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HEALTHY WATER HEALTHY FUTURE

The following is a joint statement about the Government's proposed freshwater reform issued by nine different public health, recreation, water infrastructure, and environmental organisations.

Healthy waterways and protected fresh water are essential to a healthy future for all of our communities.

The Public Health Association, Forest & Bird, Fish & Game New Zealand, Environmental Defence Society, Recreation Aotearoa, Greenpeace, Water New Zealand, Whitewater NZ, and Choose Clean Water agree the Government can deliver on its promise to protect our streams, rivers, wetlands, and lakes and start cleaning up fresh water if they implement the following four fundamental policies:

1. Adopt all science-led bottom lines on water pollution.
2. Do not protect high-polluting operations.
3. Prioritise effective rules over farm plans.
4. Ensure everyone plays their part in restoring the health of our fresh water.

Irresponsible leadership has allowed serious and ongoing pollution of Aotearoa New Zealand's fresh water. Water pollution increases risks to people's drinking water, profoundly impacts cultural wellbeing, limits recreational opportunities, damages the health of our plants and wildlife, and undermines the sustainability of our industries.

Weak freshwater policy would exempt some sectors from responsibility, lock in high polluting operations, and make it harder to protect and restore the health of the country's fresh water.

Responsible leadership and effective freshwater policy, with Te Mana o Te Wai as its framework, will put Aotearoa New Zealand on the right path to healthy water, healthy land use and infrastructure, and healthy communities. In particular:

1. Adopt all science-led bottom lines on water pollution.

We support the recommendations from the Science and Technical Advisory Group on all pollution standards and bottom lines for ecosystem health.

We especially support the addition of the following new measures for the health of our waterways: dissolved inorganic nitrogen (DIN) with a bottom line of 1mg/L, sediment, and a wetland extent and wetland condition index.

We also support improving standards for swimming and including bottom lines for swimming standards.

2. Do not protect high polluting operations.

We do not support basing rules for future activities on current levels of pollution as this would lock in current destructive practices and reward the highest polluters.

We support a prohibition on conversions to highly polluting land uses, like dairy, and restricting high-polluting activities such as intensive winter grazing, until councils have a plan on how to fairly manage pollution within environmental limits.

We support bringing the highest polluters down to reasonable levels immediately through rules that target high-polluting activities.

3. Prioritise effective rules over farm plans.

We support a clear and explicit rules-based system for managing high-polluting activities.

We do not support replacing effective rules with farm plans. This will lead to farm plans becoming a “tick box” exercise for compliance. They would fail to be used to their greatest potential to drive real environmental change.

Farm plans are a useful tool to support decision-making for farmers and land managers. However, clear and effective rules must be prioritised as the best way to achieve the Government’s stated goal of measurable improvements within five years.

4. Ensure everyone plays their part in restoring the health of our fresh water.

We agree all sectors, regions, and communities must play their part in protecting and restoring the health of our waterways.

We do not support an exemption for the six largest hydro-schemes and maintain that these schemes can responsibly contribute to meeting the goals of the freshwater policy.

We assert that future policies on forestry, drinking water, wastewater, and storm water activities must be consistent with the proposed new freshwater reforms.

