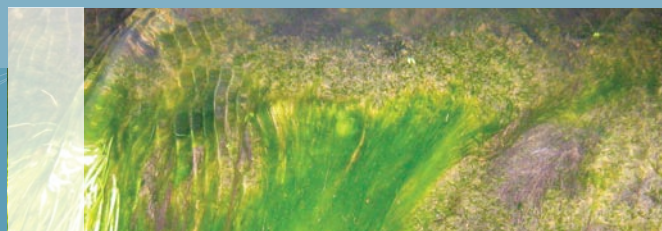




OUR RIVERS

Trends in algal cover



As part of its National Environmental Reporting Programme, the Ministry for the Environment reports on periphyton (algae) in rivers.

Data collected from 73 of the National River Water Quality Network sites between 1990 and 2006 was analysed to identify national trends. This is the first time this data has been analysed and reported on at a national level.

Algal growth can be a nuisance for swimming, fishing and kayaking and it affects fish and insect life in rivers. Some algae can also produce toxins that can be harmful to humans, stock and dogs.

Key findings

Occurrence of periphyton

- Periphyton cover was typically higher at sites with a greater proportion of pasture in their catchment.
- Around 30 per cent of rivers had algal cover that exceeded the New Zealand periphyton guideline.

Long-term trends

- Between 1990 and 2006, a higher percentage of rivers had decreasing (improving) algal cover.
- Some of these decreasing trends could be associated with improvements in point source discharges. However, algal cover is influenced by a number of factors – such as water temperature, shading and high flow events – in addition to nutrients levels.

TRENDS IN PERIPHYTON COVER, 1990 – 2006

- ↑ Increase
- + No significant change
- ↓ Decrease

