

What do Local Body Candidates Know and Think about Freshwater?

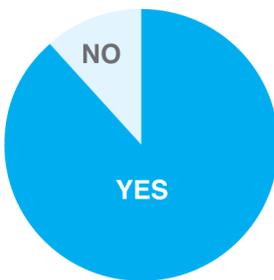
All candidates in the current Local Body postal election were approached by Freshwater Foundation Charitable Trust with a simple questionnaire. The intention was to elicit candidates' views on local freshwater issues.

Of the approximately 1100 contacted 140 responded to the survey.

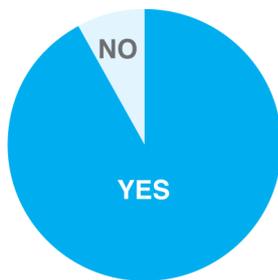
Freshwater is a hot topic with some passionate answers. Here is the summary:

- 89% consider local fresh water is not in an acceptable state
- 92% consider our freshwaters should be swimmable
- 71% said people do swim in their region's waterways
- 96% thought their local waterways could be safer/better for swimming

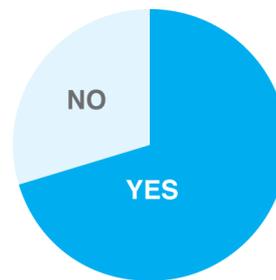
In your view are the rivers, streams, lakes, estuaries in your region in an acceptable state?



Should all rivers, lakes and estuaries in New Zealand be swimmable?



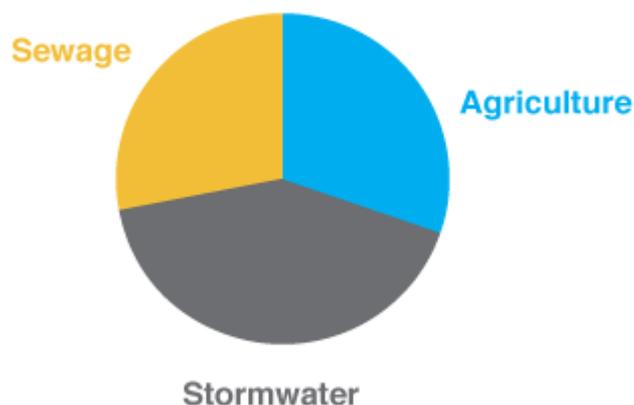
Do people swim in your region's waterways?



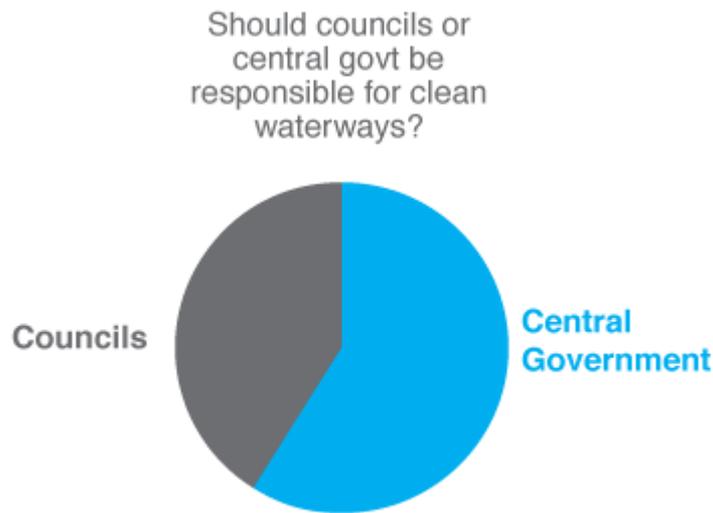
Could your local waterways be safer/better for swimming?



The common sources of pollution in their region's waterways are seen as:



Responsibility for New Zealand's freshwaters was seen as central government 59% and Councils 41%



Candidates were asked nine questions and given the opportunity to make comments. Almost all did. All were illuminating. Samples only are:

“This is a high priority for me - we must take action immediately to stop further degradation, and set programmes in place to restore the damage already done. As a Community Board person my level of focus will be on local waterways, supporting local community initiatives researching, cleaning up, and replanting, as well as working to ensure Council sets an aspirational benchmark in this area.”

