

# Hon David Parker

Minister for the Environment



# Hon Damien O'Connor

Minister of Agriculture

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PĀNUI PĀPĀHO  
MEDIA STATEMENT

## Cleaning up our rivers and lakes

- Setting higher health standards at swimming spots
- Requiring urban waterways to be cleaned up and new protections for urban streams
- Putting controls on higher-risk farm practices such as winter grazing and feed lots
- Setting stricter controls on nitrogen pollution and new bottom lines on other measures of waterway health
- Ensuring faster council planning
- Requiring mandatory and enforceable farm environment plans
- These actions will be supported by \$700m of funding

The Government is delivering on its commitment to clean up our waterways with a new package that will create jobs and benefit the value of New Zealand's agriculture export and tourism offerings.

Primary sector and other groups will be financially assisted with the implementation of the new clean water standards through a \$700 million fund that will create jobs in riparian and wetland planting, removing sediments and other initiatives to prevent farm run off entering waterways.

"Our environmental reputation is the thing that underpins our biggest export earners - tourism and agriculture. It's time for us to invest in cleaning up our water in order to protect the economic value add it brings," Environment Minister David Parker said.

"Many of our rivers, lakes and wetlands are under serious threat after years of decline and political inaction. If we don't start cleaning up our water now they will get worse, become more expensive to fix and we risk serious damage to our international clean green reputation.

"New Zealanders want to go down to their local swimming spot in summer and be able to put their head under without getting crook," David Parker said.

"Cleaning our waterways will secure the future of our meat, dairy and other primary exports and ensure they continue to earn higher prices overseas. It makes both economic and environmental sense.

"People visit New Zealand because of our clean green image; it's how we market ourselves to the world. But for too long we have put our reputation at risk as our waterways became

more and more polluted. This package is a long overdue investment in our tourism brand and international reputation.

“We know the primary sector is facing challenges in the wake of COVID-19 so the Government has reduced the cost and impact on them, including putting up \$700 million in funding to help with clean-up efforts, but without compromising environmental benefits,” David Parker said.

Agriculture Minister Damien O’Connor said the package will help to increase the value of our primary exports.

“Our high-value overseas consumers want greater assurances that the food and fibre they buy is produced in a sustainable way. Clean water and sustainable farming is entwined with the economic success of the sector, it isn’t one or the other,” Damien O’Connor said.

“All farmers in New Zealand appreciate the value of high quality water and many have done a huge amount of work to improve their practices over the last 20 years or more. Many are leading the way in restoring our waterways.

“Work undertaken to date estimates 80% of dairy farmers won’t be affected by the cap on synthetic nitrogen fertiliser.

“Cleaning up our waterways is also job rich and will provide much needed stimulus to our rural economy.

“We intend to deliver this through already established and proven catchment management groups with initial funding announcements to be made soon,” Damien O’Connor said.

Climate Change Minister and Green Party co-leader James Shaw welcomed the reforms and said they were the strongest protections a government has ever put in place for waterways.

“We all rely on clean water as part of our way of life; whether for drinking, for gathering freshwater kai, or for swimming on a well-earned summer break. However, our precious waterways have been in crisis for decades. Not only has this meant that people cannot swim in a lot of our rivers without risking their health, but many of the species that depend on clean rivers, lakes, wetlands and estuaries are now threatened with extinction.

“Today that changes. With mātauranga Māori – or Māori principles – for water management as our guide, we have developed a clear, robust and enforceable set of policies so we can all enjoy and benefit from healthy rivers and clean, safe water for decades to come.

“Of course, we also know that the climate crisis is putting enormous pressure on our water resources. In addition to what we have announced today, the progress our Government continues to make to build a clean, climate-friendly future for New Zealand will not only make life better for our children and grandchildren, but will help support our precious waterways too,” James Shaw said.

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## FACT SHEET

# Delivering healthy rivers and lakes

- The Government is delivering on its commitment to clean up our waterways, with reforms that deliver environmental gains, jobs and benefits to the economy, while recognising the impact on the rural sector with a package of support.
- The measures announced today, will stop the state of our rivers, lakes and wetlands getting worse, make a significant improvement in five years and return them to health in a generation.
- Farmers in New Zealand appreciate the value of high quality water and many have done a huge amount of work to improve their practices over the last 20 years or more.
- The changes apply equally to rural and urban waterways, and include specific controls on covering urban streams.

