

Freshwater Policy

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.

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.

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.

Actions in this policy that will help achieve this include:

- Protect, in relevant legislation, all remaining natural wetlands, including estuaries and coastal wetlands, and the natural character and mauri of lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, and aquifers (1.3.1-2)
- Affirm tino rangatiratanga of iwi, hāpu and whānau as kaitiaki regarding decision-making related to wai Māori (1.1)
- Ensure that water governance frameworks recognise access to healthy water as a right for all species (1.2)
- Permanently protect nationally and regionally outstanding waterways and water bodies (1.5)

Connected Policies

This policy is part of our approach to [Biodiversity and Environmental Regeneration](#), which supports ecosystem restoration. It sits alongside policy for restoring and protecting te mauri and the natural character of coastal, estuarine and [Marine](#) ecosystems. [Land Use](#) must align with water catchment topography and hydrological patterns and prevent erosion. Freshwater ecosystems are also impacted by major uses and polluters of freshwater, such as [Agriculture](#), [Forestry](#), [Energy](#), [Housing](#), and [Waste and Hazardous Substances](#), and by [Climate Change](#). Through human wellbeing, freshwater is also connected to [Health](#) and [Recreation and Sport](#).

Policy Positions

1. Governance and Legal Protection of Freshwater

Issues

There are tensions around the governance of water that include balancing environmental, health and economic goals, and managing the changes and pressures caused by global warming.

Actions

- 1.1. Affirm tino rangatiratanga of iwi, hāpu and whānau as kaitiaki regarding decision-making related to wai Māori, including by:
 - 1.1.1. Enabling iwi and hapū-led decision-making and governance when using water as a geothermal energy source.
 - 1.1.2. Supporting hapū and iwi rāhui and tangata whenua-led conservation and restoration measures
 - 1.1.3. 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
 - 1.1.4. 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.
- 1.2. 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 by:

- 1.2.1. Holding drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure and services under public ownership and Tiriti-based governance
- 1.2.2. Providing healthy drinking water supplies for all households and marae.
- 1.3. Protect, in relevant legislation:
 - 1.3.1. all remaining natural wetlands, including estuaries and coastal wetlands;
 - 1.3.2. the natural character and mauri of lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, and aquifers;
 - 1.3.3. healthy and variable river flows;
 - 1.3.4. sustainable groundwater levels; and
 - 1.3.5. groundwater recharge, run-off into streams, and other natural drainage patterns, including regulating land use in drought-prone areas.
- 1.4. Ensure that governance of the water column, the land under it, and freshwater biodiversity is collaborative and aligned with ecosystem health, including by:
 - 1.4.1. Aligning policies and environmental standards for freshwater with ecosystem and human health, requiring all water bodies to progressively meet standards for viable ecosystem health and safe swimming and drinking
 - 1.4.2. Recognising and supporting the important role that NGOs, local community groups, and residents have in water management.
- 1.5. Permanently protect nationally and regionally outstanding waterways and water bodies, including:
 - 1.5.1. Strengthening water conservation orders to protect taonga, wild and scenic waterbodies and effectively control land use in their catchments.
 - 1.5.2. Making the protection of aquifers from pollution, contamination, and over-abstraction a matter of national importance.

2. Preventing Harm from Human Activity

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 erosion and heavy metals from road run-off also pollute waterways. Landfills and contaminated sites vulnerable to coastal erosion and flooding are also threats. More than 90% of our pre-1840 wetlands have been converted to other land uses, and this loss continues. 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

- 2.1. Increase funding for the restoration of freshwater ecosystems, prioritising:
 - 2.1.1. The mauri and natural character of water bodies, including wetlands and aquifers.
 - 2.1.2. Healthy populations of indigenous freshwater species, including removal of pest fish and other species that are contributing to the collapse of indigenous species.

- 2.1.3. Groundwater levels and quality.
- 2.1.4. Resilience of water bodies to changing hydrological cycles.
- 2.1.5. Safeguarding water bodies as a source of human drinking water.
- 2.2. Retain and restore the mauri and natural course and character of waterways, coastal ecosystems, wetlands, and other water bodies, including by:
 - 2.2.1. Providing rivers with “room to move” to enable natural changes in course
 - 2.2.2. Resourcing landholders to restore wetlands.
 - 2.2.3. Ensuring customary indigenous use of wetlands.
 - 2.2.4. Developing a national wetland strategy that prioritises the establishment and restoration of wetlands in areas that are otherwise unsuitable for productive agriculture, such as boggy and floodable areas.
- 2.3. Reduce the risk of pollutants, sediment, or reduced water flows damaging aquatic ecosystems, including by:
 - 2.3.1. Increase the width of native riparian plantings to levels that will lead to a regeneration of streams and rivers.
 - 2.3.2. Regulating on-land use activities that have potential effects on water quality and quantity and/or on aquatic ecosystems
- 2.4. Holding polluters financially accountable for the restoration of any waterways and water bodies damaged by their activities, accidentally or otherwise. Ensure that freshwater use, flows, and levels are managed in a way that sustains indigenous freshwater species and ecosystems such as wetlands, including by:
 - 2.4.1. Enable resource consents to be reviewed where takes and discharges are causing environmental, social, or cultural harm.
 - 2.4.2. Prohibiting new large-scale dams on all remaining wild rivers.
 - 2.4.3. Requiring water-sensitive and water-efficient urban and transport design
- 2.5. Minimise commercial water usage and prevent excessive water takes, including:
 - 2.5.1. Enabling small-scale out-of-river and on-farm water storage, after ensuring robust provision for environmental flows.
 - 2.5.2. Implementing a resource rental for the commercial use of water.
 - 2.5.3. Deprioritising intensive commercial abstraction and use when managing water use due to low water levels (e.g. drought)
 - 2.5.4. Implementing a moratorium on new water bottling takes.
 - 2.5.5. Requiring large-scale water users to share some of the profits from their use of water back with the community, with payments specifically going to hapū and iwi.
- 2.6. Support water conservation and water resilience measures by all water users, by:
 - 2.6.1. Supporting drought-tolerant, irrigation-independent agriculture
 - 2.6.2. Resourcing and promoting rainwater collection, grey water recycling and other water conservation and water-resilience measures
 - 2.6.3. Implementing education programmes that encourage water conservation and promote respect for water’s ecological and cultural values.