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**Use of Zinc in Agriculture: an Assessment of Data for
Evidence of Accumulation in Waikato Soils, Surface Water
and Sediments.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

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in
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Abstract

Pastoral soils in the Waikato region of New Zealand have received high mass loads of Zn since the advent of facial eczema remedies. This activity could potentially cause widespread Zn accumulation in receiving soils, and mobilisation and contamination of nearby receiving environments, presenting risk to ecological health. Currently, no studies have examined the environmental fate of significant sources of anthropogenic Zn used in farming. This study assessed the extent and nature of any evidence that facial eczema Zn is causing significant contamination of agricultural soils and associated ecosystems in the Waikato region of New Zealand by examining extensive soil, surface water, and sediment datasets. Farmed surface soils contained two times more AR Zn on average (60.6 mg/kg, $p < 0.0001$) than natural soils and significant relative enrichment of SSP fertiliser elements Cd, P, Ca, U, F and Ni. Including Zn, these elements decreased down the soil profile, indicating anthropogenic sources. Zn accumulation occurred more readily in inorganic, granular, and allophanic soils. Laboratory experiments showed rapid Zn adsorption in granular soil at the natural soil pH level of 5.70 (>90% of the total concentration within 5 mins and ~97% at equilibrium). This reduced to ~62% adsorption at pH 4.70, indicating Zn re-mobilization in acid soils. No significant change in Zn concentration was observed in farmed soils (average of 7 years) but a 25% decrease ($p < 0.05$) was observed in forestry soils (average of 7.4 years). Approximately 11% of sampled pastoral soils exceeded 100 mg/kg AR Zn but all were below the Biosolids Guideline value of 300 mg/kg. Approximately 112.5 kg Zn/day is carried by the Waikato River ($p < 0.0001$), with ~50% in the dissolved fraction. Zn concentrations peaked twice with distance along the Waikato River: first in the upper reaches, along with B, Li, and As, consistent with local geothermal inputs; and again in the lower reaches, as with increased nutrient elements N, P, and turbidity, consistent with runoff from pastoral farming in the catchment area. Rapidly decreasing Zn concentrations in the River's med-section indicated fast adsorption to bed sediments. Zn concentrations and mass load increased during high-flow events in pastoral catchments of the Waikato River and other regional rivers ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that soluble Zn is being mobilised. Relative to background levels, 86% of sampled Waikato lake sediments have more than twice as much Zn, and up to 73% of sampled sediments have more than twice as much Co and Ca, suggesting

substantial agricultural surface soil inputs and possible mobilization to bed sediments. Presently, sediment Zn concentrations are not high enough to cause toxicity to sediment dwelling organisms and rural lake ecosystems. Overall, results indicate that Zn is accumulating in agricultural soils and some of this is likely to be mobilised in surface runoff leading to likely accumulation of Zn in receiving lake sediments. Potential issues associated with continued Zn accumulation include loss of soil function, trace element imbalances, potential phytotoxicity, and reduction of habitable lakebeds. A number of recommendations are made, including the need for ongoing monitoring and development of suitable New Zealand ecological guideline values for protection of soil receptors and function.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS	IV
LIST OF TABLES	VII
LIST OF FIGURES	X
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Environmental Chemistry of Zinc.....	1
1.2 Essentiality of Zinc	3
1.2.1 Zinc as an essential element.....	3
1.2.2 Toxicity of zinc	4
1.2.3 Guideline values for ecological health protection	5
1.3 Sources of Zinc to the Environment.....	9
1.3.1 General outline.....	9
1.3.2 Facial eczema remedies	10
1.3.3 Mobility of zinc	12
1.4 Statement of the Problem	12
1.5 Aims and Structure.....	13
1.6 References	14
CHAPTER 2. METHODS	21
2.1 Background	21
2.2 Data Sources.....	23
2.2.1 Waikato regional soils monitoring.....	23
2.2.2 Waikato regional freshwater monitoring	25
2.2.3 Waikato freshwater lake sediments	27
2.3 Statistical Methods	28
2.3.1 Soils data analysis	28
2.3.2 Preliminary Adsorption Trial.....	29
2.3.3 Freshwater data analysis	30
2.3.4 Sediment data analysis.....	32

2.4	Appendices	33
2.5	References	39
CHAPTER 3. ZINC IN WAIKATO SURFACE SOILS		41
3.1	Summary statistics	41
3.2	Evidence for Zinc Enrichment in Soils	45
3.2.1	Considerations based on XRF zinc and AR/XRF ratios.....	45
3.2.2	Variation in AR zinc with land use.....	47
3.2.3	Comparison to other elements in pastoral soils	51
3.2.4	Zinc concentrations over time.....	53
3.2.5	Zinc concentrations with depth.....	61
3.2.6	Facial eczema remedies and zinc loadings on pastoral soils	65
3.3	Apparent Accumulation – Relationship to Soil Order	68
3.4	Preliminary Adsorption Trial Results	71
3.5	Correlations	74
3.5.1	Natural soils	74
3.5.2	Anthropogenically influenced soils	76
3.5.3	Comparison of background to farmed soils.....	78
3.6	Comparison to Soil Quality Guidelines	78
3.7	Potential Human Health Issues	79
3.8	Comparisons to Other Regions of New Zealand.....	80
3.9	Chapter Summary.....	83
3.10	Appendices	84
3.11	References	95
CHAPTER 4. ZINC IN WAIKATO RIVER SURFACE WATER.....		98
4.1	Summary Statistics.....	98
4.2	Compliance with Water Quality Guidelines	101
4.3	Concentration vs Distance.....	102
4.4	Sources of Additional Zinc	106
4.5	Influence of Rainfall and Flows on Zinc Concentrations	113
4.6	Chapter Summary.....	115
4.7	References	116
CHAPTER 5. ZINC IN REGIONAL WAIKATO SURFACE WATER		119

5.1	Summary Statistics.....	119
5.2	Comparison to ANZECC Guidelines.....	121
5.3	Correlations	123
5.4	Influence of Rainfall and River Flow.....	124
5.5	Chapter Summary.....	125
5.6	References	126
CHAPTER 6. ZINC IN WAIKATO FRESHWATER LAKE SEDIMENTS ...		127
6.1	Raw Data and Summary Statistics	127
6.2	Apparent Enrichments and Possible Sources.....	132
6.2.1	Enrichment estimates	132
6.2.2	Zinc	137
6.2.3	Cobalt.....	138
6.2.4	Other Trace Elements	140
6.3	Comparison to ANZECC Guidelines for Sediment Quality.....	141
6.4	Correlations	144
6.5	Chapter Summary.....	147
6.6	Appendices	149
6.7	References	162
CHAPTER 7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS		167

List of Tables

Table 1.1 <i>Summary of New Zealand Documents Containing Guideline Values for Zn in Soils</i>	6
Table 2.1 <i>Metadata Relating to Zinc and Other Potentially Relevant Variables in Waikato Soils Examined as Part of this Research</i>	23
Table 2.2 <i>Metadata Relating to Zinc and Other Potentially Relevant Variables in Waikato River Surface Water Examined as Part of this Research</i>	25
Table 2.3 <i>Metadata Relating to Zinc and Other Potentially Relevant Variables in Waikato Freshwaters Examined as Part of this Research</i>	25
Table 2.4 <i>Waikato River Sampling Locations</i>	26
Table 2.5 <i>Metadata Relating to Zinc and Other Potentially Relevant Variables in Waikato Lake Sediments Examined as Part of this Research</i>	27
Table 3.1 <i>Summary Statistics for Zinc and Other Variables in Waikato Surface Soils</i>	42
Table 3.2 <i>Summary Statistics for AR and XRF Zn in Natural, Horticultural, Pastoral, and Farmed soils, using the Subset of Samples for which Both Fractions of Zn were Measured</i>	44
Table 3.3 <i>Differences between Mean and Median XRF Zn in Background Samples in each Farmed Soils Category</i>	46
Table 3.4 <i>Summary Statistics for AR Zn in Waikato Background, Forestry, Natural (B+F), Horticultural, Pastoral and Farmed (P+H) Surface Soil (mg/kg, apart from n)</i>	48
Table 3.5 <i>Summary Statistics for Zinc Concentration Ratios at Sites Sampled More than Once, According to Land Use Category</i>	55
Table 3.6 <i>Newer/Older Date-Pair Ratios for Each Measured Variable on Properties Sampled Twice or More (N=136 for Zn)</i>	56
Table 3.7 <i>Summary of Paired t-test Results (all possible pairs) for Zn at Sites Sampled on Two or More Occasions (mean time between samplings 6-7 years)</i>	60

