

# Waterways report card 2017



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Freshwater quality is an intensely debated issue, both nationally and regionally. It's worthy of serious discussion, but we shouldn't lose sight of two important facts:

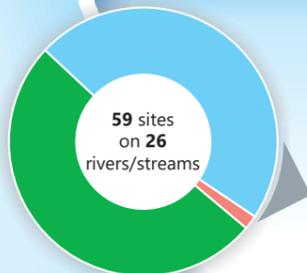
- The Taranaki Regional Council has been closely monitoring the quality of this region's waterways for more than two decades.
- Improvements are increasingly apparent, thanks mainly to significant investment and effort by communities, farmers and industry.

This report covers the most recent findings of the Council's extensive water quality monitoring programmes, which are designed to accepted protocols and subject to external review and audit to ensure their scientific integrity.

In a nutshell, the latest trends from more than 20 years of monitoring the ecological health and physical and chemical state of our rivers and streams show most measures are improving or not changing significantly. And the latest assessments of in-stream life – the primary indicator of water quality – are again the best since we began measuring.

The whole region continues to invest in measures to protect and enhance our waterways. The benefits are more and more apparent, and the Council is firmly focused on working with the community to achieve further improvements.

This page gives a broad overview of the latest results. For more detail go to [www.trc.govt.nz/taranaki-waterways-updates](http://www.trc.govt.nz/taranaki-waterways-updates)

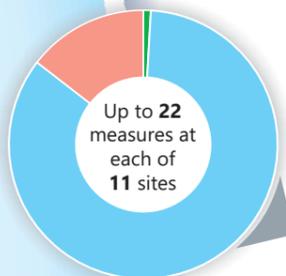


## River ecology

The ecological health of waterways is assessed by studying the type of life they sustain, and is the primary measure of freshwater quality. Across the region, our rivers and streams are improving or not showing any significant changes. At more and more sites, we're seeing the best results since monitoring began in 1995.

### Trends in ecological health of waterways 1995-2016

51% Improvement 47% No obvious trend 2% Deterioration

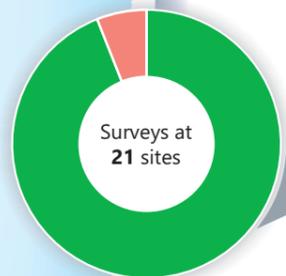


## Physical and chemical trends

Measuring organic contamination, nutrient concentrations and aesthetic quality can flag pressures on waterways and indicate where to best focus our attention. The picture in Taranaki is largely stable but our aim is to achieve more improvements and fewer declines. Importantly, monitoring has found no association between nitrogen levels in Taranaki's streams and the ecological health of our waterways. And nitrate and total nitrogen levels are not increasing.

### Trends in physical and chemical measures of freshwater quality 2009-2016

1.0% Improvement 84.5% No obvious trend 14.5% Deterioration

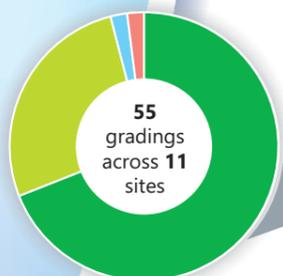


## Algae

Algae, or periphyton, is essential for aquatic ecosystems but excessive levels can cause environmental and/or health problems. Just about all of Taranaki's monitored sites meet national guidelines.

### National guidelines for algae growth 2014-2016

94% Met guidelines  
6% Exceeded guidelines

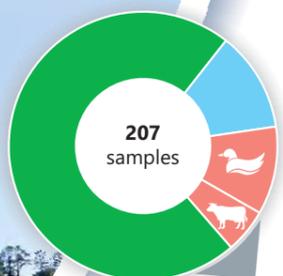


## National standards

The Government has set compulsory standards for a number of water-quality measures. Most measurements at 11 Taranaki sites meet the standards, with more than two-thirds achieving the best score.

### Ministry for the Environment gradings for water uses 2013-2016

69% A Best  
27% B Intermediate  
2% C Acceptable  
2% D Unacceptable - improvement required



## Can I swim?

Over summer, the Council monitors popular swimming spots on the coast (where most people swim) and on our rivers and streams. Freshwater sites are mostly good, with contamination by wildfowl and gulls responsible for most of the problems. Coastal sites are consistently good.

### Ministry for the Environment categories for recreational freshwater quality Summer 2015/16

149 Acceptable 22 Unacceptable (source: birds)  
25 Acceptable (monitoring alert) 11 Unacceptable (source: cows)

## Where credit's due

The improvements we're seeing are the result of consistent and continuing efforts by farmers, industry and communities (via local councils and grassroots groups). For example:

- Farmers have spent an estimated \$80 million fencing and planting thousands of kilometres of riverbanks.
- Industry and communities have invested millions of dollars to eliminate or significantly reduce the number and impact of discharges to fresh water.
- The Taranaki Regional Council's comprehensive monitoring reveals a consistently high rate of compliance with resource consent requirements.

The bar is constantly being raised and this work will only continue. Farmers are on track to have the ring plain's rivers and streams entirely protected with fences and vegetation by early in the new decade, and are also switching to land-based disposal of treated dairy effluent. Industry constantly strives for cleaner and smarter ways to operate.

We can look forward to more improvements in the quality of our rivers and streams.

Taranaki Regional Council

Working with people | caring for Taranaki