



**New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations
Te Aka Aorere**

United Nations Water Conference: National Statement

**New Zealand Statement delivered by
Permanent Representative, H.E. Ms. Carolyn Schwalger**

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Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Thank you to the governments of the Netherlands and Tajikistan for convening this Conference.

In the indigenous language of Aotearoa New Zealand, we say “*Ko te wai te ora o ngā mea katoa*”. Water is “the life-giver of all things”. We have heard a similar message repeatedly over the last few days, demonstrating the centrality of water to prosperity and security the world over.

Water is intrinsically connected to the three pillars of sustainable development, and is integral to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including eliminating global poverty and hunger. We welcome this Conference bringing the global community together to recognise the importance of water action, and to commit to accelerating and scaling up partnerships for solutions.

New Zealand works closely with our partners in the Pacific to improve water resilience and sanitation systems. Our region faces some of the lowest levels of access to safe and reliable water and sanitation in the world. There is an urgent need for action to reach the Pacific’s most vulnerable communities, especially those living in rural, remote, and informal communities. Addressing pivotal water issues, such as saltwater intrusion, must be a priority.

A string of tropical cyclones through the Blue Pacific, the eruption of the Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha’apai volcano and the associated tsunami, and serious drought affecting the atoll nations of Kiribati and Tuvalu, have all placed increasing pressure on water security in the region.

At home, the destructive power of water is top of mind for New Zealanders. Severe weather events have recently caused devastating flooding in the North and East of our country, displacing communities and destroying livelihoods.

While global demands for water are increasing, climate change is degrading ecosystems' ability to conserve water. Failing to respond effectively to these challenges will have devastating global effects, for the planet, for people, and for peace.

Given what is at stake, we must strive for greater action. Now, more than ever, concerted international cooperation is needed to ensure we better understand, value, manage, and integrate our approaches to water.

As part of this, Aotearoa New Zealand supports the proposal for the appointment of a UN Special Envoy on Water.

In striving for ambitious global action on water, we must listen to, and learn from, all voices with a stake in the issue, including councils, mayors, local representatives, and Indigenous Peoples.

Traditional knowledge embodies a wealth of wisdom and experience of nature gained over generations, and offers valuable insights into access to, and protection of, water resources. We have heard this week how traditional knowledge and scientific research can work hand in hand to deliver powerful outcomes.

In New Zealand, the Māori worldview informs our approach to environmental and water management. Kaitiakitanga, or guardianship and protection, is especially central to our attitude and policies.

In 2017, New Zealand passed a historic act to recognise the special relationship between the Whanganui River and local indigenous Māori. The Act provides for the river's long-term protection and restoration by making it a legal person in the eyes of the law. This idea, and ideas like it from around the world may provide valuable opportunities to address the water challenges we collectively face.

As part of broader resource management reforms, we have proposed new legislation to enable a more strategic and deliberate approach to allocating water resources to competing uses.

As we work to support the health of the world's water, we should leverage off each other. We hope this Conference serves as a much overdue catalyst to accelerate water action for all.

Kia ora, thank you.