

Chairman's chat



This edition of Talking Taranaki is dedicated to *Our Place: Taranaki State of Environment 2022*. The report, released late last month, set out the current state of our region's air, climate, land and water.

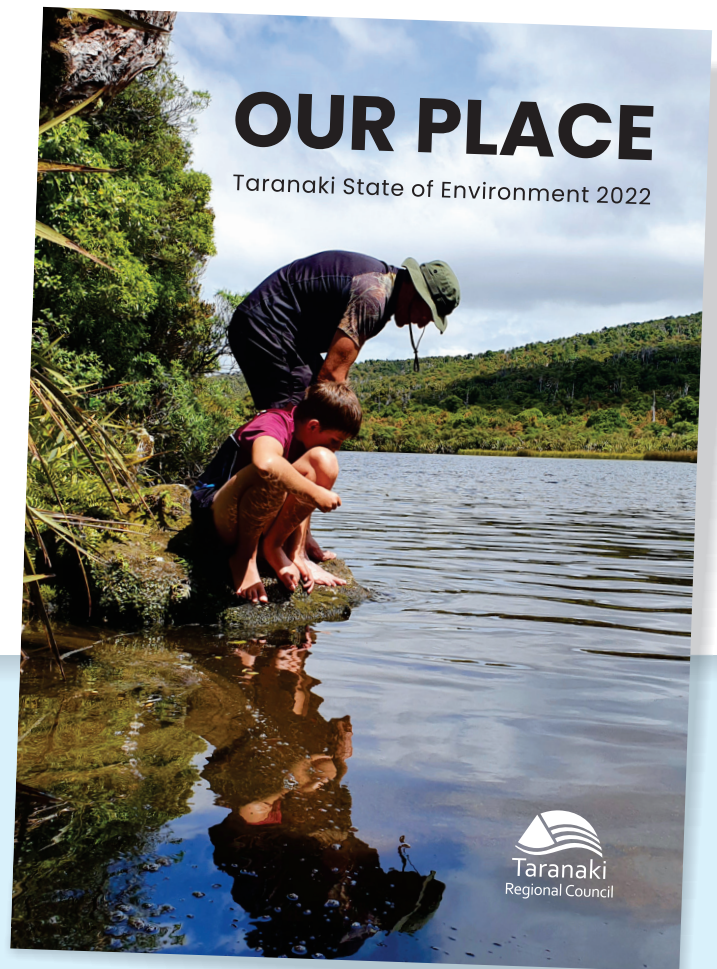
It looks at what is being done to protect and restore the environment as well as what the future holds.

It's fascinating but at times sobering reading. Taranaki can be proud of many aspects of our environment but we have a lot of work to do in other areas, such as freshwater health.

On a positive note, the report contains some great examples of community-led success stories. This is the kind of Taranaki passion and 'can-do' attitude that will help us overcome the challenges ahead.

Some of the key findings are set out below. I encourage you to have a look at the full report – it's written for the everyday person so you don't need to be a scientist to understand it! This is your data, your knowledge. Let's use it to understand the place we call home, to spark conversations and if you haven't already, to take action.

David MacLeod



Climate and Air



- Taranaki is one of the sunniest and windiest regions in New Zealand.
- Climate change already affects Taranaki. In coming years we can expect more frequent and extreme rainfall events, fewer frost days, increasing drought conditions and milder winters.
- The Council has monitored air quality for more than 25 years at up to 30 sites. Taranaki is one of only two regions in New Zealand not considered at risk of exceeding current national air quality standards.
- The Council supports a Government proposal to introduce even stricter air quality standards to protect our health, which may make compliance more challenging in some places.

Water



- New freshwater legislation provides for cultural understanding and mātauranga Māori; empowering tangata whenua to be involved in the management and monitoring of freshwater.
- Groundwater is generally suitable for stock drinking water, but often requires treatment where it is used as drinking water for people.
- Demand for surface water for a range of domestic, farming and industrial uses has increased 3% since 2013.
- Between 2015 and 2020, sampling for faecal indicator bacteria found that the health risk was low more than 90% of the time at 19 monitored beaches and 65% of the time at 18 freshwater sites.
- Long-term water quality trends show more beaches improving than deteriorating in terms of bacteria levels, while 63% of freshwater sites were deteriorating.
- Vulnerability to the effects of sedimentation and nutrient enrichment was high or moderate-high in 10 estuaries.

- Over the past five years the Council has helped restore and protect more than 100 wetlands. 8.4% of the region's original wetland habitat remains.
- 45% of native freshwater fish within Taranaki are at risk of decline nationally, work is underway to improve habitat and address barriers to fish passage.



- Possum numbers are still relatively low across the ring plain. However, there has been a gradual increase since 2015.
- 40% of original native forest and bush habitat in Taranaki remains intact, ranging from 55% in the hill country to less than 5% on the ring plain. More than 8% of New Plymouth is covered in indigenous vegetation.

Land



- The area of land used for dairy farming has increased by 43% over the last 30 years. The number of dairy cows remains similar.
- Soil conservation works over the last 25 years have resulted in a 29% net reduction in mean annual sediment load, with a further 15% reduction expected as existing works mature.
- The amount of solid waste to landfill is currently reducing by about 3% per year.

- An assessment of soil health at 18 active land use sites in 2017 found the majority of soil health indicators were in the target range. Exceedances were typically for high macroporosity levels. This is a result of soil compaction, a common issue throughout New Zealand.
- 1,336 Taranaki sites with a risk of contaminated soil have been inspected. There was no contamination at 56%, low levels at 40%. No known sites present an unacceptable risk to the community. Eighteen sites have been remediated.



- Five rare and threatened native bird species have been reintroduced to Taranaki since 2000: whio, hihi, tieke, pāteke, kōkako.
- Since 2009, Taranaki land owners have planted 46,000 poles to treat erosion-prone land; erected 237km of fencing and planted 894ha in trees along waterways and retired 5,523ha of erosion-prone land.

