

## **Perceptions of the State of the New Zealand environment - water**

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The second biennial survey of people's perceptions of the state of the New Zealand environment was undertaken in February 2002. The survey is based on the Pressure-State-Response model of state of the environment reporting. It tests perceptions of all the main resource areas - air quality, native plants and animals, native forest and bush, soils, beaches and coastal waters, marine fisheries, marine reserves, freshwaters, national parks, wetlands, urban environments, and the natural environment. It also examines preferences for changes in government expenditure between environmental and other government activities.

Two thousand people, aged 18 and over, were randomly selected from the New Zealand electoral roll. An effective response rate of 45% was achieved. Key findings include:

- New Zealanders consider the state of, and management of, the environment to be good and better than other developed countries;
- Farming is seen to be putting more pressure on resources, particularly fresh water;
- New Zealanders would like to see more taxes spent on the environment, especially on fresh water related activities;
- While the Government has dismissed implementing licences for marine recreational fishers the survey indicated that such a regime would generate a large income stream which could potentially benefit marine recreational fisheries' management;
- Ethnicity is a key variable. For example, Maori judge that water quality is lower, and management of water is worse than do other respondents.

The recent effort by Statistics New Zealand to monitor progress towards a sustainable New Zealand does not include any perceptions information. This report is an important step towards bridging that gap.

The results from this survey provide a means for individual resources to be analysed in such a way that is useful to regional and district councils, central government agencies, researchers, and consultants. The following analysis of fresh water is an example of this.

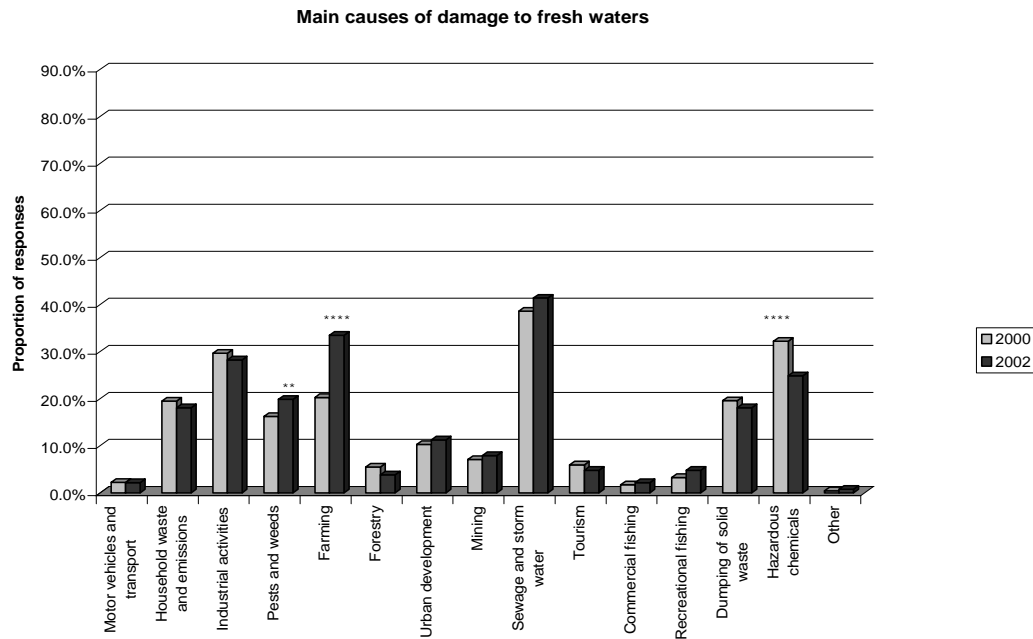
### **New Zealanders and Fresh Water**

Most New Zealanders believe that New Zealand fresh waters are in a better state in 2002 than they were five years ago. Three quarters of respondents believe that fresh water is moderately to highly available, with similar findings in the 2000 survey. More New Zealanders believe that the quality of fresh water has not changed or has improved compared to 2000. A quarter of respondents think that the water quality has worsened from five years ago, compared with thirty percent in the previous survey.

