



OIAD-930

22 February 2024

9(2)a

Dear 9(2)a

I refer to your request of 20 December 2023 to Taumata Arowai requesting the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

“what chemicals can be found in New Zealand water -- in reservoirs, lakes, streams, rivers, the sea, drinking and washing water. Please detail the chemicals and metals, and their levels, found in New Zealand water over the last five years.

Are there metals in the water of any type or location, such as copper, mercury, lead, cadmium, aluminium, barium, iron, strontium, graphene? What are the levels of these or other metals in the water? Are they all removed from drinking water?

Are there any micro-plastics or nanoparticles found in the water of any type, and if so, what are they, and what are they levels of them? If so, where do these items come from?”

On 24 January 2024, Taumata Arowai transferred the following part of your request to the Ministry for the Environment (the Ministry) under section 14(b) of the Act, as the information is believed to be held by the Ministry:

Are there any micro-plastics or nanoparticles found in the water of any type, and if so, what are they, and what are they levels of them? If so, where do these items come from?

The Ministry was not able to find any information relating specifically to “nanoparticles” after a thorough search of our environmental indicators and reports. Therefore, I am refusing this part of your request under section 18(g) of the Act as no information requested is held by the Ministry and we have no grounds to believe it is held by any other agency.

The Ministry has identified several reports and environmental indicators produced by the Ministry and Stats NZ under the Environmental Reporting Act 2015, which are publicly available and address the part of your request relating to “micro-plastics”. Therefore, I am partially refusing your request under section 18(d) of the Act, as the information requested is publicly available.

Comprehensive reports on the state of the environment, including dedicated environmental indicators, are available here:

- The Ministry’s Environmental Reporting: <https://environment.govt.nz/facts-and-science/environmental-reporting/>

- Stats NZ Environmental Indicators: <https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/environmental-indicators>

As noted above, the Ministry and Stats NZ collaborate on environmental indicators, including one covering "River water quality: heavy metals." This indicator specifically measures dissolved copper and zinc concentrations in urban rivers and streams across Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch for the period 2015-2017. Key findings highlight that 24% of monitored sites exceeded zinc guidelines, while 7% exceeded copper guidelines, potentially posing harm to aquatic life. More information is available here: <https://www.stats.govt.nz/indicators/river-water-quality-heavy-metals>.

While a dedicated environmental indicator for microplastics doesn't exist, relevant information can be found within published reports such as "Our freshwater 2023." You may be interested to note that microplastics were detected in all urban streams surveyed, suggesting potential transport via smaller streams. Additionally, plastic constituted the majority (68%) of litter collected in freshwater bodies through the Litter Intelligence programme (2021-2022). More information is available here: <https://environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/our-freshwater-2023.pdf>

You may also be interested to note the report produced by the Ministry and Stats NZ, titled "Our marine environment 2022", which reports growing evidence of widespread microplastics in marine ecosystems. You can access the full report here: <https://environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/Our-marine-environment-2022.pdf>

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Office of the Ombudsman of my decision to withhold information relating to this request, in accordance with section 28(3) of the Act. The relevant details can be found on their website at: www.ombudsman.parliament.nz.

Please note that due to the public interest in our work the Ministry for the Environment publishes responses to requests for official information on our [OIA responses page](#) shortly after the response has been sent. If you have any queries about this, please feel free to contact our Ministerial Services team: ministerials@mfe.govt.nz.

Thank you once again for writing.

Yours sincerely

Electronically approved

Aaron Napier

Manager – Intelligence and Reporting

Ministry for the Environment | Manatū Mō Te Taiao