Vision

Our waterways and water bodies are healthy, clean, and support thriving ecosystems.

Values and Principles

Freshwater policies must align with the following values and principles:

- **Honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi**: Water is a taonga and its mauri should be restored and protected. Iwi, hapū and whānau should have co-governance of water, and their customary roles as kaitiaki and whakapapa connections to wai recognised and resourced.

- **Ecological Wisdom**: Human activity should support and maintain healthy freshwater ecosystems, prioritising the health of indigenous species and habitats. Te Mana o te Wai respects the personhood, the mana of the awa, roto and moana, and prioritises the health of waterbodies over human use for them.

- **Social Responsibility**: Everyone needs reliable and equitable access to water. Water should be managed for its intrinsic values and public good rather than private profit. Water use should be sustainable so that the needs of future generations can be met.

- **Appropriate Decision-Making**: Water is a finite resource. Access to and distribution of water for human use should be equitable for current and future generations, based on mātauranga Māori and western science, and determined in partnership with whānau, hapū and iwi.

- **Non-Violence**: Safe access to drinkable water is a human right and should be protected. Abuse of, and harm to, water (e.g. pollution and over-abstraction) should be prevented.

- **Interconnection**: Ki uta ki tai - from the mountains to the sea. Freshwater management requires integrated management of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. The health of people, land, and water are inextricably linked.

Summary

Freshwater is a taonga and keystone in many ecosystems, including the ecosystem humans rely on to survive. However, human activity has polluted freshwater sources and put these ecosystems at risk. We will employ Te Tiriti-centric, holistic, enduring solutions to protect and restore freshwater systems and wetlands.

Strategic Priorities

The Green Party’s strategic goals include:

“All our waters will be in transition to becoming clean, and able to support healthy ecosystems.”

All native species and their habitats will be thriving or on a path to recovery in terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments.

Our laws and practices will respect the biological integrity of all life, while prioritising the health of indigenous species and ecosystems.

The customary and decision making roles of whānau, hapū and iwi will be integral to decisions about resource use.

Decision-making about resource use will provide for community participation and environmental justice.”

Actions in this policy that will help achieve this include:

1.2 Restore and protect te mauri and the natural character of coastal and estuarine ecosystems

1.3 Affirm tino rangatiratanga of iwi, hāpu and whānau as kaitiaki regarding decision-making related to wai Māori

1.5 Ensure that water governance frameworks recognise access to healthy water as a right for all species

1.9 Permanently protect nationally and regionally outstanding waterways and water bodies

2.1 Protect all remaining natural wetlands, including estuaries and coastal wetlands

Connected Policies

Our Freshwater Policy is connected to our Environmental Protection Policy, and to our Conservation Policy, as freshwater provides vital habitats and resources for native species. Freshwater is impacted by Agriculture, Forestry, Energy, and Housing and Sustainable Communities, as major uses of freshwater, and Climate Change, through changes to the hydrological cycle. Through human wellbeing, it is also connected to Health and Recreation and Sport.

Policy Positions

1. Freshwater quality

Issues

Many of our lakes, rivers and aquifers have unnaturally high levels of nutrient pollution due to leaching and run-off from urban or agricultural sources. Sediment from land use and heavy metals from road run-off also pollute waterways. Poor freshwater quality results in the destruction and loss of ecosystems, degrades mauri and cultural relationships, and reduces its availability for drinking, recreation, amenity and other uses.

Actions

A. Restoration of Freshwater Ecosystems

1.1 Increase funding for the restoration of freshwater ecosystems, prioritising:
1.1. The mauri and natural character of water bodies, including wetlands and aquifers.
1.1.2. Restoration of healthy populations of indigenous freshwater species.
1.1.3. Groundwater levels and quality.
1.1.4. Improving the resilience of water bodies to changing hydrological cycles.
1.1.5. Safeguarding water bodies as a source of human drinking water.

1.2. Restore and protect te mauri and the natural character of coastal and estuarine ecosystems (see our Marine Policy)

B. Governance of Water

1.3. Affirm tino rangatiratanga of iwi, hāpu and whānau as kaitiaki regarding decision-making related to wai Māori. This includes:

1.3.1. Decision-making governance if using water as a geothermal energy source.
1.3.2. Supporting hapū and iwi rāhui and tangata whenua-led conservation and restoration measures
1.3.3. Ensuring new legislation, planning and consenting processes for land uses affecting water quality, and decisions on water take and discharge consent applications are underpinned by Tiriti-based decision-making processes (see our Environmental Protection Policy)
1.3.4. Requiring a co-governance framework in regional plan making and on decision making panels (led by tangata whenua) for significant resource consent applications for water takes and discharges.

