

Action for healthy waterways summary

An 'at a glance' summary of the discussion document on national direction for freshwater

New Zealanders value our freshwater. Our rivers and lakes, and how we care for and use them, are a fundamental part of who we are. We respect the mana of our freshwater – Te Mana o te Wai.

New Zealanders want to be able to swim, fish, gather mahinga kai, and enjoy freshwater as our parents and grandparents did. We also need clean water to drink and irrigation to support a sustainable economy.

But our water is suffering as a result of human activity – urban development, agriculture, horticulture, forestry, and other activities – and because of a lack of robust regulation, monitoring and enforcement.

What do we need to do?

Many people, including farmers and growers, are already taking action to reduce their impact on freshwater. However, their efforts are undermined by those who are not. We want to acknowledge positive efforts and follow good examples wherever we can, and make sure everybody contributes.

Urgent action is required, to stop our water getting worse so that water quality is materially improving within five years. We want to bring our freshwater to a healthy state within a generation.

To reduce the amount of pollution entering our waterways from our cities and our farms, and to uphold Te Mana o te Wai, we have to put the water first in our decision-making.

This document summarises proposed new requirements that are intended to both quickly stop water quality getting worse, and set us on a path to healthier freshwater in a generation.

These regulations would require different actions in different regions and catchments, but in general would mean:

- ▶ better management of stormwater and wastewater
- ▶ no further loss of wetlands and streams
- ▶ tighter controls to prevent sediment loss from earthworks and urban development
- ▶ farmers and growers understanding and managing environmental risks and following good practice
- ▶ new standards and limits on some farming activities in some regions or catchments.

Beyond these proposals the Government is continuing to work on other parts of its plan for freshwater, including allocation of allowances to discharge nutrients, institutional/oversight arrangements for the freshwater management system, and addressing Māori rights and interests in freshwater.

What's on the table?

The Government is asking for feedback on proposals to improve the current management of freshwater by changing legislation and regulation. It's proposing amendments to the Resource Management Act, an updated National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management, an updated National Environmental Standard for Sources of Human Drinking Water, and new National Environmental Standards for Freshwater and Wastewater.

The proposals are outlined in the table on the next page, and more detail can be found in the discussion document [Action on Healthy Waterways](#), available on the Ministry for the Environment's website.

How will Government help?

As well as setting out requirements through legislation and regulations, the Government is investing in supporting communities, including farmers and growers, to take action.

In a number of catchments where the risk to freshwater and indigenous species is higher, the Government is working with communities to understand how best to leverage and accelerate community-led action, help target investment, and assist with access to other funding support.

The Government is also investing in helping farmers and growers, businesses, and Māori transition to sustainable land use. This includes: providing practical advice, information and tools; protecting high-value food exports; and further developing decision-support tools like Overseer®.

The Government will work to ensure up-to-date qualifications are available for farm advisors, and improve skills development for rural professionals.

Proposal

What will be different

Speed up the implementation of freshwater regulations through amendments to the RMA

Introduce a new freshwater planning process that will require councils to have new plans in place no later than 2025.

Better, faster, more nationally-consistent freshwater management plans and implementation.

Set and clarify policy direction to bring our freshwater to a healthy state within a generation in a new National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM)

Strengthen and clarify the requirement to manage freshwater in a way that gives expression to Te Mana o te Wai; this refers to the integrated and holistic health and wellbeing of waters as a continuum from the mountains to the sea.

The health and wellbeing of the water will be put first in decision-making; providing for essential human needs, such as drinking water, will be second, and other uses will follow.

Restructure and redraft the NPS-FM to improve clarity and reinforce a holistic approach to freshwater management.

Councils and the communities they represent will find it easier to put the health and wellbeing of the water first because they will have stronger and clearer direction.

Strengthen the requirement to identify and reflect Māori values in freshwater planning, with two options set out in the [discussion document](#) for feedback.

Iwi and hapū values for freshwater in a region will be a focus for freshwater management.

Support renewable energy targets by exempting major hydro-electric schemes from some freshwater management requirements.

Status of major existing hydro-electric schemes will be clarified but this is not expected to result in any change to current freshwater management requirements.