“If you want something enough you can make it happen. I feel the same about improving water quality.”

“Our freshwater and waterways are under threat from farm intensification and water storage projects, and vested interests who see rivers and water as a resource to use for profit. Groundwater quality is deteriorating as a result.”

“I grew up being able to swim in and drink from almost any waterway in the region. Having said that I did get sick from eating mussels at Governor's Bay. Since then we have seen improvements in some water quality, no more sewerage going into the harbour, and a decline in others, low flows high bacterial counts etc. We must continue to monitor and improve all waterways to make them safe to drink from and swim in. Councils must regulate/mitigate population, agriculture, and industry pressures to ensure these improvements are attained.”

“Wadeable” is nowhere near good enough. 90+% of our rivers and waterways should be “swimmable” so Kiwis can enjoy them. The only reason I'm not pushing for 100% is there are always going to be a few spots where birds or geography mean the water quality isn't great. Intensive farming and other polluters need to change their processes or be forced to pay for the clean-up. This is something people feel strongly about so both local and central government need to pay serious attention to it, not just lip service.”

“Many of the rivers in the Wellington region are highly polluted and not fit for swimming in. This is a disgrace and a top priority for me is to improve the quality of our rivers and make them swimmable. We need stronger more enforceable national standards to reduce agricultural runoff and stormwater and stronger monitoring and enforcement by our Local and Regional Council.”

“We need to set the bar higher in terms of our aspiration for waterways, that is they should be swimmable.”

“Not enough is done to highlight and protect threatened and at-risk native fish.”

“Water is the foundation for all life and wellbeing and we need to take collective responsibility for looking after it so we can all thrive together. Here in the Upper Clutha we do not have the obviously eutrophic situation of other water bodies but we cannot declare our water pristine either. We need to be proactive and make a management plan for our lakes and get on top of why new algae are appearing. We need to know what is going into our lakes and waterways and actively manage that to acceptable levels; which we will only be able to manage with a plan. The community needs to be involved with setting the goals for the management plan as we all need to take ownership of the situation. Central Government, regional council and district council need to work with stakeholders (which is everybody when we talk water!!)”

“I want our rivers to be clean and healthy enough for our children and grandchildren to enjoy in the future. I want our rivers to be clean enough for swimming, playing, fishing, and gathering kai, so our children and grandchildren can enjoy them too.”

“Fresh and clean water is not only “nice to have” but essential to a healthy life. It is not acceptable that our rivers are just for wading - they need to be swimmable. The natural biodiversity in our rivers should be maintained and our grandchildren should be able to enjoy healthy waterways. To reduce fresh water pollution, actions need to be taken such as: preventing further intensive farming and irrigation consents; fencing farmland from rivers and creeks; planting river banks to absorb excess run-off and putting a hold on new conversions of land to dairy farms.”

“While it may never be 100% possible, all Central, regional, and local government bodies should nevertheless be required to aspire to return our waterways to "swimmable" quality, allowing safe immersion of head, and minimal or no illness from accidental ingestion. Councils are responsible for the provision of clean, filtered municipal supplies at reasonable, not excessively fixed, charges to residents, whether from natural catchments via dams or reservoirs, pumped from aquifers, or artesian bores. Agriculture is the greatest polluter of waterways in our region, and while PNCC has responsibility for rural landholder behaviours within increased City limits, the major issues need to be addressed via Horizons Regional Council and central government legislation, plus ongoing funding for riparian plantings and increasingly requiring new best practice farming methods that prohibit over-intensification.”

What can be taken from the results? Overall, probably, those standing for public local government office consider their regions’ freshwaters, that is lakes, rivers, streams and estuaries, are not of an acceptable state for swimming even though people wish to swim in them. Local body candidates clearly want swimmable freshwater which is opposed to central government who are legislating a wadeable bottom line for New Zealand’s freshwater.

The Freshwater Foundation advocates for healthy New Zealand lakes, rivers, streams and estuaries for people and nature. ff.org.nz

To help decision makers understand what New Zealanders mean when they ask for a swimmable waterway Freshwater Foundation recently published this comic strip ff.org.nz/swimmable

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[Freshwater Foundation Charitable Trust](http://ff.org.nz)

