



RESEARCH FIRST



ENVIRONMENT SOUTHLAND

# WATER:

Values and Objectives  
Initial Information Gathering



August 2018

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## Water: Values and Objectives Initial Information Gathering


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## Disclaimer

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# 1

## Key Findings

 *"It is an intrinsic value, pretty much everything is linked to water, the ability to have access to it and for it to do its natural function, all the rivers are the blood that flows through the region... The river is a symbol of who we are."*

The core common values for water identified were:

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
|  <p>To be able to reliably access clean, safe drinkable water from the tap</p> |  <p>To be able to safely swim and fish</p> |  <p>To maintain quality access for industry and economic growth</p> |  <p>To maintain the wellbeing of the natural environment</p> |
|---|---|---|---|

When prompted to think about it, participants recognised that water was vital and at the very core of living.

However, the extent to which this was thought about or acknowledged in day to day life and the extent it influences behaviour differed greatly. The value is there but it is not recognised as access to quality water is seen as a right.

In the past, people have taken it for granted that the quality of water in Southland is good, that there will always be a sufficient supply, and that the country as a whole is 'clean and green'. This is how NZ has been marketed and it is how a lot of generations have experienced it. This is a huge barrier to behaviour change.

There is an increasing feeling of responsibility where it is accepted that water quality is declining. People do want to be involved in the protection and control of water quality. Southlanders are governed by a sense of guardianship; of protecting and restoring the values that attach to water for future generations but this needs to be driven by personal accountability and the hunt for solutions and ways to work together, rather than stopping at blaming someone else.

To protect the values held for water, residents are recognising the tensions between social values, economic prosperity and environmental guardianship.

Achieving change is accepted to be everyone's responsibility but there are barriers that need to be addressed to be able to support people to make a change. The main barriers identified were:

- Apathy
- Knowledge levels
- Media influence
- The 'blame game'
- Perceptions of the ability of Environment Southland to drive change

Change will come through integrating on-ground action with the regulation to back it up.

# 2

## Project Objectives

### 2.1 Objectives

This project was designed as part of an initial information gathering stage to provide the context behind and shape the design of a wider community engagement project. This project will run from November 2018 through to June 2019 across the catchment areas. The overall project aims to understand:

1. The value people attach to water and what they want from it
2. Southlanders' objectives for water

The information gathered will feed into a regional forum that will determine how to reach the objectives.

The aims of this initial project were to start the conversation, to understand how best to engage people in the conversation and to ensure that the engagement plan is designed to reach not just those that are typically open to engagement but also the large sector of the Southland community that do not typically connect and engage.




The project has been designed around the IAP2 Core Values for Public Participation:<sup>1</sup>

1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iap2.org/page/corevalues>

## 2.2 Project Method

| PROJECT STAGE   |   |
|---|---|
|  | <b>Part 1:</b><br>Literature review of learnings from other areas |
|  | <b>Part 2:</b><br>7 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders     |
|  | <b>Part 3:</b><br>3 focus groups                                  |

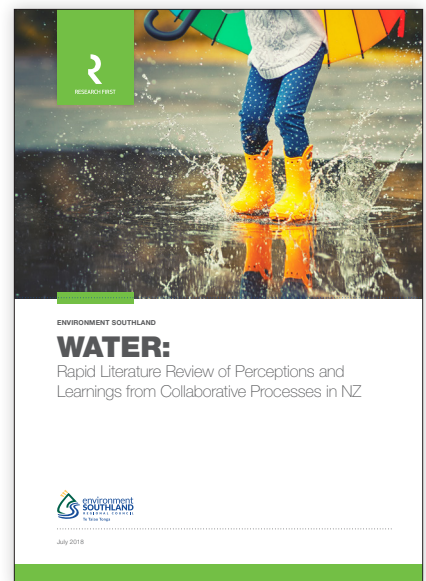
### 2.2.1 Literature review

This project was preceded with a rapid evidence review of perceptions of water and the key learnings from other engagement process in New Zealand. This ensured learnings from other projects were taken into account in the shaping of the community engagement process for Southland.