### The measures include:

- Using Te Mana o te Wai as our guiding principle, which prioritises the health of the waterway, then the needs of people and then commercial needs
- Cleaning up our rivers and lakes
- Setting higher health standards at swimming spots
- Requiring urban waterways to be cleaned up and new protections for urban streams
- Putting controls on high risk farm practices such as winter grazing and feed lots
- Setting stricter controls on nitrogen pollution and new bottom lines on other measures of waterway health
- Ensuring faster council planning
- Requiring mandatory and enforceable farm environment plans
- The package contains rapid action to stop things getting worse in the short term including controls on high risk farming practices such as winter grazing and feed lots.”
- There will be lower e.Coli levels where – and when – people swim.
- There will be a strengthened bottom line for nitrogen toxicity, to provide better protection for 95 per cent of freshwater species, up from 80 per cent under the previous national policy statement.
- There will also be a cap per hectare on the use of synthetic nitrogen fertiliser, excluding vegetable growers. It will be set initially at 190 kgs/hectare/year with a review by 2023. Fertiliser use increased seven fold between 1990 and 2018.
- Dairy farmers will be required to report annually to councils the quantity of nitrogen applied per hectare as synthetic fertiliser. Fertiliser companies will have to report on sales to ensure the overall level of use is heading in the right direction.

- The primary sector, iwi/Māori, local government and their communities will be supported in implementing the package through the investment of more than \$700 million from Budget 2020 for predominately freshwater-related activity.
- Funding will be used to support actions like installing mini wetlands, removing sediment, riparian planting, helping farmers with stock exclusion and developing farm plans, stabilising river banks and providing for fish passage.
- Rising nitrate levels in drinking water from aquifers has been an increasing concern in recent years. A Ministry of Health-led taskforce is assessing whether New Zealand research is needed into links between nitrate levels and human health impacts and is due to report later this year.
- Expert specialist advisory groups helped develop the proposals, and we received over 17,500 submissions on the plan we outlined in 2019 – that’s more than any other public consultation process the Ministry for the Environment has run.
- Concerns expressed by submitters and the primary sector, as well as the impact of COVID-19, have been taken into account. Further in-depth analysis of the costs and benefits has given us a clearer picture of the overall economic effects.
- Key changes include a longer timeline for farmers on some of the requirements and a decision not to implement a national bottom line for dissolved inorganic nitrogen (DIN) at this stage, although current levels will have to be maintained or improved. Existing permanent fences are not required to be moved via regulation.
- The primary sector will play a critical role in New Zealand’s economic recovery from COVID-19. So the Government has reduced the cost and impact on them from the proposals put out for consultation last year, without compromising major environmental benefits.
- New Zealand’s future wellbeing, including the wellbeing of our rural communities, depends on an economy that is both environmentally sustainable and generates high value for its people.
- For the longer term, there will be a new National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM) to achieve permanent improvements and uphold Te Mana o te Wai. A new freshwater planning process will speed up the process of getting the NPS into force around the country.
- To complement these actions, farm plans will be rolled out over time starting with higher-risk catchments and can be made mandatory and enforceable.
- The Government will work with the agriculture sector to ensure it gets to a space where future generations have the kind of water that they deserve, that they want, and that this country needs. Efforts to achieve high quality water will be rewarded by greater value for our produce.
- With mātauranga Māori – or Māori principles – for water management as the guide, the Government has developed a clear, robust and enforceable set of policies that will mean all New Zealanders can enjoy and benefit from healthy rivers and clean, safe water for decades to come.

Other changes include:

- Delaying consideration of a DIN national bottom line (maximum level) for 12 months, to allow time for a thorough review of its environmental and economic implications.

- Where fences are required they must be a minimum of 3 metres from a waterway, but permanent fences will not need to move to comply with riparian setback requirements, although freshwater farm plans and regional rules may require more than this.
- Developing mandatory and enforceable freshwater farm plan regimes and phasing their introduction over a longer timeframe.
- Removal of commercial vegetable growing from the interim intensification rules

The key legislative and regulatory changes are:

- Amendment to the Resource Management Act to deliver faster regional water plans
- A National Environmental Standard to hold the line by controlling riskier practices
- A National Policy Statement based on Te Mana o te Wai sets new bottomlines for swimmability and water health measures
- Stock exclusion regulations and water take measurement
- Mandatory and enforceable farm plans