

Summary of results from survey (Upper Waikato region waterways)

Prepared: 2026-02-25 • Total responses observed: 91

Key findings;

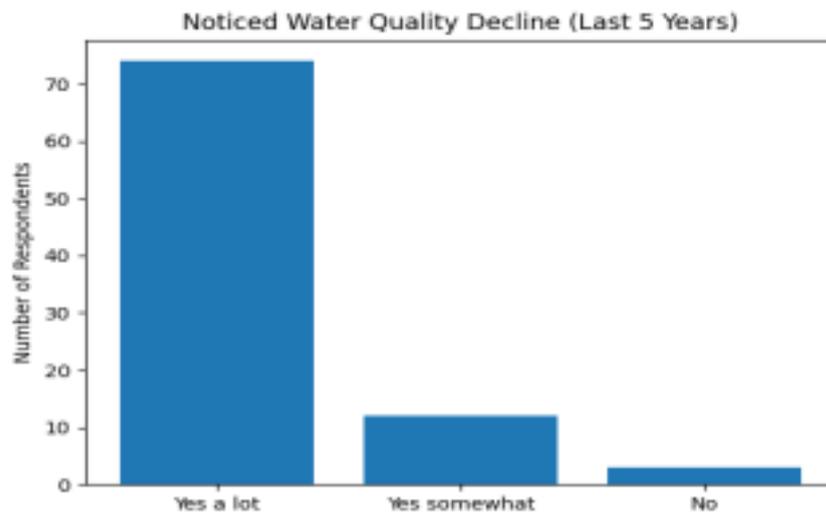
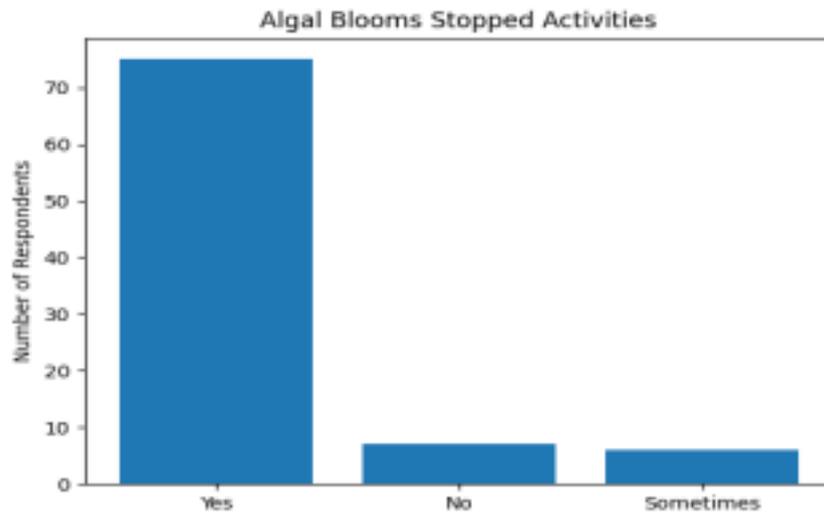
- Most respondents were local residents (66%, 60 of 91).
- Waterway use is frequent: 66% visit weekly or daily (60 of 91).
- Recreation is being curtailed: 89% say blooms/poor water quality have stopped activities (yes or sometimes) (81 of 91).
- Perceived decline is widespread: 97% have noticed blooms or other signs of declining water quality
in the last 5 years (86 of 89).
- Impact is high: 87% rated the impact as 4 or 5 out of 5 (79 of 91). Average rating: 4.42/5.
- Health concerns: at least 41% reported sickness in humans and/or pets after contact (37 of 90).
- Business impacts (subset): among 27 who answered the business question, 63% reported reduced customers/revenue (a lot or somewhat) (17 of 27).

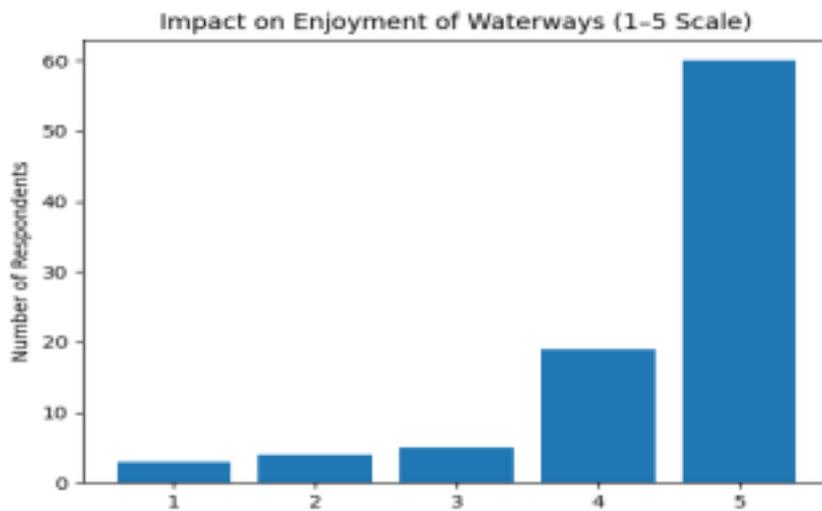
NOTES- Some questions have fewer responses due to skips. The survey was collected mid-February 2026. Results reflect respondent sentiment and experience, and are not a random-sample estimate.

