

## Conclusion

We will never know as much as we would like to about the state of our environment. The complexity of natural systems means that we are only just beginning to understand the relationships between species, populations and ecosystems, and interactions with people, both immediate and cumulative over time. However, as this report shows, we do know a great deal about many aspects of our environment based on over 20 years of monitoring and research.

Although the big picture is variable, overall results suggest that the pressures of consumption and production continue to increase. With a growing population forecast, much depends on our future success in decoupling population and economic growth from production and consumption and the negative impacts of that production and consumption on the environment. In short, we need to become more resource efficient. That will require both technical advances and behavioral change.

While we tend to focus on the challenges we face, it is important also to recognise the environmental gains we have made. There have been many and some are very significant. It is also important to recall that, while some of these gains are likely to be permanent because we have achieved a technological shift (such as improved vehicle emissions, or stormwater treatment), others, like pest control, remain vulnerable and can be easily lost.

It is also important to note that even after we have intervened it will take time, often decades, for results to be apparent in monitoring data.

Notwithstanding these gains, many of the negative trends highlighted in this report occur despite the work of the ARC and other agencies. Our environmental efforts have stopped the decline of some natural resources, but our resources are limited.

In many ways the information in this report confirms that we have exhausted the easy opportunities for environmental improvement, just as we should have. The relatively easy-to-deal-with point sources of pollution have been regulated and cleaned up, like the relocation of wastewater treatment to Mangere in the 1960s, and the subsequent upgrade of many smaller treatment facilities and dairy shed discharges during the 1990s and 2000s.

