

Section 1:

#1 "If you walk along Silverwater Creek on a quiet afternoon, it might almost fool you. The gum trees still lean gently over the water like old friends. The sky reflects on the surface just as it used to. Birds still sing somewhere in the distance. But the moment you look a little closer, the truth becomes impossible to ignore. The water is dull and cloudy. It carries a faint chemical smell that clings to your nose. Dead leaves drift past scraps of plastic, and there's something heartbreaking about the way a crushed chip packet bobs where dragonflies used to dance."

Strengths: ■ Your vivid imagery paints a clear picture of the creek, helping readers visualise the setting ■ Your effective contrast between natural beauty and pollution creates emotional impact

Weaknesses: Limited sensory details → Your opening paragraph relies heavily on visual descriptions but could engage more senses to fully immerse readers. While you mention smell briefly, you could expand how the creek affects all senses to create a stronger emotional connection. The "chemical smell" is vague and could be more specific to help readers better understand the pollution's impact.

Exemplar: ***The gum trees still lean gently over the water like old friends, their eucalyptus scent now competing with the sharp, metallic odour that rises from the murky surface. When you dip your fingers in, the water feels unnaturally slick, nothing like the cool, clean creek that once refreshed summer visitors.***

#2 "Water quality tests from the Environmental Water Authority show that Silverwater Creek now contains dangerously high levels of nitrates, phosphates and even traces of heavy metals like zinc and lead. These are not just complicated scientific words. They are poisons. They choke the oxygen out of the water, which means fish can't breathe. Frogs can't lay eggs. Insects disappear. Even the birds that once flew low over the water to drink or feed are starting to stay away."

Strengths: ■ Your clear explanation of scientific concepts makes them accessible to readers ■ Your short, impactful sentences effectively emphasise the serious consequences of pollution

Weaknesses: Underdeveloped human connection → While you effectively explain the environmental impact of pollution, you miss an opportunity to connect these effects directly to readers' lives. The paragraph focuses on animals but doesn't clearly show why humans should care beyond ecological concerns. Adding a line about how these changes affect people personally would strengthen your argument.

Exemplar: ***These poisons don't just harm wildlife—they threaten our community too. When these chemicals seep into soil and groundwater, they can affect the vegetables in***

our gardens, the water in our taps, and the air we breathe when we walk beside what was once our neighbourhood treasure.

#3 "But hope alone is not enough. It needs to be backed by action. Real action. The local council needs to take stronger steps to protect what's left. That means better stormwater filters, regular pollution monitoring and tougher penalties for illegal dumping. It means helping small businesses make the switch to greener practices, not just punishing them for falling behind. It means involving schools, residents, and community leaders in the recovery process. Because if we wait until it's too late, we won't be able to fix it no matter how much we care."

Strengths: ■ Your balanced approach acknowledges both environmental concerns and business needs ■ Your specific suggestions provide clear, actionable ideas for readers to consider

Weaknesses: Lack of individual action steps → While you mention what authorities should do, you don't provide enough concrete actions that individual readers can take right now. The paragraph focuses on institutional changes but misses an opportunity to empower readers with personal steps they can take immediately to help the creek. Adding specific individual actions would make your call to action more effective.

Exemplar: ***Starting today, you can help by joining monthly creek clean-ups, reporting pollution incidents to the council's environmental hotline, or simply bringing a small bag to collect rubbish whenever you walk near the creek. Even small actions, when multiplied across our community, create powerful change.***

■ Your feature article shows strong emotional appeal through descriptive language and vivid imagery. The way you've structured your piece works well, starting with the problem, explaining its causes, and ending with a call to action. However, you could make your article more powerful by adding more personal stories or examples. Maybe include a short story about someone who remembers swimming in the creek as a child, or a local elder who has watched the changes over decades. This would help readers connect more deeply with your message.

Also, try to balance your concerns with more hope throughout the piece. While you mention some positive initiatives near the end, readers might feel overwhelmed by the problems. You could highlight small signs of recovery or success stories from similar creeks that were saved in other areas.

Additionally, your call to action could be more specific. Instead of just asking readers to "do something," give them 2-3 exact steps they can take after reading your article. This makes it easier for people to get involved right away while they still feel motivated by your writing.

