

Taranaki Regional Council's Riparian Management Programme is transforming the landscape on a scale not seen elsewhere in New Zealand; and improving freshwater health and native habitat.

National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) scientists confirm the voluntary restorative programme is likely one of the biggest and longest-running restorative freshwater projects in the world. Covering over 15,400 kilometres of streambanks, the \$100 million programme been built on hard work and investment, largely funded by landowners, with 10 percent public funding.



Fresh water is valued culturally, socially and is a driver of Taranaki's economy. More than 300 rivers and streams flow from Mount Taranaki to the sea, across the Taranaki ring plain which is covered by intensive dairy farming. Stream health in the region was deteriorating due to pressures from diffuse pollution from pasture run-off, along with industrial and municipal wastewater discharges.

In the early 1990s, the Council identified the need to protect and enhance the region's many waterways in a comprehensive and integrated way, and developed the riparian programme. The Council has worked with landowners on the ring plain and coastal terraces to develop free riparian management plans, recommending fencing and planting streambanks, and supplying suitable native plants to plan holders at-cost (around 500,000 plants per year in recent years). There are no subsidies.

Fencing riparian margins prevents stock access, and planting traps and filters silt and nutrients from pasture run-off, provides shading, reducing water temperature and improving instream and streambank habitat.

At June 2018 99.9 percent of Taranaki dairy farms have riparian plans. More than 5.1 million plants have been planted along streambanks, with this number set to reach 6 million by completion of programme. 13,207 km (86 percent) of streambank on the ring plain is now protected by fencing, with an additional 8,399 km (72 percent) of streambank requiring vegetation protected by riparian vegetation.

The programme is driving improvement in stream ecological health, the primary measure of freshwater health, at a regional level, contributing to the future wellbeing of the region.

An independent NIWA study (March 2018) found the programme has improved ecological health and reduced bacterial levels in Taranaki streams and rivers. In 2018 the Council recorded the best ever ecological health in rivers since monitoring began in 1995; with 98 percent of rivers and streams improving or not changing significantly compared to 24 years ago.

The riparian programme has created 3,000 hectares of new habitat, and underpins Taranaki's position as a leader in freshwater health and addressing New Zealand's declining biodiversity.

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