Community Water Quality Survey | Summary Report

This survey gathered 91 responses from community members regarding the state of local waterways. The findings indicate strong and consistent concern about declining water quality, increasing algal blooms, and the resulting impacts on recreation, wellbeing, and local economic activity. While the survey did not directly ask about trust in specific agencies, a recurring theme in open-ended responses was frustration regarding perceived lack of coordination, transparency, and accountability among responsible entities, including local and regional authorities and hydro operators.

Survey Data Visualisations





Thematic Analysis of Open Responses

Common themes across 90+ open responses include:

- Concerns about weed spraying (particularly diquat) and its potential ecological effects.
- Requests for improved dam flow management to reduce stagnation and bloom development.
- Calls for better monitoring, transparent reporting, and regular testing.
- Concerns about farm runoff, nutrient loading, and nitrogen inputs.
- Reports of reduced tourism, cancelled bookings, and declining property values.
- Expressions of frustration that complaints have not led to visible action.
- Strong desire for collaborative leadership between councils, regional authorities, iwi, and hydro operators.

Quantified Themes from Open Responses

- ~46% referenced perceived inaction, delays, or lack of visible progress.
- ~39% referenced concerns about dam flow management or hydro operations.
- ~34% raised concerns about weed spraying (particularly diquat).
- ~31% referenced farm runoff, nutrient loading, or nitrogen inputs.
- ~28% explicitly called for clearer accountability between agencies.
- ~22% referenced economic harm (tourism decline, cancelled bookings, property impacts).
- ~18% questioned adequacy of monitoring or transparency of data.
- ~15% compared water quality unfavourably with Taupō.

These themes frequently referenced the roles of the Waikato Regional Council, Taupō District Council, and hydro operators, with respondents expressing concern about fragmented responsibility.

Community Voices (Anonymised)

Selected excerpts illustrate the tone and substance of concern:

“There seem to be nothing happening.”

“We complained two years ago and nothing changed.”

“Someone needs to take accountability and fix it.”

“Holiday people who usually stay weeks left after a week.”

“The lake has been off limits three years in a row.”

“It feels like agencies don’t want to engage with the community.”

“We sold our lake boat .. no point owning it if you can’t use it.”

“This is affecting local businesses and property sales.”

“The water is sick and it pains my heart.”

“Taupo council give our lake the care it deserves”

“WRC are missing in this conversation”

“The state of the lake is putting off potential homebuyers”

“The water quality has been steadily declining due to Mercury and all the new dairy farms”

“Councils take responsibility”

Themes from open-text responses (illustrative)

- Stop or restrict chemical weed-spraying (frequent mentions of ‘diquat’).
 - More monitoring/testing and clearer public communication, including notifications when treatments occur.
 - Water-flow and dam management: more flushing/flow releases to reduce stagnation and blooms.
 - Reduce nutrient inflows and runoff; expand riparian planting/native buffers.
 - Accountability, coordination, and transparent investigation into causes and solutions.
- Selected anonymised quotes (verbatim excerpts)
- “Used to be regular, but since the water quality has been so bad these past few years we hardly bother now.”
 - “The rivers/lakes should NOT be turning green, ever... run off needs better control with intensive waterline planting...”
 - “Regular testing of the water... find the issue, then sort it please.”
 - “Stop spraying diquat in the river/lakes.”
 - “We have stayed out of the water, and kept our dogs out, since the health warning...”

Community Confidence

A consistent pattern across responses suggests erosion of confidence in institutional coordination.

Respondents frequently described:

- Being redirected between agencies.
- Lack of timely response.
- Insufficient public communication around spraying or flow management.
- Perception that central Taupō receives stronger protection or priority.

The community is not merely asking for improvement in water quality, it is asking for clear leadership, transparent monitoring, and meaningful collaboration across responsible entities.

Local Councillor Statement

Hope Woodward | Mangakino–Pouakani Ward Councillor | Taupo District Council

I initiated this survey after suggesting the idea to the Upper Waikato Algal Bloom group (involving all major entities) to gain better insight into how the water quality was affecting my communities. WRC agreed but when I queried timeline for the idea I was advised by the Waikato Regional Council that community engagement on this issue could only be undertaken “in the next fiscal year, funding dependent.”

Using a simple online survey platform, this consultation took me 20 minutes to set up and cost me \$50.

For an issue that is clearly affecting public health, local livelihoods, tourism, property values, and community wellbeing, waiting another financial cycle was not acceptable. I am disappointed by what appears to be ongoing fragmentation between responsible entities and a lack of coordinated urgency. Our communities of Mangakino and Whakamaru are taking a serious hit. When residents consistently report that water quality is deteriorating while other parts of the district appear prioritised, it undermines trust -which is not something many people have these days.

This survey makes one thing clear: there is a serious and worsening problem, and it is affecting both wellbeing and livelihoods. The comments reflect frustration, but also a consistent desire for collaboration, transparency, and practical solutions.

Our lakes are not optional amenities, they are the lifeblood of our villages. Without healthy waterways, our communities will all but cease to exist. The results of this survey reflect not only environmental concern but also economic, social, and cultural impact. Residents and business owners are seeking transparent, science-led solutions and coordinated leadership. The strength of response indicates this issue is deeply felt across the community and warrants serious consideration

-Councillor Hope Woodward | Mangakino-Pouakani ward | Taupo District Council