

STORMWATER AND SWIMMERS: SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MUTUAL BENEFIT

New Zealanders love swimming outdoors – in our lakes, rivers, creeks, lakes, ponds estuaries and the sea. Swimming our landscapes helps to build New Zealanders, strengthening commitment to caring for our water and deepening connection to our home places.

Swimming New Zealanders are central to the future of water and waterways so for stormwater professionals, engaging with swimmers and keeping their interests central to water management is a really good investment.

Here are seven recommendations for mutual benefit:

1. Partner up with mana whenua

Māori whakapapa connections to water are accentuated and reinforced by swimming. Seek those who know these stories and that history and partner up to weave them into water plans and actions.

2. Factor swimming in

Through the NPSFM we are required to consider 'human contact' with water when meeting water quality bottom lines. Deliberately think 'swim'. Use creative strategy, modelling and measuring that encourages swimming, provides language for it and is inventive about how to value it.

3. Get to know your swimmers

Because outdoor swimming is mostly unorganised, spontaneous and free, there are few 'groups'. Ask around locally. Visit the likely, and the unlikely, swimming spots. Look for the tell-tale signs – steps cut in the bank above a deep pool, a swing rope, a cut fence – that's where you'll find them. Listen to swimmers' concerns and delights. Get in the water yourself and see what you think.

4. Enable outdoor swimming

Build jump and bombing platforms. Think 'swimmers' when making by-laws and policies. Set up pontoons wherever you can. Improve access to the creek. Leave an entry place to water down at the wharf. Leave that rope swing up. Better still, put one up yourself.

5. Treasure swimming history

Swimming has a people's history, an unwritten, unrecorded story of place. It is fascinating, engaging and enlightening. Find the swimming history of your waterways and celebrate it. Let swimmers know they are part of a deep local story, and that their swims are important, connecting the future to the past.

6. Be brave

Health and safety isn't just important, it's the law. But it can't be the only consideration or point of communication with swimmers. Find the wriggle room. Test the boundaries. Use common sense. Consult the swimmers as well as the lawyers. There are guerrilla swimmers and bombers too who will be swimming whether you know it or like it or not. It might be safer to plan for that in the first place.

7. Prioritise cleaning up the water

Swimmers care about water quality, and not just e.coli. They care about sediment and muddy swims. They care about ecological health and swimming in nature. They care about keeping rivers deep and cool and shaded. They want to swim in the rain as well as in the sun. Make those 'No swimming' signs temporary, and work to have them removed permanently. Invite swimmers in as advocates. Help them find the language they need to defend and define swimming. Jump into the water yourself – you'll find all the motivation you need to make it fresh.