



THE WEST COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL

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***Our Freshwater 2020* Report**

The West Coast Regional Council welcomes the latest report on New Zealand's freshwater environment released today by the Ministry for the Environment and Stats NZ, but notes caution is needed in interpreting the data provided.

Our freshwater 2020 considers how New Zealand's freshwater is being impacted by urban development, farming, forestry and other human activities. The report identifies the four most pressing issues facing freshwater environments:

- Threats to native species and habitats
- Pollution in urban, farming and forestry areas
- Changing water flows
- The impact on climate change

West Coast Regional Council Chief Executive, Mike Meehan, said that the data used to inform the report has limitations.

"There has been a range of data sets used to complete the maps, including modelling for the trophic level index of lakes, which has resulted in showing some poor outcomes, that we know are incorrect. Other data collection methods are likely to have been collected in response to impact assessment or other consenting processes so it can be a biased dataset to some extent.

However, the report is a useful snapshot of the state of freshwater in New Zealand, though when looking at freshwater quality issues locally, we need to take a comprehensive catchment focused approach."

The West Coast Regional Council released its 2018 State of Environment (SOE) report last year which provides a snapshot of the state and trends of some of the West Coast region's natural resources, including land cover, water quality, water quantity and air quality.

The SOE report shows how things are changing over time given the pressures experienced throughout the region and is based on robust monitoring data collected and analysed over several years.

“The SOE summary shows that for the parameters we measure, the West Coast is generally in good shape compared to other regions, but we know that there are definitely areas for improvement,” said Mr Meehan.

Work to address freshwater quality and quantity issues is being addressed through the work with the Freshwater Management Unit (FMU) Groups set up across the region.

“Our FMU Groups are provided with the latest data trends and analysis of water issues within their various catchments by our Resource Science team,” said Mr Meehan. “Using this information, the FMU Groups are able to make recommendations for managing this resource for the future to our Resource Management Committee.

Using a targeted approach to managing freshwater issues is the best way to address issues as catchments differ in their own natural conditions and constraints, resource pressures and potential solutions.

Lake Brunner is a very good example of where issues around water quality were addressed with significant input from the local community and landowners.”

Mr Meehan said that while the SOE report helps Council and communities to identify where to focus on, resourcing is one of the biggest challenges in undertaking the work.

The West Coast Regional Council is the smallest Regional Council in New Zealand, managing the fifth largest area in the country, yet must deliver the same services and functions as the other regions of New Zealand.

“We are committed to addressing freshwater issues, water is one of our biggest assets here in the region and critical to our future economic, social and cultural wellbeing.”

A copy of the SOE Report can be found on the Council website at www.wcrc.govt.nz/environment/state-of-environment

Further information:

State of Environment (SOE) monitoring is a key function of regional councils under the Resource Management Act (RMA).

Council monitors groundwater, lakes, rivers, coastal beaches, and air quality across the region at 85 sites. A range of environmental data on the quantity of water on the West Coast, including rainfall, river flows, and groundwater levels is also collected. This data makes up the SOE report.

The SOE Report is a summary document for the general public, backed up by a comprehensive technical report.

Some key findings include:

- Phosphorus levels either improved, or showed no change, at 93% of monitored sites, declining at 7% of sites. Levels at 60% of monitored sites showed no change.

- Invertebrate communities indicative of poor water quality were found at 13% of monitored sites, fair quality but typical of moderate impacts on water quality were found at 18% of monitored sites, with levels at 68% of sites good to excellent.
- Ammonia levels improved at 38% of monitored sites indicating potential improvements in the management of discharges, with levels at 62% of sites showing no change.
- Irrigation allocation has increased by 161% since 2012.
- Hydroelectric power is the largest consented user of water in the region.
- The Grey River catchment has the largest number of consented water takes out of the three districts.
- The demand for groundwater has more than doubled since 2012.
- Long term air quality monitoring of the airshed in Reefton has shown improvement.
- Most rain recorders in the region measured lower than average rainfall in 2012, 2013 and 2107. Rainfall was average, or slightly above, for 2014, 2015 and 2016.
- The Cropp River at waterfall received a whopping 11,228mm of rain in 2017.
- Significant work undertaken in the Lake Brunner catchment over the past decade continues to pay dividends with the lake still classified as 'low nutrient'.

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