Water management issues in the Ruamāhanga whaitua

General

The natural state of rivers, lakes and wetlands is modified, in some cases significantly, and there has already been loss of natural character and habitat. River, lake, flood and land drainage management have contributed to this, as well as the taking of water and discharge of contaminants.

The management of land and water by regulatory agencies could be better co-ordinated and integrated.

Climate change needs to be reflected in future resource management decisions.

Iwi values and interests are not well recognised in the current water management system.

Water quality

Many rivers do not meet the National Objectives Framework standard for primary contact recreation (swimming) but the secondary contact level (wading) is met everywhere.

Periphyton (algae) growth in rivers and streams in the Eastern Hills and the Parkvale Stream can be excessive (below national bottom lines).

Nitrate toxicity in the Parkvale Stream exceeds the national bottom line.

Sediment generation from soil and streambank erosion is affecting water bodies.

Phosphorus levels in Lake Wairarapa exceed the national bottom line.

Lake Wairarapa and Lake Onoke are seriously degraded. Lake Wairarapa is at the worst level of quality (super-eutrophic) and Lake Onoke is slightly better (eutrophic).

Water quantity

Current allocation, based on a 'first in first served' approach, is not always the most efficient system for allocating water, particularly in fully allocated catchments.

The efficiency of water use is variable between users and there is room to improve. This includes efficient use by individual taking water and the use of water taken in a community water supply.

Reliability of supply differs across the Ruamahanga catchment, leading to inequities between users.

Groundwater takes directly affecting surface water bodies are able to continue when rivers reach minimum flows.

River low flows are getting lower over time and there are questions on whether current minimum flows and allocation are supporting ecosystem health. This includes the methods used for developing minimum flows and allocation limits, and the way water takes are managed as they approach minimum flows.

Permitted activity water takes are not currently accounted for as part of limits on the amount of water taken in a catchment, and there is currently poor information on the amount of water taken.