



Media Release
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NEW CROWDFUNDING WEBSITE ENABLES ALL KIWIS TO HELP CLEAN UP POLLUTED WATERWAYS

New Zealand's first environmental crowdfunding website, launched at the start of Conservation Week, makes it easy for all New Zealanders to help clean up polluted waterways.

The Million Metres Streams (MMS) Project, which aims to help restore one million metres of New Zealand waterways, funds riparian (stream bank) planting.

Created by the Sustainable Business Network in collaboration with Enspiral, and led by Rebecca Keen, the MMS website (millionmetres.org.nz) will list stream projects the length of New Zealand, in urban and rural areas and on public and private land. All New Zealanders – individuals and businesses alike – can fund trees for these projects, by purchasing a metre or more of riparian planting.

"The project is a radically inclusive way of scaling up and speeding up stream restoration projects in New Zealand," says Rachel Brown, CEO of Sustainable Business Network.

"It's a native tree restoration platform that anyone can get involved with," she says.

The MMS initiative was prompted by the shocking statistics about the state of our waterways. 62% of our rivers are unswimmable due to pathogens¹; 44% of our lowland lakes are eutrophic or worse²; and 74% of our freshwater fish are classified as threatened³.

Freshwater scientists agree that riparian planting is key to the health of our waterways, as vegetation prevents sediment, faecal pathogens and phosphates from entering waterways. It also provides aquatic fish and invertebrates with shade and habitat so they can more easily survive. With water quality predicted to get worse over the coming decades, something needs to be done quickly to slow down the decline.

"While riparian planting is an important part of the solution for water quality in New Zealand, it's not the whole solution. We as a nation also need to address the whole water system, including nitrate leaching and urban runoff, to account for the many factors that are contributing to the decline in water quality," says Rachel.

"The Million Metres Streams Project is an important step towards improving water quality."

Claire Warren, communications manager for MMS, says that the Million Metres Streams website is intended to build on the considerable restoration work already being done by conservation groups, landowners and councils throughout the country.

“MMS provides funds for native plants suitable for riparian planting, such as sedges, flaxes, and pioneer forest species like cabbage tree, mahoe and coprosmas,” she says.

A counter on the MMS website tracks progress towards the project’s target of a million metres of riparian planting.

“Although a million metres is a very small percentage of the 208,250 km of lowland waterways in New Zealand, the intention is to exceed the goal,” says Claire.

With entire catchments showing interest in being listed on the website, and the first project on its way to full funding, MMS is off to a good start. All it needs now is plenty of website visitors donating a metre or more of riparian planting.

“We all need to step up and take responsibility for the decline in our water quality. The environment – our climate, soils and water – provides everything we use, so the cost to keep it healthy is a cost we should all be prepared to pay.

“This website makes it easy for all New Zealanders to contribute.”

millionmetres.org.nz

Q & A

What is eutrophication?

Eutrophication is the process whereby excess nutrients in water spur the growth of algae, which in turn depletes the oxygen in the water, killing both the algae and any aquatic organisms in the waterway. This leads to stinky, slimy waterways, especially in summer.

What are faecal pathogens?

These are the bacteria and viruses associated with human and animal excrement.

How does vegetation prevent sediment, phosphates and faecal pathogens entering streams?

Vegetation stops soil, and the phosphates that come attached to soils, washing into streams. The plant roots not only hold river banks in place, they also provide habitat for our native fish and invertebrates. Additionally, with farm animals excluded from streams, faecal pathogens are prevented from entering water. Once vegetation reaches a reasonable height, it provides shade to keep streams cool – important as cooler water holds more oxygen.

What do nitrates do?

Nitrates are an additional nutrient that causes algal blooms (and eutrophication) in our lowland lakes. According to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, the major source of nitrates entering our waterways is cow urine, whereby urine patches bypass the grass root zone and enter the ground water and subsequently our streams and rivers.

The main causes of excess nitrates are not only dairy intensification (excessive stocking rates), but also the extra 40,000 hectares of land that is being converted to dairy farms each year⁴.

1. Draft Regulatory Impact Statement: Proposed amendments to the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2011.
2. Lake water quality in New Zealand 2010: Status and trends. Verburg et al. (2010), NIWA, Hamilton.
3. Goodman et al. (2014), Conservation Status of NZ Freshwater Fish, 2013. New Zealand Threat Classification Series 7. Department of Conservation, Wellington.
4. Water quality in New Zealand: Land use and nutrient pollution. November 2013. Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment. Data for 2008-20011.

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Images available on request.

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