

NEW ZEALAND

CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

TE POU ATAWHAI TAIAO O AOTEAROA

NZCA Freshwater Principles (2016)

Freshwater principles

Adopted 2008

Reviewed and amended 6 December 2016

New Zealand's freshwater resources are approaching crisis point.

These principles are a tool to guide the assessment of the New Zealand Conservation Authority's role, its contribution to, and/or response to issues relating to freshwater management.

These principles acknowledge the interaction of freshwater with the land from the mountains to the open sea and recognise that freshwater is essential to all life. It exists in various states, described by the hydrological cycle: in the atmosphere, as snow and ice, and as liquid water both above and below ground. Freshwater environments include rivers, lakes, wetlands, groundwater, estuaries and geothermal waters.

Water is only in part a renewable resource.

The Authority believes that current and future generations of New Zealanders all have the right to enjoy the benefits of our common freshwater resources, so that we can all fully enjoy the environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits associated with freshwater.

The Authority is concerned that economic drivers are dominating the management of freshwater issues to the detriment of other values and believes freshwater management requires taking a long-term, holistic approach, to conserve and protect freshwater for *all* its many uses and values.

The Authority recognises that public conservation land is the source/origin of many of New Zealand's freshwater resources. It supports the DOC 2015-2025 Stretch Goals and in particular Stretch Goal 4:

"50 freshwater ecosystems are restored from "mountains to the sea".

The Authority acknowledges the establishment of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater (NPSFW) under the RMA, recognising this planning instrument will be the key driver of how freshwater will be managed in the coming years. Future changes to the NPSFW and the RMA, around the management of water, are expected.

The NPSFW provides for maintaining and improving water quality through establishment of "bottom lines" and "bands" for the management of water quality and ecosystem health attributes, as well as allocation objectives for both water quality and quantity. These are key determinants of aquatic habitat values and provide the link to the NZCA's advisory functions under the Conservation Act and Section 6 (ab) of that Act:

"To preserve so far as is practicable all indigenous freshwater fisheries, and protect recreational freshwater fisheries and freshwater fish habitats".

Governance

1. Freshwater is a taonga - a treasured and common resource vital to all our lives and must be respected and managed for the benefit of all the people and natural ecosystems of New Zealand. This is a national and intergenerational responsibility.
2. Freshwater environments should be managed in an integrated, long-term, whole-of-catchment, way that recognises the complex inter-relationships of the various components and values.
3. Decisions about the allocation of water (quantity and quality) must be made in the context of the whole catchment (or Flow Management Units), region and ecosystem, encompassing the range of environments, state of water quality, flow regimes, landforms and landscapes.
4. The RMA (NPSFW) limit setting process for catchments must give a high degree of recognition to the conservation values, including ecosystem services, of all aquatic ecosystems.
5. There should be clear national policy to address competing values and uses.
6. Decision-making should provide for public and tangata whenua participation at all levels from community to Government, and be informed by principles of Kaitiakitanga, stewardship and traditional knowledge as well as scientific understanding.
7. The quantity and quality of freshwater should be regularly monitored; new information and research results reviewed, and management continually adjusted to incorporate these.
8. Where there is insufficient information, or effects may be irreversible, the precautionary principle should apply.
9. Use of water for drinking (by humans and animals) has priority over other consumptive uses.
10. Any allocations granted should be based on evidence of environmental sustainability, fairness and equity, rather than greatest potential economic gain.
11. Decision-making around resource consents (water permits and discharge consents), should be based on the "worst-case" scenario, not "average" scenarios, to prevent over-allocation of water resources from a water quantity and quality perspective.

Protection

12. Freshwater management should provide for the protection of all instream values especially the connectivity of water bodies, their riparian margins, and the protection of indigenous biodiversity, natural character, intrinsic, recreational and aesthetic values, wilderness values, historic and wahi tapu values and ecosystem services. All these values are components of healthy aquatic ecosystems.
13. Priority should be given to New Zealand's unique indigenous flora and fauna.
14. Indigenous aquatic species should be present in natural abundance and can, if their natural lifecycles require, freely migrate up- and downstream, to and from the sea, through river mouths and in and out of lakes.
15. The role of rivers, lakes and their outlets in provision of sediments for natural coastal processes should be recognised.
16. Freshwater management should provide for the rehabilitation of degraded waterbodies and their margins.
17. Freshwater management should include prevention of the establishment of new pests and provide for the containment/reduction/elimination of existing ones.

18. Freshwater management should provide for the provision of open space adjoining freshwater bodies and access to estuaries, lakes and waterways for the benefit, recreational use and enjoyment of the public.
19. Water Conservation Orders are a mechanism to protect significant river systems, and options for further WCOs should be investigated.

Sustainability

20. Freshwater management should ensure that any use of water resources, and the indigenous species therein, is ecologically sustainable and managed in a way that maintains its potential for future generations.
21. Decision-making around the use of water resources, should consider the status of native fish species populations, given most are in decline.
22. The commercial takes associated with the long-fin eel fishery and whitebait fishery should be regularly reviewed.
23. Freshwater management must address the cumulative effects of both abstractive uses and discharges, including non-point source discharges.
24. Water should be safe for both swimming and food harvesting, reflecting its natural state.
25. Reduction or elimination of water pollutants should occur at their source, rather than clean up and remediation after environmental damage has been done; land uses creating diffuse-source pollution must therefore be monitored as stringently as point-source discharges.
26. Environmental outcomes for freshwater should be based on the values (including conservation values) and physical characteristics of the waterway.
27. Freshwater management regimes should acknowledge the changes brought about by natural processes including floods, droughts and climate change.

Management

28. Authorised uses should generally be time-limited and reviewable and contain conditions specific to timing and quantity of abstraction.
29. New Zealand needs a national water quality- and quantity-monitoring network that provides comprehensive coverage of flowing waters, lakes and wetlands, capable of providing data that is compatible across regions.
30. Collected data should be used for research and modelling to connect precipitation and river flows enabling greater understanding and prediction of flows and river behaviour.
31. Resources are required to expand management capability and provide appropriate hydrological skills at regional level, and hydrological modelling skills at a national level.

Note: These principles should be read in conjunction with the other current NZCA principles and the template for section 4 of the Conservation Act (giving effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi).