

# Rugby Legend Fronts River Protection Campaign

Published on Thursday, Aug 9, 2012

Former All Blacks captain Anton Oliver is throwing his weight behind a new environmental cause – protection of the country's outstanding wild and scenic rivers.

Although now based in London, Oliver says on recent visits back to New Zealand he's been staggered by the rate of decline of many of our country's rivers and waterways.



*"I'm like many Kiwis who love and have a great affinity for our rivers – I grew up swimming, playing, and fishing in crystal clear water that you'd drink without any fear of sickness or pollution.*

*"Living in the UK I see the promotions aimed at luring tourists to New Zealand – the land of crystal-clear waterways. In my opinion there is a large and growing discrepancy between the marketing 'clean green' rhetoric and the reality of what's actually happening on the ground.*

*"My concern is that we are fooling ourselves if we think New Zealand's natural world is pristine and untouched – it's a concept that is difficult for us to accept because it challenges a part of our national identity.*

*"We're not doing enough to protect these special natural features, and consequently the highly lucrative '100% Pure' brand that relies so heavily on wild, scenic rivers and clean water."*

Hence, why Oliver is fronting efforts to preserve and even strengthen the use of Water Conservation Orders (WCOs), which confer status akin to National Park-protection over some of the country's most iconic and pristine wild rivers.

*"WCOs are the highest level of protection that can be afforded to any freshwater body in New Zealand, yet lots of people have never heard of them.*

*"We've only got a finite number of wild, free-flowing rivers left in this country and many are protected by WCO. It's time to get WCOs to the fore and ensure the average Kiwi understands how precious they are."*

A WCO recognises a river or lakes' outstanding natural, recreational, cultural or heritage values – presently there are 15 WCO-protected waterways throughout New Zealand.

*"When a WCO is granted it provides National Park-type status, protecting its outstanding natural values for all freshwater fish, wildlife, outdoor recreation and present and future generations," Oliver says.*

So, when a WCO is put in place it protects a river from damming, altering its course, or other environmentally damaging in-stream impacts, he adds.

Fish & Game NZ, through their efforts to preserve and enhance habitat for species like trout, salmon and a variety of waterfowl, have led the majority of applications for WCOs. But because a WCO also protects a host of other recreational and indigenous wildlife values, many other parties have assisted their efforts – including Whitewater NZ, Forest & Bird and the Environmental Defence Society.

Oliver says he is happy to front the campaign on behalf of these organisations.

*"We need to get behind Fish & Game and the NGOs who've gone into bat on behalf of the public so often on this issue. All Kiwis – including our kids and future generations – benefit from having these special places protected in perpetuity.*

*"Some sectors might make short-term, private profit by damming or irrigating from rivers, but we all benefit in the long run by having clean rivers and lakes which belong to the New Zealand public and are so vital to our '100% Pure' brand."*

Present and future governments should explicitly recognise the value of preserving wild and scenic rivers, Oliver says, and should support calls for legislation to be strengthened so the protection mechanisms can't be watered down.

Oliver has been outspoken on environmental issues – including the mismanagement of New Zealand's freshwater resource – and his credentials include the completion of a Master's degree in Environmental Policy from Oxford University, UK.