

# 11 CONCLUSIONS

The 2013 EAAA and NEP survey results show some interesting results, patterns and changes over time (when compared to previous surveys) with regards to how respondents perceive and interact with their surrounding environment. Respondents in the Waikato region appear to be continually satisfied with their local environment and this is illustrated by the limited changes in the Environmental Satisfaction Index overall (currently at 6.47). In saying this, the results show a continuing decrease in respondents' positive perceptions of their local environment. Specifically, 17 per cent of respondents feel that the overall quality of their local environment has decreased in recent years (up five percentage points from 12% in 1998).

Part of this decreasing satisfaction appears to be the issues relating to water quality in the region. When compared to previous surveys, the results illustrate that water quality is still the most important issue for the Waikato region. Although the emphasis placed on the region's water quality is potentially heightened by the effects of the 2012/2013 summer drought conditions, this issue has consistently been the primary environmental concern for respondents since monitoring began. Results indicate that respondents make a clear link between farming and water quality.

Interestingly, when the verbatim comments relating to water pollution/quality are reviewed, the majority of respondents speak of water quality rather than water pollution per se. This change in language appears to be a modification from the responses in the 2006 survey in which respondents spoke more specifically about pollution. It is hypothesised that the public definition of what constitutes pollution (within the context of water) has changed in recent years, and that respondents now use 'low water quality' to describe water that would have previously been referred to as 'polluted'.

This change is potentially a reflection of the language used in the media, via government, dairying, and environmental organisations to convey work that has been undertaken to improve waterways across the region and New Zealand generally. The language utilised in communication from these organisations often focusses on improving water quality rather than reducing water pollution. As such, it is speculated that respondents use the term pollution for more extreme cases of water contamination, with quality now being the more common reference.

The focus on water appears to overshadow many other environmental issues. In particular, rubbish and air pollution have seen decreasing mentions over time (in favour of increasing water mentions), while issues such as urban sprawl and coastal erosion have remained at consistent levels of concern (not gaining any greater emphasis).

With regards to how respondents engage with their environment, there appears to be a shift from undertaking public actions to an increase in undertaking private actions. From the current results, 11 per cent of all respondents do not undertake any kind of private action that benefits the environment; a decrease of four percentage points from 15 per cent in 2006. While recycling continues to be the primary private action respondents undertake, there has been an increase in the 'green lifestyle' actions, over the last seven years, specifically mentions of growing vegetables, walking, saving water, composting, gardening, etc. have all increased.

However, despite private actions increasing, respondents' involvement in public actions has decreased considerably with only 11 per cent stating that they are involved in a public action of some kind (down 15 percentage points from 26% in 1998). The primary way in which respondents are publically involved appears to be joining a group, or undertaking private actions that have a public benefit, e.g., planting trees. In comparison, public actions of a formal nature appear to be decreasing with involvement in formal submissions, calling Council, attending hearings or writing to Council all displaying lower uptake than in previous years. Despite the shift away from these more formal actions, respondents appear to feel that their actions are gaining in effectiveness, with this measure trending upwards in recent years.

Respondents' attitudes towards environmental regulation remain consistent and there are limited changes in the measures related to this knowledge theme. Specifically attitudes towards urban sprawl, government restrictions, Council's enforcement and land owners' actions have all seen limited movement when compared to previous years' results. However, respondents do show some concern with the level of protection given to significant natural sites. Disagreement with this issue has been trending downwards since 2003 suggesting that this could be a greater focus for Council in the coming years or, communication to the public regarding any work undertaken on such sites could be more strongly promoted.

When looking at the balance between the environment and the economy, respondents' answers are still strongly in favour of balancing the health of the environment with a prosperous economy. In particular there is consistent strong support for a healthy environment creating a healthy economy, not sacrificing the environment for the economy and that the economy and the environment go hand in hand. However, on the back of the recent global recession there are some indications that allowances for businesses are gaining favour.

Specifically, this year's results show decreases in the disagreement that it is too expensive for businesses to behave in an environmentally friendly way and decreases in agreement that businesses should have to bear the brunt of expenses for river and water pollution. Furthermore, the index that reflects attitudes to balancing the environment and the economy is starting to decline, albeit slowly.

Additionally, when looking at the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) segmentation, the majority of respondents sit in the mid-ecological grouping (57% for 6-Item NEP Scale and 64% using the Expanded Ecological Values Scale). Profiling of this group shows that they are in favour of environmental protection but have some empathy for businesses and prefer a balanced approach to this relationship. While this by no means suggests that respondents favour the economy at the expense of the environment, the 2013 results indicate some underlying sympathy for business, and the resulting economic impact, which may need to be considered in future communications or policy development.