Most respondents think that New Zealand's fresh waters are currently adequately to well managed. This finding is very similar to that of the 2000 survey. There has, however, been an increase in the proportion of respondents who believe that the quality of management has improved and in the proportion who believe it has worsened.

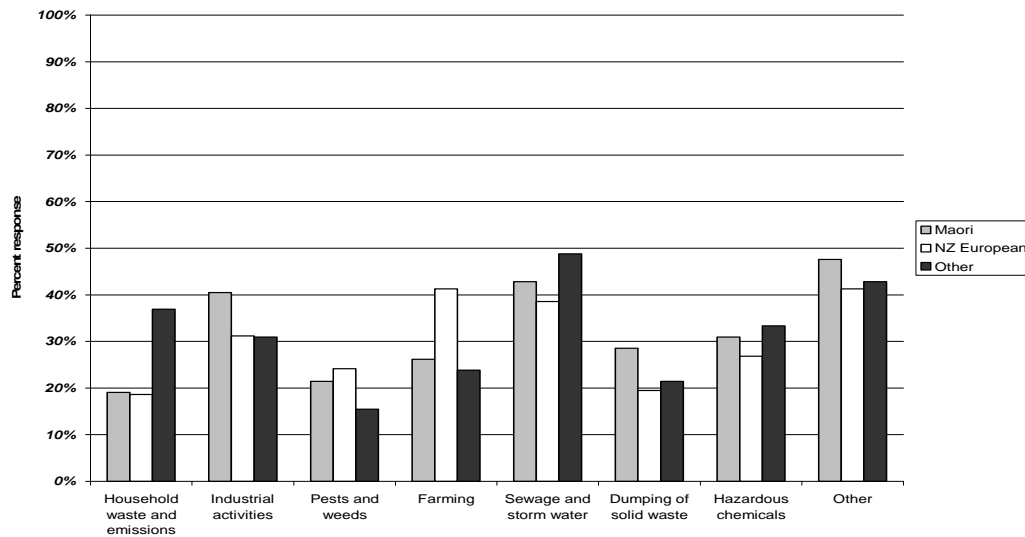
There has been a significant change in respondent's beliefs about the main causes of damage to fresh waters from 2000 to 2002. There has been an increase of 13% in those who think that

farming is the main cause of damage to fresh waters. An increasing number of those surveyed believe that pests and weeds are the main cause whereas the number of people who think that hazardous chemicals are the main cause of damage has decreased. Sewage and storm water, however, is still considered to play the biggest role in damaging the fresh waters.



Respondent's ethnicity seems to affect their thoughts on the main causes of damage to fresh water. The highest NZ European response was recorded for farming while for Maori and 'others' it was sewage and storm water.

**Analysis of main causes of damage to freshwater, by ethnicity**



New Zealanders value the quality of water highly. Respondents placed pollution that affects the quality of water as the fourth most important environmental issue facing New Zealand today.

Overall, the state of fresh water is generally viewed positively. Nevertheless there were large shifts toward attributing damage to fresh water to farming and to judging management of farm effluent and runoff to be worse. These views may reflect the increased public profile of water allocation issues, including for dairy farming. This concern is reflected in the desire to see increased expenditure on fresh waters, which was ranked first in 2002, but only fourth in 2000. In general, New Zealanders would like about one billion dollars more to be spent on the environment. This is double what is currently being spent.

As mentioned previously, ethnicity plays a large part in the beliefs of New Zealanders about the environment, however it is particularly noticeable in the water-related questions. For seven of nine factors studied there are significant differences in responses between ethnic groups. It appears, generally, that the 'other ethnicity' group have a relatively positive view of almost all water-related matters. This might be because many of these respondents were born outside New Zealand and their prior experience of fresh water has been somewhat negative. 'Other ethnicity' people include Pacific Island people, and Asians. Previous work reported by MfE in 1997 suggests there is some evidence that Asian people have differing attitudes toward environmental management than do New Zealand Europeans and Maori (MfE, 1997: section 2:9).

This type of analysis has the potential to provide councils, agencies and consultants with valuable information for decision-making on the environment. Indeed, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment believes it is the most comprehensive survey to date.

