

# Sustain-ability



BY SHARON MCIVER

## Water's Way

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The sound of Aotearoa is the sound of water. Listen to Douglas Lilburn's electronic work, or Bluey's "Ocean Unknown" and you'll hear the drips, washes and backwashes of our soundscape.

Recently, I registered a new strain in the aural backdrop to 'sitting on the porch.' A watery undertone to the hollow gurgle of drains, and the steady splats of rain on the tin roof.

If I was slow to recognise the sound of the creek, it is because it has never been full enough to 'run' before – at least, not in the year that I've lived here.

The timing amused me. I was about to write a sustainability profile on fresh water ecologist Jon Harding; during our talk I had told him about the state of the waterway near my house.

Deciding that a stagnant strip of water between the hedge and the front lawn was bad feng shui, I had cleared it of debris shortly after I moved in. The satisfaction of watching the stream move sluggishly along its ascribed path was worth the amount of non-biodegradable crap I was left with.

Last month I shared the job with a four year old – who, with each exotic item extracted, asked how it had got there.

Which is a good question. It's one thing to whinge about the state of our rivers and blame dairying, coal-mining and local industries, but how often do we think about what we're putting into our local streams? All the litter and pollution from our roofs, driveways and roads. All the cigarette butts, plastic bags, and cans. All the detergents from people washing their cars. Even without scientific analysis, anyone can see the damage.

Who put it there?

We did. Because we have less maturity than a child who instinctively knows it's wrong to mess with something as cool as a creek.

Litter always ends up somewhere. If the City Council stages an intervention it'll end up as landfill. Otherwise, it may well settle in our waterways. Rain washes the smaller items down the storm-water drains, including cigarette butts tossed onto the road. Meant only for rainwater, these drains are disgorged into rivers and the sea.

And that's just the manmade stuff. Aside from all the invisible pollutants, introduced deciduous trees are also a menace in autumn, and when I check the stream in flood, there are several leaf build-ups.

I imagine what this waterway would have been like before.

Before concrete town-housing projects diverted rain into the drains. Before, when it was stabilised by harakeke and toetoe. Before, when it was alive with fish, eels, and insects.

For now, I am happy with the sound of the stream doing what it should. It is a sound I could grow to love.