

Key points

- 31 popular swimming sites are regularly monitored every summer
- Wet weather often leads to exceedances of MfE's guidelines for swimming beaches and rivers
- Swimming should be avoided during and after wet weather, particularly in urban and intensively farmed areas
- 80% of coastal swimming sites were deemed safe for more than 95% of the time during the 2008-09 summer
- Only 30% of river swimming sites were deemed safe for more than 90% of the time during the 2008-09 summer
- Approximately 50% of coastal beach sites have a Grade (SFRG) 'Very Good' or 'Good'
- River sites are graded at best as Fair. Nearly 70% of river sites are graded 'Poor' or 'Very Poor'.
- Diffuse pollution remains the biggest threat to recreational water quality in Marlborough

Why we monitor

Every summer 13 river swimming spots and 18 coastal beaches are sampled for the presence of bacteria (*E. coli* in freshwaters and Enterococci in coastal waters). The number of bacteria present in the sample gives an indication of the risk of contracting illness or infection from being in contact with the water. The numbers are based on the Ministry for the Environment (MfE's) bathing water guidelines. Sampling takes place once a week from November to March. Results are published once a week on the Councils website. The purpose of the monitoring is to inform the public of the relative safety of our popular swimming sites.

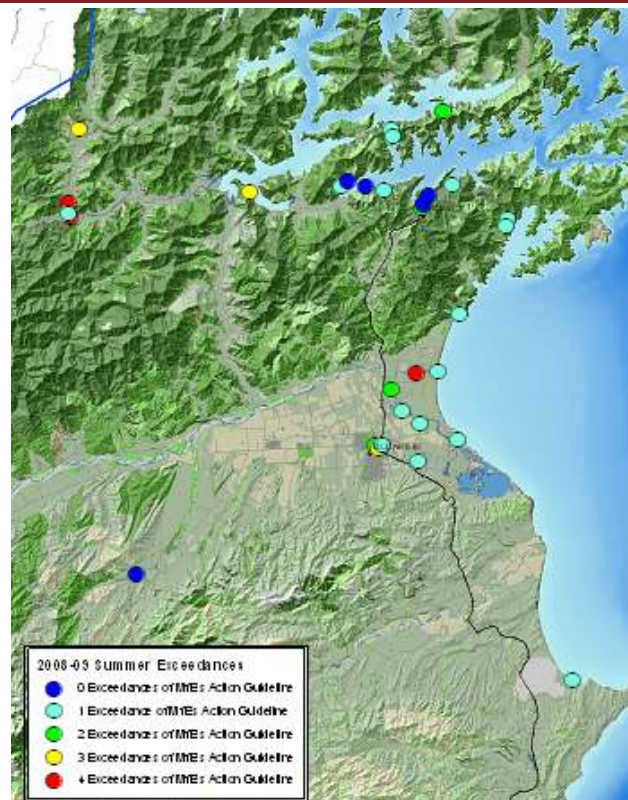
Coastal water results 2008-09

Our coastal water quality is generally very good in terms of compliance with the recreational water quality standards. In 2008-09 80% of monitored beaches were safe to swim at for over 95% of the summer time.

This year Marfells Beach exceeded the MfE action guideline for the first time since sampling began at this beach in 1996. It is not known what may have caused this exceedance but it is likely that seagulls and other birds may have had a very localised impact.

The best water quality was at Shelly Beach in Picton, Bobs Bay in Picton and Anakiwa. There were no exceedances at any of these sites in 2008-09.

Moenui and Portage had the poorest water quality. Over the last 2 years rainfall events have led to a number of exceedances at Moenui. Investigations are ongoing as to the source of this contamination.



Freshwater results 2008-09

Our rivers are highly prized for recreational activities, from swimming to kayaking, rowing and fishing. A wet spring in 2008 led to numerous exceedances of MfE's guidelines, the worst were recorded for the Rai Valley catchment. Health warning signs were put up in December due to the unacceptable bacteria levels at the Brown River Reserve, the Rai Falls and at the Pelorus at Totara Flat. Once the floods abated the water quality remained good for the rest of the summer. This is an improvement over previous summers where frequent dry weather exceedances have been recorded for these sites.

The Taylor River had the poorest water quality. Swimming at the Taylor River was only considered safe for approximately 70% of the time. The best water quality was recorded at the Waihopai at Craiglochart where it was safe to swim for 100% of the time and at the Pelorus Bridge, which only had one exceedance of the guidelines during the heavy spring rainfall.

