

# Proposed Waikato Regional Plan Change 1 – Waikato and Waipa River Catchments.

**To:** Chief Executive, Waikato Regional Council  
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We do not wish to speak at the hearing in support of our submission.

## Healthy Rivers submission

1. We agree that our rivers need to be protected and pollutants reduced.
2. We acknowledge that the proposed plan involves stakeholders from many different activities that affect water quality.

In theory, the plan appears to address the issue in a broad sense but we have serious concerns about the way it will be implemented.

3. Our fear is that this plan adds another substantial level of bureaucracy to landowners in our region while not actually making very much difference to the river. It will create enormous administration costs for which landowners will be required to pay.

In addition, there does not appear to be any plan to reduce administration costs to landowners once “swimmable river” status is achieved.

- 4 We believe that this plan should apply to ALL landowners in the Waikato River catchment; it is unjust to exclude Maori land.

In addition, it makes no sense to exclude sub-catchments because ***“these ecosystems will not begin to show the water quality improvements envisaged during the development of the proposed Plan Change 1.”***

How can water quality be improved in catchments if they are excluded from the very controls that should be able to improve them?

- 5 It is widely perceived that the Waikato Regional Council has been particularly ineffective in addressing water quality management issues in the past.

The perception is that the way the council administers the regulations favours big industry and penalises individuals.

Examples include;

- Wairakei power station continues to pump arsenic, mercury and other heavy metals into the river, despite requirements in its consents that appear to be being disregarded.
- Kinleith continues to pollute the river, as it has done since construction in the 1950s.

- WRC appears to have failed to monitor the harmful effects of enormous and sudden fluctuations in river level by Mighty River Power (now Mercury) resulting in the devastation and destruction of the wetlands in the upper Waikato River catchment, the loss of habitat of many of our endangered waterfowl and native birds and insects.

In addition, WRC has effectively prevented any member of the public from having the right to object to these practises.

- Councils along the river have a variety of methods of controlling river weed. Spray pollutants are turning up in river samples down river, mulched weed is creating problems downstream, and harvested weed is putting arsenic and mercury into land-based dumps.

One potential tool to manage this issue has been developed by Shane Carter. His science-based method of dealing with river weed involves harvesting and drying the weed (eliminating the pollutants), then using the dry river weed to generate electricity, giving a nett profit with no pollution. He has a working prototype in Rotorua. We recommend the council investigate this option.

- 6 There is an economic benefit associated with all the industries named above. However the regulatory process must be fair to all. Creating much greater transparency in both monitoring and actions would give the community much greater confidence in both the council and industries.
- 7 We recommend:
  - a. All industries that are required to report discharge readings to WRC be required to also report this information to the public. The WRC should also provide a public resource of this information collated from all sources.
  - b. The WRC publicly report, in a similar resource, all the sites it monitors and the results of that monitoring. Where WRC auditing and monitoring relates to a specific point source such as the industries covered under clause a), both sets of results should be easily able to be compared.
8. We urge council to create clarity in the definitions it uses in the plan, such as “swimmable” and “safe for food gathering”. With robust definitions in place the community will feel much more empowered to contribute to achieving specific results. Currently, one result of the lack of results-based goals is that the community becomes increasingly sceptical and disengaged. We believe the council will never be able to achieve full success in water quality goals without the community’s full support and buy-in.

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