**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Revised Freshwater Policy Will Help Improve New Zealand’s Freshwater Management**

The government has taken an important step in improving New Zealand’s freshwater management in the revised National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management (NPS-FM).

The Chair of the Land and Water Forum, Dr. Hugh Logan, is pleased that recommendations the Forum made last year have now been incorporated in the latest NPS-FM – particularly action on river ecosystem health using two key water quality measures – nutrients, and the macro-invertebrate community index (MCI), which measures the different varieties of small aquatic animals that exist in the river ecosystem.

“We are very pleased that regional councils will now be required by law to not only monitor MCI, but also to act where it is declining,” says Dr. Logan.

“This is a significant step forward, giving councils a mandatory trigger to develop action plans to remedy any issues and to report on their monitoring and progress to the public.”

Management of nitrogen and phosphorous levels in waterways – key nutrients which cause algal growth and slime - has also been strengthened based on the Forum’s advice.

Councils will now be required to use a mandatory technical process to set maximum in-stream nutrient concentrations for rivers in their plans to improve ecosystem health.

“It is now very clear that action must be taken to reduce nutrient enrichment of rivers and streams, not just for toxicity, but also for ecosystem health. The policy will help ensure there is a consistent approach nationwide to addressing nutrients.”

Dr. Logan says the Forum supports changes to determining swimmability of waterways with the adoption of a mandatory time-based measurement of E. coli – an indicator of pathogens in water.

“Using a time-based approach is a more practical way to measure and manage swimmability than the previous system. Whilst many rivers are usually safe for swimming, that can change – for instance in high flows or in winter months.”

Dr. Logan says there will be debate about whether the new policy is explicit enough about requiring improvement to smaller rivers and lakes and about timeframes.

“But the intent of the policy seems pretty clear that authorities are going to have to improve the quality of all waterways except those in pristine condition. The Forum has advised the Government that in implementing these new policies there must be a more active government role.

“In our view, the Ministry for the Environment will need to work very closely with councils and sector groups on what is a complex issue. It is not good enough to hand this over without any on-the-ground support.”

**NOTES TO EDITOR**

The Land and Water Forum brings together over 50 stakeholders consisting of industry groups, electricity generators, environmental and recreational NGOs, iwi, scientists, and other organisations with a stake in freshwater and land management. They are joined by central and local government participants in developing a common direction through collaboration for freshwater management in New Zealand and provide advice to the Government.  The Forum operates under a mandate from the Minister for the Environment and Minister for Primary Industries.

The Land and Water Forum is the trading name for the Land and Water Trust.

A Small Group, with around 30 participants, meets on a monthly basis and reports to the Plenary, which has a membership of nearly 70 organisations. More information can be found at: www.landandwater.org.nz.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Dr. Hugh Logan, Chair of the Land and Water Forum – 027 505 1226