

Identifying Outstanding Waterbodies in Northland

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Purpose of this document

This document provides a brief overview of how the council identified outstanding freshwater bodies in Northland that warrant protection in accordance with the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2014 (NPS-FM).

The NPS-FM requires regional councils to protect the significant values of outstanding freshwater bodies.¹ An outstanding freshwater body is broadly defined in the NPS-FM as a water body that has outstanding values, including ecological, landscape, recreational and spiritual values. The NPS-FM also directs councils to protect the significant values of wetlands.

Outstanding lakes

Northland has some of the most outstanding examples of coastal dune lakes in New Zealand, and which are some of the few remaining lowland lakes in the North Island with high water quality. These lakes and their surrounding wetland margins support a range of endemic endangered species.

In 2012 the council commissioned NIWA to, among other things, classify and rank Northland's lakes.² The focus was on 76 of the major lakes, with all but seven being dune lakes. NIWA ranked the lakes as having outstanding, high, high-moderate, moderate, moderate-low, or low ecological value using the following criteria:

- Habitat size,
- Buffering,
- Water quality,
- Aquatic vegetation diversity,
- Aquatic vegetation integrity,
- Endangered species,
- Presence of key species, and
- Connectivity.

The 20 highest ranked lakes are listed in Table 1 below. The council resolved to identify and provide for the protection of the 12 outstanding lakes through provisions in the draft new regional plan. The key driver for the identification of these lakes as outstanding freshwater bodies is their ecological value, however a number are also highly valued for recreation and cultural values (e.g. Kai Iwi Lakes).

¹ See Objectives A2 and B4.

² Champion, P., de Winton, M. (2012) Northland Lakes Strategy. Prepared for Northland Regional Council. NIWA Client Report No: HAM2012-121.

Many are also identified as being within outstanding landscapes or natural features (E.g. Humuhumu, Kanono, Mokeno and Morehurehu).

Table 1 Highest ranked lakes for ecological values

Ranking	
Outstanding	High
Taharoa	Kahuparere
Humuhumu	Te Kahika
Waikere	Te Werahi Lagoon
Rotokawau (Pouto)	Karaka
Mokeno	Ngakapua
Kai-Iwi	Te Paki
Ngatu	Waiparepra
Wahakari	Rotoroa
Kanono	
Waiporohita	
Waihopo	
Morehurehu	

Outstanding rivers

The Regional Water and Soil Plan for Northland identifies and provides for the protection of seven rivers and reaches of rivers and one lake (Lake Ora) that have outstanding values.³ Maps of the rivers are shown in the Regional Water and Soil Plan. The plan also contains a policy that provides for the inclusion of additional outstanding value freshwater bodies in the plan (by way of a plan change) if they are deemed to meet the following criteria:⁴

- (a) *Have catchments which are dominated by indigenous vegetation and which are largely unmodified natural ecosystems or ecological sequences from headwaters to lowlands; or*
- (b) *Are recognised by any judicial authority or which subject to the agreement by the Council in consultation with an iwi authority are recognised to be a taonga requiring flow preservation in a natural or near natural state; or*
- (c) *Are an essential part or an outstanding natural feature or landscape and where changing the water level or flows would adversely affect those values.*

The council considers that the existing outstanding freshwater bodies (except Lake Ora) should continue to be protected under the new regional plan, and the scope of protection includes water quantity and quality. Lake Ora is a small (2.19 ha) lake in a volcanic crater. It is highly enriched and very low water clarity prevents submerged vegetation establishing.

All seven river catchments have also been identified as having outstanding landscape values (or fall within an outstanding landscape unit) and many are also highly valued for their recreational or cultural associations.

³ Policy 9.5.1, Regional Water and Soil Plan.

⁴ Policy 9.5.2, Regional Water and Soil Plan.

As part of the consultation on the new regional plan, the council will consider nominations for additional waterbodies to be identified and protected as outstanding freshwater bodies. The requirement is for the waterbody to have outstanding values, including outstanding ecological, landscape, recreational and spiritual values. Generally speaking, to be successful the water body should be located in a catchment where there is currently little or no development and would have a combination of values (rather than being deemed outstanding on the basis of a single value such as landscape). Waterbodies located in areas that have been developed or are downstream of developed areas may still be nominated for an outstanding freshwater body status, but it may be more appropriate to protect their quality and quantity under other provisions of the new regional plan.