The literature review is presented in a separate document and concluded that the engagement process should be governed by the following principles:

- Inclusivity (wide public involvement)
- Active participation
- Transparency and accountability
- Integration (incorporate iwi engagement at an early stage, avoid polarising approaches e.g. between urban and rural communities; actively fostering understanding)
- Efficiency (e.g. build on existing relationships)
- Flexibility and responsiveness
- Competence

The literature review highlighted positive outcomes where engagement was active, informal and integrative.



### 2.2.2 In-depth interviews with key informants

Representatives from a range of sectors were involved in in-depth interviews to provide an overview of the values and issues critical to their sector, as well as their own views as Southlanders.

Whilst this is not inclusive of all interest groups, the information gathered provided strong indicators for each sector area. It is envisaged that the wider engagement plan will provide opportunities for other organisations to be involved.

Participants interviewed for this stage of the project included:

| Sector                 | Organisation                  |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Iwi                    | Te Runanga o Awarua           |
| Recreation             | Fish & Game                   |
| Tourism                | Venture Southland             |
| Farming                | Fed Farmers and DairyNZ       |
| Infrastructure/Economy | Southland Chamber of Commerce |
| Communities            | Gore High School              |

### 2.2.3 Active focus groups

Instead of the traditional focus group structure followed in other areas that has divided the population into separate interest groups (e.g. urban/rural/farming), this project took a different approach and aimed to foster understanding from the outset, rather than polarising the groups by design.

The general population focus groups designed were also more active in design than the traditional meeting room-based discussion. A broad cross section of the community were represented in participants that were invited to groups taking place on farms and at a marae. This prompted discussion by immersing participants in a different experience. The benefits of this approach included:

- Fosters a shared understanding and educates across groups – creates empathy as a starting point and removes the barriers to conversation created by a lack of knowledge. It removed the difficulties in talking about something where people don't want to offend, don't want to get it wrong so don't talk.
- More informal and engaging grass roots approach.
- Taps into the pride and passion in farming in the region.
- Engages with the region's cultural values.
- Talks to the region's love for the land.

Groups were hosted at a dairy farm, a sheep and beef farm and Murihiku Marae during August 2018.

Recruitment was deliberately designed to mix different members of the community from different geographic areas of Southland. There was a split of people from urban and rural areas in each group and a mix of knowledge levels around water quality and water management.


The design of the groups received very positive feedback from participants as a way to encourage involvement. They held greater appeal to participants than a traditional focus group so were seen and as a good way to engage those that would not normally engage.



# 3

## Starting to define the values around freshwater

### 3.1 Overarching Core Values


 *"It is an intrinsic value, pretty much everything is linked to water, the ability to have access to it and for it to do its natural function, all the rivers are the blood that flows through the region... The river is a symbol of who we are."*

The core common values for water identified were:

|   |   |
|---|---|
|  <p>To be able to reliably access clean, safe drinkable water from the tap</p> |  <p>To be able to safely swim and fish</p>                     |
|  <p>To maintain quality access for industry and economic growth</p>          |  <p>To maintain the wellbeing of the natural environment</p> |



## 3.2 Quality Identifiers


 *"I'm too scared to actually test the water; you have to decide, right I have to do something with the result; ignorance is bliss"*

Measures of water quality are based on perception. For the general resident these include:


- **Swimmability and fishability**
  - Would you swim there, or would you fish there; if you would then it is ok.
- **Visual tests**
  - Signs of colour, algae, foam and cloudiness are seen as concerning.
  - If a cow is seen standing in a stream, if there are signs of effluence or just footprints near a river it is assumed the water is polluted.
- **Biodiversity**
  - Lack of fish and invertebrates in the streams are taken as a sign of poor water quality.
- **Smell**
  - Any smells mean contamination.
  - Stagnant/pungent smells mean stay out of the water.
  - Chemical smells suggest the water has been treated and is not naturally clean.
- **Feeling**
  - Slimy, gritty or grimy water is not trusted.
- **Drinkability**
  - In an ideal world, water quality would be such that it was safe to drink the water directly from the stream or lake with no fear of contamination. Currently, even if the water looks clear and does not smell there is still a lack of trust that the water is drinkable.


