



Summary of Regional Forum recommendations

July 2022

Murihiku Southland's land use, both urban and rural, has changed significantly during the past 150 years. Across much of Southland, drainage channels have been dug, wetlands have been drained and forests removed, with many rivers straightened or confined within stop-banks to protect growing townships and developed land.

More recently, land use has intensified with increasing demand for irrigation and other water supplies. An increase in population and a rich agricultural landscape continues to underpin Southland's economic prosperity. However, this has resulted in significant degradation to our freshwater.

The gap between the state of our freshwaters now, and where they need to be to sustain ecosystem health and resilience is large. Current and emerging good management practices will not be enough.

The forum's purpose

The Southland Regional Forum was set up to consider specific policies as well as on-ground initiatives required to make change and improve Southland's water and land for generations to come.

The forum participated in 22 workshops across Murihiku Southland over three years, delivering their report to Environment Southland and Te Ao Mārama Inc in July 2022.

Forum members are: Sean Bragg, David Diprose, Cain Duncan, Kelsi Hayes, Bernadette Hunt, Paul Marshall, Phil Morrison (Deputy Chair), Fiona Smith (Chair), Lisa Pearson, Estelle Pera-Leask, Ewen Pirie, Darren Rewi, Michelle Roberts, Hayden Slee, and Vaughan Templeton.

Summary of key recommendations

The forum has detailed an integrated suite of measures to create a "system reset" – a very different way of managing Southland's freshwater resources in the future. Collaborative effort does not demand equal input from every user. Those responsible for activities with a greater environmental impact on freshwater can expect to make a greater contribution towards restoration.

Partnership

- The ongoing development and the embracing of co-governance as a reflection of Treaty Partnership is fundamental to these recommendations.
- A collaborative, "Southland-Inc" (multi-entity) response is recommended to leverage available knowledge, resources, and energy to deliver on the freshwater objectives identified within a generation.

Hauora catchment management/Climate Change

- Integrated catchment management guided by hauora (healthy resilience) principles (focusing on the resilience of the waterbody) and co-governance, and through the introduction of hauora management practices at a regional, freshwater management unit (FMU), catchment, and landowner level.
- All Southland land-users and businesses (not only farmers) with the potential to influence freshwater hauora outcomes to prepare an appropriate Environmental Management Plan (EMP), identifying risks to freshwater hauora, along with appropriate risk treatment and mitigation actions.
- Within the FMU Hauora Planning framework, anticipated regional climate change effects, risks, and opportunities are accounted for in planning and implementing freshwater management initiatives and projects, in order to align hauora outcomes with climate change resilience outcomes, including protection of food production systems.

Repurposing land

- Where appropriate, Environment Southland repurpose its own public land for increased ecosystem services that align with FMU Hauora objectives; and along with Te Ao Marama Inc, encourage other regional managers of public land to do the same.

Wetlands protection, restoration and development

- Environment Southland lead the formation of a regional wetlands task force, encouraging a multi-agency approach, to plan and manage a regional programme of wetland development.

Focus on Waiau River issues

- Mandatory flushing flows on the Waiau River must be instituted as soon as possible and remain in place while a more comprehensive assessment of the lower Waiau flow regime is developed.

Urban and industrial management of water

- Environment Southland and Te Ao Marama are to work with the Territorial Authorities to:
 - investigate alternative treatment and disposal options for the region's wastewater and stormwater;
 - implement a programme to register and certify septic tank and other alternative non-networked toilet systems.

Outreach and Education

- Outreach and education programmes developed around Environmental Management Plans, hauora management practices, cultural monitoring and land use decision making tools.

Technology

- Invest in a technology monitoring programme to leverage emerging technology.