Raise the bar on freshwater ecosystem health by introducing new attributes and requirements in the NPS-FM to protect threatened species and habitats

Broaden the focus of national direction and planning to a more holistic view of freshwater ecosystem health and require better monitoring and reporting.

Land and water resources will be managed so that in a generation our freshwater will be healthier for people, animals, native fish, trout and salmon, plants, and other species that live in or alongside waterways.

New attributes (indicators of ecosystem health) to be monitored and maintained or improved:

- ▶ nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus)
- ▶ sediment
- ▶ fish and macroinvertebrate numbers
- ▶ lake macrophytes (amount of native or invasive plants)
- ▶ river ecosystem metabolism
- ▶ dissolved oxygen in rivers and lakes.

Land and water resources will be managed to maintain or improve ecosystem health in each catchment. This is likely to require different actions in different catchments, including reducing soil loss, reducing nutrient run-off, and/or investing in upgrading wastewater and stormwater infrastructure.

Higher standard for swimming in summer.

Greater efforts to reduce contamination where people want to swim.

Protect urban and rural wetlands and streams.

There will be no more draining or development of wetlands.

Remaining streams in urban and rural areas will not be piped or filled in unless there is no other option, for example to provide a crossing.

Proposal

What will be different

Protect threatened indigenous freshwater species.

Land and water resources will be managed in a way that helps indigenous species thrive.

Provide for fish passage.

Fish that need access to the sea to breed will face fewer barriers.

Improvements to setting minimum water flows and reporting on water use.

Better management of water allocation within the current system.

Support the delivery of safe drinking water through amending the National Environmental Standard for Sources of Human Drinking Water

Strengthen requirements to assess and control risks to drinking water sources.

Tighter management of land use in areas that are sources of drinking water supply so drinking water is not contaminated.

Better manage stormwater and wastewater to stop things getting worse and improve freshwater health in a generation, through new regulations and potentially new legislation

Set minimum standards for wastewater discharges and overflows and require all operators to follow good practice risk management.

There is less pollution of rivers, lakes, groundwater and the sea from stormwater and wastewater.

Improve farming practices where needed to stop things getting worse and improve freshwater health in a generation, through new National Environmental Standards for Freshwater and regulations

Ensure all farmers and growers have a plan to manage risks to freshwater.

There is less pollution of rivers, lakes and groundwater from agriculture and horticulture because all farmers and growers understand and manage environmental risks and follow good practice. All farmers and growers have a farm plan by 2025.

Tightly restrict any further intensification of land use through interim measures until all regions have operative freshwater management plans.

From June 2020, changes such as new irrigation or conversion to dairying will only happen where there is evidence it will not increase pollution.

Reduce nitrogen loss in catchments with high nitrate/nitrogen levels through interim measures until all regions have operative freshwater management plans.

In catchments with high nitrate/nitrogen levels there will be a reduction in nitrogen loss within five years.

Exclude stock from waterways.