### 3.3 The values are perceived as rights

When prompted to think about it, participants recognised that water was vital and at the very core of living.


 *"If water quality isn't good then everything that is sustained by it isn't good...if fish species aren't thriving we haven't done our job properly".*

The core values expressed by the Southland community are strongly attached to this belief. However, the extent to which this was thought about or acknowledged in day to day life and the extent it influences behaviour differed greatly. The value is there but it is not recognised when the value comes to be seen as a right:


 *"Because it's our right it doesn't have value – we take it for granted"*

 *"Kiwi's feel they have the right to clean rivers, it used to be the quarter acre entitlement, that changed but feelings on being able to go and fish in the river haven't"*

In the past, people have taken it for granted that the quality of water in Southland is good, that there will always be a sufficient supply, and that the country as a whole is 'clean and green'. This is how NZ has been marketed and it is how a lot of generations have experienced it. This is a huge barrier to behaviour change. However, there is growing recognition that water quality has dropped and this is pushing the impetus for change.

 *"Government has to remember water is more precious than gold or silver or diamonds – it's time we all woke up, it's not about the export dollar, it's not about votes, it's about getting NZ back to being clean and green, that's really important"*

There is a real feeling of responsibility and people do want to be involved in the protection and control of water quality. Southlanders are governed by a sense of guardianship; of protecting and restoring the values that attach to water for future generations:

 *"It's a priority for my grandkids... I still like to go out shoot a duck, catch a fish, go for a swim, you know... but I pick where I go – the kids might not have that choice."*

So, the duty to improve water quality and protect it has a strong future focus for Southland.

This concept of guardianship is important as it identifies a shift in values away from those attached to economic gain that relied heavily on mastery of the environment, to valuing the achievement of a balance between social values and environmental guardianship alongside economic prosperity.




# 4


## Issues & Tensions

### 4.1 A complex problem with social, economic and environmental values.


Water quality is a national issue and is a complex, or 'wicked problem'. That is, it is not easy to articulate in a straightforward way and is impossible to solve in a way that is simple or final.

Knowledge and evidence surrounding water quality can be incomplete or contradictory, there are interconnected tensions involved, those connections are not always clear and the requirements can be both shifting and difficult to define:

 *"It is everyone's problem in terms of load and contribution. Everyone has a part to play but it is so complex, does everyone understand their part?"*

 *"Is it possible to get a balance between swimmable, profitable etc? – We will never achieve the end goal, we're just always trying to be a bit better..."*

It is possible that there has been a generational shift from a mentality around mastering the environment to a recognition of the need for guardianship: that the water we have now needs to be around for future generations.

 *"It feels like all the pressure is on to feed the world – I think we need to focus on feeding our world, and protecting our land, before we decide to turn our land inside out to suit others"*

To protect the values held for water residents are recognising the tensions between:



Where one side of the triangle is seen to have a stronger influence, conflicts or issues tend to arise around the perceived or real impacts these activities have on water quality or availability. For example, championing recreational use could come at the expense of a farming family’s livelihood. The farming community needs to be able to run a water reliant business with access to good quality and quantity of water. Equally, if unchecked, achieving economic prosperity through intensification of farming could have disastrous consequences for the long term future of water quality and availability.

#### 4.1.1 Primary Industries are front of mind

Primary industries are a strong driver of water quality and have a major influence on it. Judgements placed on this sector can be harsh and are heavily influenced by the media portrayal of economic greed in big farmers constantly chasing the dollar, apparently without any regard for the long-term care of the land.

Strong urban/rural divides have been picked up in other regions of NZ. Dairy is a key industry for Southland and is often front of mind when attributing blame.

Participants expressed significant concerns around 1. the impact dairy farming has on the environment through intensification and wintering practices, and 2. the long-term stability of its economic prosperity.