Score: 45/50

Section 2:

The Beautiful Place We're Letting Die

If you walk along Silverwater Creek on a quiet afternoon, it might almost fool you. The gum trees still lean gently over the water like old friends. The sky reflects on the surface just as it used to. Birds still sing somewhere in the distance. But the moment you look a little closer, the truth becomes impossible to ignore. The water is dull and cloudy. It carries a faint chemical smell that clings to your nose. Dead leaves drift past scraps of plastic, and there's something heartbreaking about the way a crushed chip packet bobs where dragonflies used to dance. People remember when Silverwater Creek was something special. Now it's being forgotten, or worse, ignored. #1

It didn't happen all at once. For years, factories in the area have been releasing waste into drains that lead directly to the creek. Construction sites send dirt and cement runoff into the water every time it rains. Stormwater systems, full of oil, plastic and other pollutants, overflow after heavy weather. And slowly, silently, the creek began to change. At first it was just small things. Fewer fish. Murkier water. Then the frogs stopped singing. Then the smell started. Now, people barely go near it, except to dump more rubbish. A place that was once alive is slowly dying, and it's happening in front of everyone's eyes.

Water quality tests from the Environmental Water Authority show that Silverwater Creek now contains dangerously high levels of nitrates, phosphates and even traces of heavy metals like zinc and lead. These are not just complicated scientific words. They are poisons. They choke the oxygen out of the water, which means fish can't breathe. Frogs can't lay eggs. Insects disappear. Even the birds that once flew low over the water to drink or feed are starting to stay away. Dr Leena Tran, a freshwater ecologist from Western Sydney University, put it clearly when she said, "This is one of the worst cases of slow ecosystem collapse we've seen in an urban creek. If the damage continues, recovery could take decades---if it's possible at all." #2

But the damage isn't just to plants and animals. This creek was once a part of the community's daily life. Children played in it during the summer. Elderly residents walked beside it each morning. Students from nearby schools used to do field studies there, learning about water bugs and riparian zones. Now it's something people avoid. It's seen as dangerous. Something to be warned about. Parents tell their children not to go near it. Teachers plan other excursions. Residents quietly say it's sad, but they're not sure what can be done. And that's part of the problem---when something becomes too big, people start to feel like they don't matter in the solution.

Some local business owners have voiced concerns about stricter environmental rules. They say that not all factories are polluting. Some, like James Barker's small metalworks near the industrial zone, argue that they already follow the rules and that extra restrictions could put them out of business. "We're not villains," James said. "We do what's required of us. But if new rules are brought in suddenly, we'll need help to adjust. Otherwise, we're just being punished for trying to survive." That perspective matters. People's livelihoods matter. But so does the health

of the environment we all share. It can't just be about choosing one or the other. There has to be a balance---and that balance begins with honest conversations, real support and firm accountability.

Even so, it's not just factories that cause harm. A lot of damage comes from the choices we make every day. The plastic we leave behind at parks. The oil we let drip from our cars. The cleaning chemicals we pour down the drain. These choices add up. They flow into our waterways and sit there, unseen, until the damage becomes visible. That's why this isn't only a government problem. It's a community problem. It belongs to all of us. And if we all played a part in harming the creek, then we all have a part to play in healing it.

Thankfully, some people already are. Groups like CreekWatch have been fighting to restore Silverwater Creek for years. They ~~organise~~ [organise] weekend clean ups, plant native reeds along the bank and teach school students how to care for the land around them. They aren't paid to do it. They do it because they believe this creek still has a chance. A few months ago, a group of Year Nine students from Silverwater High designed a floating plant system to help filter some of the water naturally. It was a small project, but it showed that even young people can be powerful when they're given the chance.

But hope alone is not enough. It needs to be backed by action. Real action. The local council needs to take stronger steps to protect what's left. That means better stormwater filters, regular pollution monitoring and tougher penalties for illegal dumping. It means helping small businesses make the switch to greener practices, not just punishing them for falling behind. It means involving schools, residents, and community leaders in the recovery process. Because if we wait until it's too late, we won't be able to fix it no matter how much we care. #3

Nature is forgiving, but only up to a point. We can't keep pushing it and expecting it to bounce back every time. Ecosystems are delicate. When they break, they don't always heal. We have a choice to make now---ignore the warnings and let this creek become another forgotten stretch of dirty water, or stand up and say enough is enough. Let this be where we draw the line. Where we decide that a polluted creek in the middle of our town is not something we'll just accept.

Silverwater Creek doesn't need our pity. It needs our voice. It needs people to stop walking past it like it doesn't matter. Because it does. It's part of our environment, our community, and our responsibility. So go see it. Look at what's happening. Then ask yourself what you're willing to do to bring it back.

Let's be remembered as the generation that turned around and fought for what mattered before it was too late. Not the ones who shrugged and walked away.