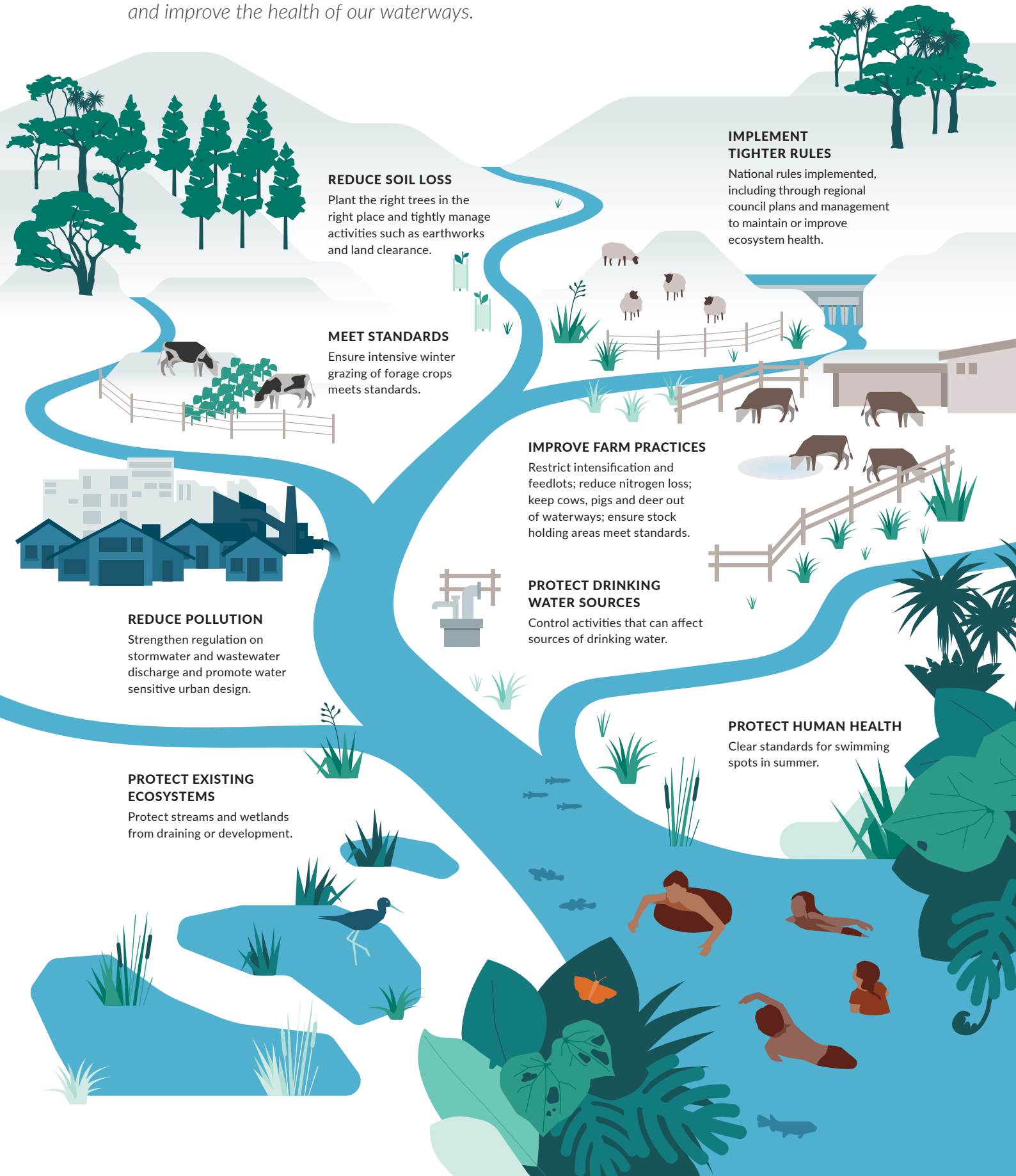
There will be more fencing and wider setbacks to keep stock out of waterways, reduce erosion, and capture contaminants before they reach the water.

Apply standards for intensive winter grazing, feedlots, and stock holding areas.

There will be less erosion and less pollution of waterways from nutrients, sediment and pathogens.

Action across a catchment

This diagram shows proposed actions intended to limit pollution and improve the health of our waterways.



What do you think?

The Government is interested in your views.

If you want more detail before you have your say, download the [full discussion document](#) on the Ministry for the Environment's website.

Join the kōrero and have your say:



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? Here's some questions to get you started

- ▶ Do you agree that the health of our freshwater should be our first priority?
- ▶ Do you think the proposals will result in water quality materially improving within five years?
- ▶ Do you think the proposals will achieve healthier freshwater in a generation?
- ▶ What difference do you think these proposals would make to your local waterways, and your contact with them?
- ▶ What would you have to do differently, under these proposals?

Timeline



2019

Support for community-led action, investment in tools and support and advice for farmers



Late 2019 – early 2020

Government makes final decisions on National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management and National Environmental Standards for Freshwater



2019–2020

Ongoing work on allocation of allowances to discharge nutrients



June 2020

Implementation of new requirements



2020

Further consultation on wastewater and stormwater regulations



2025

All councils have plans to implement new National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management



2025–2050 and beyond

Land and water resources are being managed to maintain or improve freshwater health and monitoring shows material improvements



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