Beach Grades:

Our swimming sites are graded each year to reflect the general water quality that can be expected from them. Beaches and rivers are graded using the Ministry for the Environment methodology. The Grade incorporates data from 5 years of sampling in addition to incorporating a risk assessment for the site.

The quality of our river sites are typical of that seen throughout New Zealand. Although there is a perception that our rivers are generally safe for swimming they often suffer from high bacteria loads during wet weather. This has resulted in many of our rivers sites being graded 'Fair' at best, in addition most popular swimming sites are located in lowland and urban areas, areas which are particularly susceptible to bacterial contamination, especially after rainfall.



The Rai River in flood November 2008. (Maike van der Heide, The Marlborough Express).



The Outward Bound school with students at the Rai Falls.

What do MfE's guidelines mean?

Each week water samples are assessed against MfE's guidelines for recreational waters. The results are posted on the council website each week. The guidelines denote the *level of risk* of contracting illness/infection from being in contact with the waters. This level of risk is described below:

Coastal sites (Enterococci)

Acceptable 'Green Mode'
<140 /100mL

Highly likely to be uncontaminated

Safe 😊

Alert 'Amber Mode'
>140 /100mL <280 / 100mL

Potentially contaminated

OK 😐

Action 'Red Mode'
>280 / 100mL

Highly likely to be contaminated

Unsafe 😞

River sites (*E. coli*)

Acceptable 'Green Mode'
<260 /100mL

Highly likely to be uncontaminated

Safe 😊

Alert 'Amber Mode'
>260 /100mL <550 / 100mL

Potentially contaminated

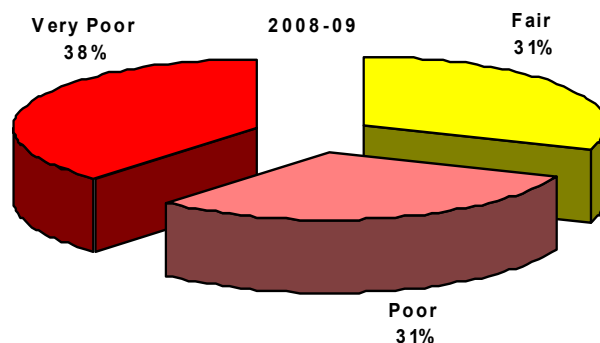
OK 😐

Action 'Red Mode'
>550 / 100mL

Highly likely to be contaminated

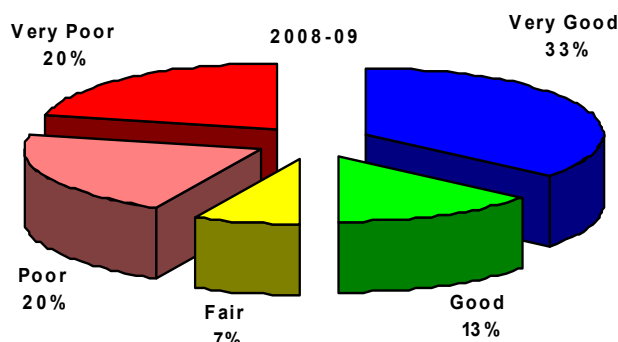
Unsafe 😞

Suitability for Recreation Grades (SFRG's)



2008-09 River Grades

Suitability for Recreation Grades (SFRG's)



2008-09 Coastal Water Grades

What can you do to help protect our waterways?

- Keep stock out of waterways to prevent faecal contamination
- Ensure sewage from boats and campervans is correctly disposed of
- Ensure septic tanks are properly maintained and can cope with increased volumes, particularly important during the summer months.

What is the Council doing to protect our waterways?

- Regular monitoring helps to identify problem areas, it also shows if an area is experiencing an improvement or a decline in water quality
- The Council has a 'Stormwater Strategy' in place to help minimize pollution from urban runoff.
- The Council with the help of the farming community are working towards minimising the effects of stock, particularly dairy herds, on water quality through eliminating stock crossings and fencing and planting riparian margins to prevent stock access to waterways, thereby reducing the faecal load to waterways.
- It is illegal to dump sewage from boats within 500m of the shoreline.

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For more information on recreational water quality go to

www.marlborough.govt.nz

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