1.4. Recognise and support the important role that NGOs, local community groups and citizens have in water management.

1.5. Ensure that water governance frameworks recognise access to healthy water as a right for all species and recognise water as a part of the 'commons', including:

1.5.1. Holding drinking and stormwater infrastructure and supply under public ownership and Tiriti-based governance (see also our Waste and Hazardous Substances Policy)
1.5.2. Ensuring healthy drinking water supplies for all households and marae.

C. Protection of Water

1.6. Protect the natural character and mauri of lakes, rivers, stream wetlands and aquifers; healthy and variable river flows; and sustainable groundwater levels.

1.7. Ensure national policies and environmental standards for freshwater are consistent with ecosystem and human health, requiring all water bodies to progressively meet standards for viable ecosystem health, and safe swimming and drinking.

1.8. Protect groundwater recharge run-off into streams, and other natural drainage patterns, including regulating land use in drought-prone areas.

1.9. Permanently protect nationally and regionally outstanding waterways and water bodies, including:
1.9.1. Strengthening water conservation orders and requiring water quality and control land use in their catchments to be protected.

1.9.2. Making the protection of aquifers from pollution, contamination and over-abstraction a matter of national importance.

C. Preventing Harm from Human Activity

1.10. Ensure that freshwater use, flows, and levels, are consistent with ecosystem health (see, for example, our Energy Policy), including:

1.10.1. Ensuring the ability to review resource consents where takes and discharges are causing environmental, social or cultural harm.

1.11. Ensure that land uses align with water catchment topography and hydrological patterns and prevent erosion (see also our Land Use and Soils Policy).

1.12. Regulate land use activities which have potential effects on water quality and quantity and on aquatic ecosystems (see, for example, our Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Forestry and Mining Policies), including:

1.12.1. Requiring water-sensitive urban design and water-efficient buildings (see our Housing and Sustainable Communities Policy).

1.12.2. Requiring water-sensitive transport design, e.g., roads with systems that clean diverted run-off water (see also our Transport Policy).

1.12.3. Retaining or restoring the natural course and character of waterways and water bodies through urban and rural areas, including providing rivers with “room to move” to enable natural changes in course.

1.13. Minimise commercial water usage and prevent excessive water takes, including:

1.13.1. Supporting a transition away from intensive, irrigation-dependent agriculture to more regenerative, resilient, and drought tolerant farming systems (see our Agriculture and Rural Affairs Policy).

1.13.2. Enabling small-scale out-of-river and on-farm water storage, after ensuring robust provision for environmental flows.

1.13.3. Implementing a resource rental for the commercial use of water with revenue directed to restoration and sustainable water management.

1.13.4. Deprioritising intensive commercial abstraction and use when managing water use due to low water levels (e.g. drought).

1.13.5. Implementing a moratorium on new water bottling takes.

1.14. Ensure large scale water users (e.g., commercial industry) who profit off the use of water are required to share some of these profits back with the community with payments specifically going to hapū and iwi.

1.15. Protect all remaining wild rivers from new large-scale dams.

1.16. Resource and promote rainwater collection, grey water recycling and other water conservation and water-resilience measures (see our Waste and Hazardous Substances Policy).
1.17. Implement education programmes to encourage water conservation by all water users, and promote respect for water's ecological and cultural values.

1.18. Hold polluters financially accountable for the restoration of any waterways and water bodies damaged by their activities, accidentally or otherwise.

2. Wetland Ecosystems

Issues
Wetlands provide enormous environmental and cultural benefits including acting as nature's sponges and the kidneys in the landscape to soak up and filter water, as mahinga kai, and to sustain Māori culture and identity. More than 90% of our pre-1840 wetlands have been destroyed and this loss continues.

Actions
2.1. Protect all remaining natural wetlands, including estuaries and coastal wetlands (see our Marine Policy for more on estuaries protection).

2.2. Restore the habitat quality and healthy functioning of former wetlands

2.3. Encourage landholders to restore wetlands.

2.4. Ensure customary indigenous use of wetlands.