made available to the public on the Council's website.

A key focus of the Council is the development and implementation of Government's Essential Freshwater policy reform package. To inform community discussions around the development of values and visions for freshwater, the Council recently published

story maps for each of the region's six proposed Freshwater Management Units (FMUs) via our [Let's Kōrero: Essential Freshwater](#) webpage.

We continue to develop and refine new and relevant ways of sharing scientific information with our communities, with science communication being one of four key areas of strategic focus for the Council's Environment Quality group.

Our Land & Farm hub provides land owners with a one stop shop for information on freshwater requirements, good farming practice and biodiversity and biosecurity among other topics of relevance.

4. *Waikato Regional Council, Taranaki Regional Council, and Horizons Regional Council strengthen relationships with iwi and hapū, especially those yet to complete Treaty settlement processes, by formally seeking their aspirations for involvement in strategic decision-making and identifying how those aspirations can be met.*

We note that a response to this point is not required at this stage however, there are a number of key initiatives that we would like to draw to the attention of the OAG.

From 2019 the Council has had three iwi representatives on its two key operational committees (Policy and Planning and Operations and Regulatory). In 2022 an iwi seat was created on the Council. These initiatives are generally working well and providing greater iwi input into decision making and expanding relationships. Engagement with the regions iwi leaders group is also increasing and active discussions are currently occurring on joint approaches to the region being a tranche one region, in terms of the replacement legislation for the Resource Management Act. On a wide range of environmental matters the Council is working with Ngā Iwi o Taranaki and hapū to strengthen and grow relationships.

Council has invested in dedicated policy support with resourcing of two Pou Taiao to support iwi and hapū through the development of the NPS-FM. In addition to supporting the work programmes of the Pou Taiao, Council staff are also working directly with iwi kaimahi to advance mātauranga Māori and mahinga kai components of our freshwater policy review. This level of investment is likely to continue and be expanded, subject to Council approval, and deliver further gains for all concerned.

5. *Waikato Regional Council, Taranaki Regional Council, Horizons Regional Council, and Environment Southland use a full range of appropriate compliance, monitoring, and enforcement tools to effectively identify and act on material non-compliance with the Resource Management Act 1991 or resource consent conditions.*

The Council has an established comprehensive compliance, monitoring and enforcement (CME) regime in place. . The regime compares very well against that existing elsewhere in the country and has been successful in maintaining and enhancing environmental quality in Taranaki over the years, including when environmental pressures have increased.

In 2018 the Compliance Monitoring and Enforcement Special Interest Group (CESIG), with support from regional council and unitary council chief executives, commissioned an independent consultant to complete a report into CME using data from 2017-2018.

Council received a very positive audit report and continues to do so in subsequent reports.

The Council has a long and successful history in CME and considers it to be a vital part of a properly functioning resource management system. The Council has been a national leader in many aspects of CME for many years and has made continuous improvements in its systems and processes, when needed. An example of this is increasing iwi involvement in enforcement by contacting iwi early, in a major environmental incident and liaising throughout the investigation, and engaging them to provide victim impact statements for prosecutions. This partnership type arrangement is well received.

The timing and purpose of the review, amidst all the Government's freshwater reforms, and how the results will be used, are of interest to the Council.

If you wish to discuss this further, please feel free to contact Fred McLay at [fred.mclay@trc.govt.nz](mailto:fred.mclay@trc.govt.nz), who will act as the contact point for those involved.

Naku noa, na

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S J Ruru', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

S J Ruru  
**Chief Executive**