



Picture: Vanessa Henry

The Matter with Water

There is displacement of peoples, cattle and crops through drought and heavy pollution in many countries around the world.

This can be linked to:

- **Degradation** of the land through stripping out of forests leading to changed weather patterns; loss of top soils, barrenness, erosion, land-slides, loss of biodiversity, damaged crops.
- **Ignorance/Greed/Power/Dominance over**, resulting in disenfranchisement of peoples, loss of land, family, possessions, conditions for livelihood and sense of belonging.
- **Mechanisation and Industrialisation** which disregards both people and the environment leading to:
 - Pollution – of air, soils and water
 - Build-up of environmental greenhouse gasses through excessive and uncontrolled levels of emissions
 - Rising sea levels.

When any of these events occur – peoples and all life become displaced.

Water and New Zealand

Thankfully, in New Zealand we do not have displacement of peoples because of water issues – yet. However, we are seeing displacement and death of flora and fauna in our land due to many of the above mentioned realities that have overtaken other lands and there is plenty of evidence that this could become the situation here. What is more, these signs are not being taken seriously by significant authorities or, in many situations, by the general population.

Every week in the newspapers and on the air there are reports from concerned individuals and groups covering the whole range of unchecked use and abuse of water and waterways throughout the country and all with the potential of long-term degradation of land and life.

Examples of water related issues are as follows:

- Of growing concern is the issue of individuals/companies extracting - freely and seemingly unchecked, millions of litres of water from aquifers around the country, selling off-shore for personal gain.
- The sale of the Ashburton District Council's Lot 9, which comes with resource consent to bottle 1.4 billion litres of artesian water each year, caused outrage - but the global beverage giants have been quietly bottling New Zealand's water for years CHARLIE MITCHELL reports.
 - Along a quiet, dusty road near rural Tai Tapu lies a nondescript water bottling-plant once backed by billionaires. It's a corrugated iron structure, indistinguishable from the hay sheds scattered across the Canterbury Plains. There is nothing to suggest it is connected to Lynda and Stewart Resnick, Americans with a fortune of about \$6 billion. The town, which has a population of about 700, was chosen as the site for a plant used by SpringFresh, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Resnick-owned company Fiji Water.
 - It is one of the world's largest bottled water brands, said to be the drinking water of choice for many celebrities, including United States President Barack Obama.....

- The sale of the Ashburton District Council's Lot 9, which comes with resource consent to bottle 1.4 billion litres of artesian water each year, caused outrage - but the global beverage giants have been quietly bottling New Zealand's water for years.
 - A subsidiary of Fiji Water is behind the SpringFresh bottling plant in Tai Tapu.
 - At the blue spring near Putaruru in Waikato, a town with a population of about 4000, Coca-Cola (annual revenue over \$60b) extracts water for its Pump brand.
 - In Kaiapoi, Japanese company Suntory Holdings (annual revenue over \$30b), which owns Frucor, bottles its South Island sourced water for its H2Go and Mizone products.
 - Oravida bottles water in the Bay of Plenty; a Latvian company sells water under the Tongariro Springs brand.
 - Kiwii water, sold in 40 US states, is American-owned, and Chinese-backed companies who sell water across Asia bottle their water in Hawke's Bay. Billions of litres of water leave the country every year for sale overseas, driven by some of the world's largest companies, who do not pay a fee to use the resource. *Business News 28 April, 2016*
- 'In 2015, NASA's satellite data revealed that 21 of the world's 37 large aquifers are severely water-stressed. With growing populations, and increased demands from agriculture and industry, researchers indicated that this crisis is only likely to worsen.' ***The Third World War Will be About Water*** by [AMRITA GUPTA](#) | APRIL 28, 2016

Three new hydro stations are planned in the Matakītaki River, West Coast, a river well-known for its pristine conditions and diverse native species of all kinds, some particular to this region only. The whole eco-system is now in danger of disappearing completely.

Reported in the NZ Herald 26 Jan and again on 29 May, land owners on the shores of Lake Taylor grazing stock unchecked along the shore and polluting the lake edge and the lake itself. This is a scene occurring along many of our waterways and resulting in the polluting of rivers and lakes, killing off aquatic life and endangering human health and enjoyment.

- Run-off from dairy farms has severely impacted our rivers and lakes. In the past 20 years fertiliser use has increased 800%. This has raised the chemical load on our rivers so much it is threatening our fish life. NZ maintains a top ten position for nitrate levels amongst OECD countries. Half of our native fish species are listed as threatened. Nearly half of monitored lakes in New Zealand are so polluted by nutrients they are now classed as 'eutrophic' which means that they contain more nutrients than they can cope with. Eutrophic lakes are typically green and murky, with higher amounts of nutrients and algae. Most of our lowland rivers don't meet standards for bathing. More than 90% of New Zealand's wetlands have been drained to make way for farming and development, destroying precious habitat for native species.

Demand is rising for irrigation, particularly from our rapidly-expanding dairy industry. This can reduce river flows to a trickle – making most life in these rivers unsustainable. The 2006 OECD average for total weekly allocation of water used for irrigation is 43%. In contrast NZ's allocation is 77%. (Report by Forest and Bird)

More than half of our lowland lakes and rivers are polluted – unsafe for people and the species they support. The government is now proposing "**wadeable**" and "**boatable**" as water quality bottom-lines. From a response by Minister of the Environment Nick Smith, reported under *Freshwater Management—Water Quality of Rivers and Lakes*, NZ Parliament, Sitting date: 29 March 2016, Vol: 712, pg 9925.

In this year of Mercy, what is the place of water in our prayer, our relationships, our being-in-the-world? Most literally, along with air, water is a co-equally critical requirement of sustaining life...a fundamental physiological need. The simple act of giving water to the thirsty is hence a basic of mercy. When the availability and purity of water is under threat, we are surely called to be merciful to others as well as to the planet that provides. (*Robins Kearns in Tui Motu May 2016*)

The issue of Water is one of concern in New Zealand and now is the time to actively address the concerns being raised – before it does lead to displacement of peoples.

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