Table 3.8 <i>Summary Statistics for Waikato Pastoral and Background Surface (0-10 cm) and Deeper (10-20 cm) Soil Samples, Ranked by Surface Enrichment Ratio for Pastoral Soils</i>	62
Table 3.9 <i>Ratios of Cd, Pb, and Zn in Surface (0-10 cm)/deeper (10-20 cm) Soils in Native, Forestry, Background, Horticultural and Pastoral Waikato Land Use Categories</i>	64
Table 3.10 <i>Summary Statistics for AR Zn (mg/kg) for Allophanic, Brown, Gley, Granular, Organic, Podzol, Pumice, Recent and Ultic Surface Soils (0 - 10 cm) of the Waikato Region</i>	69
Table 3.11 <i>Adsorption Trial Results for Zinc in pH 5.7 Buffer in 100 mL Solution</i> ..	72
Table 3.12 <i>Correlation Coefficients and p-values for AR Zinc and Other Variables in Regional Waikato Background and Forestry Soils. Relationships of $p < 0.001$ or better are in Bold Italic*</i>	74
Table 3.13 <i>Soil Order Percentages of Background and Forestry Samples</i>	76
Table 3.14 <i>Correlation Coefficients p-values for AR Zinc and Other Variables in Regional Waikato Horticultural (including Arable) and Pastoral Soils. Relationships of $p < 0.001$ or better are in Bold Italic</i>	76
Table 3.15 <i>Distribution of Individual Zn Concentrations in Waikato Farmed soils</i> .	78
Table 3.16 <i>Estimated Number of Years before Guideline Values are Reached</i>	79
Table 3.17 <i>Summary Statistics for AR Zn (mg/kg) in New Zealand Surface Soils</i>	81
Table 3.18 <i>Average (arithmetic) Zn (mg/kg) in Background, Forestry, Pastoral and Horticultural Soils in the Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Marlborough, Taranaki, Waikato and Wellington Regions of New Zealand</i>	81
Table 4.1 <i>Summary Statistics for Waikato River Surface Water Sampling</i>	99
Table 4.2 <i>Annual Mean Total Zn by Sample Site</i>	102
Table 4.3 <i>Annual Mean Dissolved Zn by Sample Site</i>	103
Table 4.4 <i>Results of Pooled t-tests on Differences in Mean Zn Concentrations Between the Upper, Mid and Lower Reaches of the Waikato River</i>	104

Table 4.5 <i>Correlation Coefficients for Zn and other Variables, Distance, and Dissolved/Total Zn Ratios in Waikato River Surface Water. Relationships of $p < 0.001$ or better are shown in Bold Italic*</i>	107
Table 4.6 <i>Mass Flows and Ratios of Total and Dissolved Zn in the Waikato River</i>	113
Table 4.7 <i>Correlation Matrix for Relationships between Mean Monthly River Flow at Huntly (m^3/s), Dissolved and Total Zn Concentrations, and Mass Loads of Zn.....</i>	114
Table 5.1 <i>Summary Statistics for Zinc and other Variables in Regional Waikato Surface Water.....</i>	120
Table 5.2 <i>Regional Waikato Surface Water Sites that Exceeded the ANZECC Guideline Trigger Value for Zn ($8 \mu g/L$)</i>	122
Table 5.3 <i>Correlation Coefficients and p-values for Zn and other Variables in Regional Waikato Surface Water. For all relationships, $N=1113$ pairs</i>	123
Table 5.4 <i>Correlation Coefficients for River Flow and Sample Variables at Sites where Zn Concentrations Exceeded the ANZECC GV on Two or More Occasions. Relationships of $p < 0.001$ are shown in Bold Italic*</i>	124
Table 6.1 <i>Individual Zn Concentrations (mg/kg dry weight) in Waikato Lake Sediments</i>	128
Table 6.2 <i>Summary Statistics for Zn and other Variables in Waikato Lake Sediment Grab Samples (mg/kg dry weight).....</i>	129
Table 6.3 <i>Average Enrichment Factors for Zn and other Variables in Waikato Lake Sediments. Variables Enriched by a Factor of 2 or more are in Bold Italic*</i>	133
Table 6.4 <i>Summary of Elements with an Enrichment Factor of 2.0 or More in >33% of Waikato Lakes Studied, and initial attribution of possible sources.....</i>	136
Table 6.5 <i>Recommended Sediment Quality Guidelines (ANZECC, 2000, pp. 3.5-4)</i>	141
Table 6.6 <i>Correlations for Zn and other Variables in Waikato Lake Sediments. Relationships of $p < 0.0001$ or greater are in Bold Italic*</i>	145