- Some participants believed that Southland soil is not suitable for Dairy; it is more suitable for sheep. However, because there is currently seen to be more money in dairy, investments are being made to make the land dairy-ready which has a perceived negative impact on water quality. Where residents question the longer term stability of the dairy industry in Southland, this level of investment is a concern.
- Intensification is very visible. Changes to industry, whilst benefiting the economy, can have a negative impact on the environment and recreational access to water. What residents see much less is the work that is done to manage the impact of these numbers so assumptions are made around amount of damage that is done.
- Wintering is also very visible. There was some discussion around whether Southland wintering practices are worse than other regions in the country, or just more noticeable due to nature of heavy soils and wet winters.

These factors all highlighted a need for the region to be seen to ‘farm smarter and cleaner’.

There was some awareness that some farms were putting processes in place to help with the water management, such as riparian planting, managing run-off, effluent use, grey and green water use and so on. However, knowledge levels were low and the more urban participants, in particular, did not recognise that this was a priority for farmers.


Southlanders are keen to move away from the connection that economic development can only come at the cost of water quality. Most farmers do have the same core values as everyone else and residents outside of the sector do recognise and acknowledge this. However, sections of the community believe farmers show an entitlement to water and a unfair priority over the rest of the community if their dollar return is the most important factor.

Whilst significant changes are being made in the farming industries around regenerative farming to support the environment alongside some more intensive farming practices, these get little publicity. Not everyone is on board and so perceptions are ending up negatively skewed.

 *“There’s good and there’s ratbags, we don’t want to see cowboys dragging everyone else down”*


There is an increasing focus on being able to grow the economy with a reduced footprint – ‘having it both ways’. A lot of good management practices are being developed with emphases on progressive practices and regeneration, increasing the knowledge of impacts and how to monitor and manage. A key part of this work is identifying the best ways to roll these initiatives out across the farming community and maintaining the sense of guardianship for the land.

Perceptions do need to be managed. Agriculture needs to be seen to tidy itself up or community support for the industry in Southland and its point of difference in the export market were argued to be at risk. NZ products are sold on the premise of ‘clean and green’, there was a perceived danger that negative marketing will be used to capture the market. If marketers from other countries, or with alternative products (synthetic alternatives), focus on farming practices to tell an ‘ugly truth’ about the damage a ‘clean and green’ product is apparently doing to the natural environment there would be a significant risk to the region’s economy. This risk should be managed by preparing to adapt to changes in the market as well as changing farming practices.

 *“There is a real need to look 10 years in the future - how can we position ourselves and products against the alternatives.”*

#### 4.1.2 Urban Infrastructure is recognised as a problem

Participants were very aware that farming gets a disproportionate level of blame for water quality issues:


 *“The dairy industry is the most visible industry sector... Dairy farmers get blamed; but cities are more responsible for pollution”*

Participants identified that more needed to be done to improve the built environment and infrastructure within urban areas, particularly as resident and tourist numbers increase. Issues highlighted included:

- Invercargill sewage treatment,
- Stormwater run offs,
- Meatworks' waste disposal,
- Legacy issues such as the proximity of old landfill sites to rivers and aging infrastructure,
- Plastic waste getting into waterways,
- Vehicle pollution and smog.


The disproportionate levels of blame were attributed to:


1. The disconnect with responsibility for water quality amongst urban residents; it is too easy to put the Council in between and create distance from being part of the problems and being responsible for the solution:


 *“If you're in the city, people don't really care what they tip down the stormwater drain...they think ah, no they'll deal with it”*

2. Levels of media coverage in relation to urban issues are low compared with farming.

There is a perceived lack of visible fairness in compliance and regulation across urban and rural activities, and a perceived lack of visible action from the territorial authorities:

 *‘The duplicity is frustrating...irrigation and effluence leading to ponding – compliance officers will prosecute despite there being no run off into rivers. This always means a conviction and fine, plus lawyers' fees. However, raw sewage run off into the water body by ICC – the Council can do that with impunity... It may be expensive for a TA to fix problems, and may be unpopular with ratepayers but it's difficult to reconcile with farmers getting the book thrown at them.*

