

Australasia Environmental Excellence Award: Sustained Contributor Winner – Graeme Ridley

Driving Success through Innovation

Through his seminal role in developing New Zealand's first robust erosion and sediment control guideline for earthworks on large civil construction sites in the Auckland Region (the then TP90, now evolved into GD05), Graeme's work involved education, government involvement, research, establishment of standards and policies. Graeme set up the then ARC erosion and sediment control programme which focused on policy, education, regulation and investigation research.

While working for the then Auckland Regional Council, Graeme:



- conducted local and international research into best practice erosion and sediment control on large sites
- adapted the most relevant practices to meet Auckland's tricky soil and climatic conditions and the region's highly sensitive and valued freshwater and coastal receiving environments. Many of these practices involved introducing and locally developing technologies that were new to New Zealand, both initially and over time – including for example the later use of flocculants to settle out fine clay particles and the development of a guideline for this;
- set up a training programme for both the consultants designing erosion and sediment controls and for the contractors installing, operating maintaining, and eventually decommissioning them;
- took part in developing a regional plan (a document with the force of law), which set up a regulatory and compliance framework to ensure that these practices were appropriately designed and deployed;
- supported industry research (including in the form of an Investigation Strategy) to assess the effectiveness of the practices and to assess the nature of Auckland's freshwater and coastal receiving environments and their sensitivity to sediment discharges; and
- taking a leaf out of the Council's Industrial Pollution Abatement Team's playbook, Graeme also oversaw an inspection compliance and enforcement framework that eventually led to the development of a robust body of industry-specific environmental protection case law; and
- all this while steadily working in partnership with and forging strongly constructive relationships with the industry itself and also developing community partnerships in all of these areas.



Since leaving the Council 18 years ago and forming his own company, Graeme has continued to play a major leadership role in the erosion and sediment control industry, by:

- adapting Auckland’s guideline to meet the needs of other regions in New Zealand;
- delivering training all around the country;
- becoming an expert witness in legal proceedings relating to erosion and sediment runoff;
- supporting the development of related industry training initiatives, including:
 - lifting the standard of the assessments of environmental effects which are required in support of every consent application for erosion and sediment control works;
 - identifying the need to adapt bulk earthworks controls for appropriate use on individual vertical construction lots for residential houses and other small buildings;
 - supporting the development of stream ecological valuation methods and training;
 - investigating how blended delivery (a mix of onsite, online and classroom-based training methods) could enhance the outcomes of the Council Stormwater Unit’s industry training courses; and
 - investigating certification and accreditation opportunities for stormwater industry training.

Graeme's strategic overview of the erosion and sediment control sector in New Zealand took him to the next level when he became an early adopter and enthusiastic promoter of IECA in New Zealand. Companies took it in turn to host what were quite vibrant gatherings of industry professionals willing to share and learn from each other’s good practice.