

Government Commits to Lakes Restoration

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The Labour-led Government is committing \$72.1 million over ten years to a programme to clean up the most seriously degraded Rotorua lakes, Prime Minister Helen Clark, Environment Minister Trevor Mallard and Conservation Minister and local MP Steve Chadwick announced in Rotorua today.

"This investment recognises both the importance of this restoration programme and the significance of the Rotorua lakes for the people of Te Arawa, for the Rotorua district, and for New Zealand as a whole," Helen Clark said.

The government funding announced today represents half of the \$144.2 million cost of the restoration programme. The other fifty per cent will be contributed by Rotorua District Council and Environment Bay of Plenty.

Helen Clark said that New Zealanders are becoming acutely aware of the need to act on the state of our country's freshwater resource. Most recently the report on the state of the New Zealand Environment earlier this year, warned that many of our water resources are in decline.

"The Rotorua Lakes are a dramatic example of the problem we face - all are either degraded or at risk environmentally. Already several of the lakes suffer from algal blooms which restrict their recreational use.

"Rotorua is acknowledged as one of the richest jewels in New Zealand's tourism crown. Its lakes have iconic status and have long been a draw card for visitors to the region. It is vitally important that they are cleaned up to secure their future health and their ability to contribute to sustainable tourism.

"The restoration plan for the lakes is ambitious – and it needs to be. The Government's commitment of fifty per cent of the restoration cost ensures that the job can be done properly and that these lakes are rescued for future generations to enjoy. Four lakes have been prioritised under the programme: Rotorua, Rotoiti, Okareka, and Rotoehu," Helen Clark said.

Environment Minister Trevor Mallard said the government's support reflects the priority the government is putting on water quality and water management.

"Looking after New Zealand's water bodies, lakes and rivers is a top priority for the Labour-led Government. That is what the Sustainable Water Programme of Action is all about. This latest government support for Rotorua follows previous government help since 2003, including evaluation work on the scope of the Rotorua lakes' problem, short term remedial work, community waste water upgrades, land user initiatives, and science and research."

Rotorua MP and Conservation Minister Steve Chadwick welcomed the announcement as a huge boost for the region.

"I know how important and precious the lakes are to everyone in this region, and I'm very pleased our Labour-led Government has recognised this by working in partnership with the local communities and sharing the burden of the clean-up. Thanks must also go to all the groups and individuals who are part of the Rotorua Lakes Protection and Restoration Action Programme," Steve Chadwick said.

Questions and Answers

What does the clean-up entail?

The clean-up programme entails individual action plans for each of the lakes.

The key components are:

- Construction or extension of sewerage works to pick up waste from un-sewered lakeside communities around lakes Rotorua, Rotoiti and Okareka.
- Treatment or diversion of nutrient-rich streams flowing into Lakes Rotorua and Rotoehu.
- Capping lake sediments to lock up nutrients coming up from the beds of Lakes Rotorua and Rotoiti.
- Construction of wetlands, and land management changes to reduce the nutrients coming in from surrounding land.
- Harvesting and disposal of weeds from Lake Rotoehu.

A large portion of the Government contribution will go towards extending sewerage reticulation around the lakes. The government already contributes to community sewerage schemes through the Sanitary Works Subsidy Scheme administered through the Ministry of Health.

What has caused the lakes to be so polluted and how badly polluted are they?

The lakes suffer from degraded water quality (ie high nutrient status) and algal blooms mainly due to land use and farming practices, discharges of human sewage (septic tanks and municipal sewage).

The four priority lakes have excessive nutrient load known as, four other lakes risk turning to this state if nutrient inputs are not reduced, and the remaining four will degrade over time if nutrient inputs are not managed.

How will the funding work?

The government funding will get progressively paid out as the clean-up meets certain trigger points (to ensure public money is well spent. These trigger points will enable research and testing to be undertaken to make sure the proposed interventions will be successful.

For example, the capping of the sediments of large lakes like Rotorua and Rotoiti is a technically complex undertaking which will need further research and testing before proceeding to the implementation phase.

Who will undertake the cleanup?

The clean up and restoration programme for the 12 lakes is being undertaken by the Rotorua Lakes Strategy Group (mandated by the Te Arawa Lakes Settlement, this group comprises representatives from Te Arawa Lakes Trust, Rotorua District Council and Environment Bay of Plenty).