 *“The sewage plant isn’t going so well, why haven’t they fixed it? You wouldn’t swim there, you wouldn’t eat fish from there”.*

 *“Dairy Hub is trialling new systems for roll out across the region. Are the towns doing this? If farms and dairy are doing it why aren’t the towns and cities doing it too? What are ICC doing to solve their problems? Dairy farms have been red stickered so they’re doing something about it but cities will still be blaming the dairy farmer in 15 years”*



# 5

## The need for behaviour change


Change will come through integrating on-ground action with the regulation to back it up.

Achieving change is accepted to be everyone's responsibility but there are barriers that need to be addressed to be able to support people to make a change. The main barriers identified were:


- Apathy
- Knowledge levels
- Media influence
- The 'blame game'
- Perceptions of the ability of Environment Southland to drive change


### 5.1 Apathy


Apathy is a significant barrier to engagement and action. For change to happen, residents need to re-evaluate their thinking around fresh water and attach value to it:


 *"It's an abundance... It's here, we take it for granted, we don't appreciate the value in it"*

Participants felt that there was currently an irresponsible approach to water in the region:


 *"We've got so much we don't have to worry about it"*


 *"People just rely on others to look after their interests, they assume government is doing a good job but are they?"*


 *"Apathy, greed, stupidity... the dumb \*\*\*\* I see going on still is laughable"*

 *"There is an awakening but no inherent problem with putting the sprinkler on or pouring something down the sink... 'she'll be right' – we are not realising the long-term implications our behaviours might have... It can carry on as it is but it shouldn't. If we're disrespecting water, we are disrespecting ourselves. We don't smoke in environments we care about. Water – we don't care. We have it in spades... we've got heaps more out the back, it'll rain in a couple of days, she'll be right"*

Special interest groups will champion vested interests, but the average citizen will need to see the value to them in order to be motivated to get involved or change what they are doing.

 *"You can't expect the average kiwi, someone who likes fishing every now and then to be as motivated to speak up against landowners wanting to develop and intensify...but these voices need to be heard"*

 *"People only notice the impacts when they directly affect them. People will only get engaged when they are personally impacted... they have faith that the powers that be will do it.. until it personally impacts they won't do anything. It's not until the tap stops that people jump up and down."*

 *"Not having water would certainly do it but then that's crisis and then it's too late."*

To get around the barrier of apathy, water needs to become a point of value rather than being taken for granted. It needs to be recognised as a limited resource.

Guardianship for future generations was a strong concept across the groups. This suggests that change may be achievable through establishing legacy values; focusing on the establishing pride and guardianship for the future as encouragement.


Identifying outcomes that are simple, accessible, have value and have come up from the community e.g. 1-minute showers, greywater collection for gardens, a community commitment to make a swimming hole swimmable 95% of the time and a regional council commitment to protect it up and downstream.


An outcome that is accessible and valued, an asset that people can have pride in: doing something, not just talking about something.

## 5.2 Knowledge levels and monitoring


Whilst it is generally accepted that water quality in Southland is declining, people think they do not really know what is going on and do not have the information to be able to make decisions.

There is a degree of knowledge and education and an awareness of Environment Southland's monitoring, but public opinions are still heavily based on perceptions and rhetoric.


 *"We happily swam in the creek when we were kids, the water wasn't tested then either...has it really changed"*

 *"You only go on what you read and what you are told – if you're given misinformation, how do you know? You don't"*

There was a lack of clarity, both on which groups are involved in the conversation and action but also what quality is, how it is measured, how it is monitored and what the targets are:

 *"How is it measured? We are holding a line but we don't know where it is".*

Participants did not know how to measure their own impact on water quality, when or how to report water quality issues, who was responsible for reporting and how to initiate action so were less likely to take any. Education is therefore important before behaviour change can be achieved.