List of Figures

Figure 3.1 <i>Histogram showing the Distribution of AR Zn Concentrations Measured in the 369 Waikato Region Soil Samples</i>	44
Figure 3.2 <i>Histogram of the Distribution of AR Zn Concentrations in Natural (B + F) Compared to Farmed (H + P) Waikato Surface Soils</i>	50
Figure 3.3 <i>Pastoral/Natural (B+F) AR Trace Element Ratios for Waikato Surface Soils, based on Mean Concentrations in Each Category</i>	52
Figure 3.4 <i>Correlations between Years In-Between Sampling of Waikato Forest Soils and Zn Ratios</i>	58
Figure 3.5 <i>Mean AR Zn Concentrations (mg/kg) in Addition to Background Zn Levels in Pastoral and Horticultural Surface Soils of Different Orders (Kim, 2011).</i>	70
Figure 3.6 <i>Comparison of Zn adsorption to soil in pH 5.70 and pH 4.70 buffer solution over time</i>	73
Figure 3.7 <i>Comparison of Regional Mean AR Zn Concentrations (mg/kg) in Natural and Farmed Soils</i>	82
Figure 4.1 <i>Changes in Annual Mean Dissolved and Total Zn Concentrations with Distance Along the Waikato River</i>	103
Figure 4.2 <i>Changes in annual mean ratios of dissolved/total Zn with distance from Taupo Gates</i>	105
Figure 4.3 <i>Changes in annual mean turbidity in Waikato River water with distance from Taupo Gates</i>	106
Figure 4.4 <i>Relative Changes in Annual Mean Concentrations of As, Li and B in Waikato River Water with Distance from Taupo Gates</i>	109
Figure 4.5 <i>Changes in annual mean concentration of nitrite (NO₃), nitrite-n + nitrate-n (NO₃ + NO₂), nitrate (NO₂), total ammoniacal-n (NH₄) and total kjeldahl-n (TKN) in Waikato River water with distance from Taupo Gates</i>	111
Figure 4.6 <i>Changes in annual mean concentration of total phosphorus (TP) and dissolved reactive phosphorus (DRP) in Waikato River water with distance from Taupo Gates</i>	112

Figure 4.7 <i>Changes in annual mean concentration of non-purgeable organic carbon (NPOC) and dissolved non-purgeable organic carbon (DNPOC) in Waikato River water with distance from Taupo Gates</i>	112
Figure 5.1 <i>Seasonal Fluctuations of Zn in Surface Water at Three Waikato Sites Regularly Exceeding the ANZECC GV for Zn</i>	125
Figure 6.1 <i>Histogram Showing the Distribution of Zn Concentrations Measured in the 68 Freshwater Lake Sediment Samples</i>	131
Figure 6.2 <i>Enrichment Rankings for Zn in Waikato Lake Sediments</i>	137
Figure 6.3 <i>Enrichment Rankings for Co in Waikato Lake Sediments</i>	139
Figure 6.4 <i>Scatterplot showing the Relationship between Zn and Cd Concentrations in Waikato Lake Sediments</i>	146