



## Don't forget urban waterways – World Rivers Day

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Pollution from urban stormwater is putting pressure on communities and local authorities in their efforts to ensure our rivers and waterways remain healthy.

Water New Zealand President-elect Dukessa Blackburn-Huettner says while there has been a lot of discussion about the role of industry and agriculture, as New Zealanders, we all need to play our part in keeping our rivers healthy and clean.

This Sunday (25 September) is World Rivers Day where communities around the world celebrate waterways and look at what we all need to do to improve the stewardship of rivers.

“We need to remember that, historically, urban stormwater run-off from roads, carparks and so on was not treated before ending up in our rivers or underground waterways. This means that pollutants such as sediments, heavy metals, litter, cigarette butts, petrol, oil and lead all end up going untreated into a local stream or river before it gets to the sea. As well as petrol and oil, tipping things like cleaning products and paint down the drain poisons plant life and the animals that feed off it.”

However, she says there is a whole raft of simple things we can all do to lessen the impact of our activities on our waterways. These include keeping gutters free of sticks and rubbish, avoiding materials such as uncoated copper guttering and zinc roofing, cleaning up pet waste, picking up plastic bags and rubbish and washing cars on lawns.

“We want to get the message clear that washing poisons and pollutants down to underground stormwater drains does not get rid of the pollution rather it moves it to our waterways.”

Around the world many cities are now adopting water sensitive urban design (WSUD) to address both water quantity and water quality issues. At its heart, WSUD is about working with nature. Approaches involve minimising impervious surfaces and on-site retention of stormwater to better manage water quantity issues, to utilising vegetation features like wetlands, vegetated marshlands and rain gardens to assist in trapping sediment and pollutants for improved water quality. This approach is central to managing new growth under the Auckland Unitary Plan.

At the forefront of these initiatives is a practice known as stream ‘day-lighting’ where buried pipes are brought back to the surface to restore natural streams in their place. This helps to restore habitats and provides a natural asset for people to enjoy.

In Auckland, in what has become a design and bio-engineering showcase for urban stream restoration, two tributaries of the Avondale stream have been day-lighted from their culverts in the La Rosa Reserve in Green Bay.

“This is a great example of Auckland Council designers and engineers working closely with the local community”, says Blackburn-Huettner, who alongside her role at Water New Zealand is Healthy Waters Operations and Planning Manager at Auckland Council.

“The community and mana whenua were involved from the beginning in providing the artwork, planting design and installation. It has since taken ownership of the project, with local schools, day-cares, pa harakeke and special needs facilities using the reserve as an outdoor classroom, and community groups undertaking fish surveys, planting, and ongoing care of the stream.

“We need to remember that rivers, including our urban ones, are our taonga. They are our lifelines, as well as a source of inspiration, lifestyle and prosperity, and we all need to give them the respect and care that they deserve.”

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**Water New Zealand is a national not-for-profit organisation which promotes the sustainable management and development of New Zealand's three waters (freshwater, wastewater and storm water). Water New Zealand is the country's largest water industry body, providing leadership and support in the water sector through advocacy, collaboration and professional development. Its 1,600 members are drawn from all areas of the water management industry including regional councils and territorial authorities, consultants, suppliers, government agencies, academia and scientists.**