 *"It's got to come from knowing what the issue is, qualified data, and then the plan to mitigate it... some it comes through education...it's got to come from kindergarten kids, that's how it will feed through to the parents"*

## 5.3 Unbalanced media coverage

Knowledge and perceptions are strongly influenced by media coverage that was perceived by some groups to be unbalanced, focusing on poor farming practices and 'scare mongering'. However, other groups felt that this portrayal was deserved.


There is a lack of transparency and visibility between the rural and urban sectors. There are few communications around the positive work that farmers are doing. Changes in farming practices will be having a positive impact but these are not identified. However, if there is a decline then farmers will get the blame in the press.

 *"Good news stories do not sell papers"*

 *"The media says cows are a big nasty monster and yet everyone is prepared to take the dollars from it"*


A more balanced media approach would support those that are trying to initiate change in their sector and could encourage the less progressive farmers to change.

## 5.4 Stop the 'blame game'

 *"Stop the blame game – get together and solve the problems"*

Participants in this stage of the project were positive about involving the community in water management. They recognised that there was a need for people to be listened to, but also a need to get them to talk.

Moving forward the engagement approach needs to focus on working together and joint messages. Move conversation away from 'who's having a go at us now' and focus on community values and achieving things together. Celebrate the people and organisations that are proud of what they are doing and use open and transparent messages:


 *'This is what we're doing, we're not all here, but we can be'*


## 5.5 Perceptions of Environment Southland

Perceptions of Environment Southland also need to be addressed. The power and ability of Environment Southland to drive change was questioned due to:


### 1. A PERCEIVED LACK OF FAIRNESS BETWEEN THE TREATMENT OF DIFFERENT SECTORS


Different groups perceived Environment Southland to be too lenient, or too tough on farmers and the territorial authorities:

 *“Compliance measures need to be fair across urban and rural activities; the duplicity is frustrating. Regional Council powers to prosecute the TA are limited as if changes are needed this will come back to the ratepayers to fund. It may be expensive for a TA to fix problems and may be unpopular with ratepayers but that’s difficult to reconcile with farmers getting the book thrown at them.”*

 *“Environment Southland are good at finger poking but not good at information. They have pet agendas – we’re going to play with the red block for two years – that’s farming, let district councils alone but catch the private businesses for doing wrong”*

### 2. EMPHASIS ON REGULATION AND FINING RATHER THAN EDUCATION AND HELPING TO CHANGE PRACTICES.

 *“90% believe they’re just there for compliance and enforcement... they’re not proactively helpful”*

 *“From a regional approach management is based on stick not carrot... we could gain a lot more by saying water makes Southland”*

Participants reflected a need for Environment Southland to showcase practical, hands on skills, to show an understanding of the industries that they are working with and be clear about their role and the aims are:

- ES need to be staunch rather than hand holding; enable people to move and change
- Integrate on ground action with the regulation to back it up
- Setting limits is not an answer on its own but where it is used then make the parameters clear and set the baselines within FMUs. Create specific targets, controls and ground rules about how to reach them.
- Continue the conversation about how to balance economic development and water quality
- Focus on things where everyone is winning e.g. swimmability

# 6

## Continuing the conversation

It should be acknowledged that this approach is not complete and did not engage with all the different interest groups. It is just the starting point of the conversation around values and objectives.

The engagement approach that follows this part of the project will be multi-faceted to ensure that it is inclusive and aims to engage with those that do not normally engage. Some points to note here include:

- Younger people are hugely influential in behaviour change amongst adults. Children push their parents on issues so working with schools will be important
- A face to face approach was welcomed by those that engaged at this stage. Smaller groups were preferred; public meetings were perceived to 'just turn into slanging matches' rather than facilitating conversation.
- Varied communication modes need to be used to identify values: interactive electronic tools, local media, word of mouth, direct engagement. Pockets of communities with high awareness and engagement can be used to start talking, to lead conversations and engage others.
- Engagement with community research may be lower amongst lower socio-economic groups that need to prioritise 'getting by', busy urban and rural residents and youth. Targeted approaches to include these groups should be designed.



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