

A message from the Hurunui Waiau Zone Committee

Calling all Hurunui dryland farmers

If the current planning rules for the Hurunui Waiau zone stay as they are, you will need a resource consent to farm. Here is your opportunity to change this - and to have your say on what that change could look like.

The Hurunui Waiau Rivers Regional Plan currently requires resource consent from all farms where nutrient losses have increased by more than 10% since 2013. Because dryland farms have very low nutrient loss rates, small but normal changes in how a dryland farm is run (variations in stock numbers, additional winter feed) can increase nutrient losses by more than 10% and trigger a consent requirement. The Zone Committee wants to fix that.



Send us something in writing, go to a public meeting or both.

Public meetings – all welcome, no need to RSVP

- **Monday 25 June, 7.30pm,**
Waikari Hall, Princess Street,
Waikari
- **Tuesday 3 July, 7.30pm,**
Cheviot Trust Hotel, Hall Street,
Cheviot

Feedback **by 6 July** to Hurunui.Waiiau@ecan.govt.nz by email or write to Environment Canterbury, PO Box 345, Christchurch 8140, attention: Lisa Jenkins, Planner.

Read on for all the background information

What are we proposing?

The Zone Committee would like all dryland farming with no irrigation and less than 10% of the farm area in winter grazing for cattle to be a permitted activity with no consent to farm required.

To make a strong proposal for a change to the Hurunui Waiau Rivers Regional Plan to this effect, we need to:

- Show how these dryland farms will manage nutrient, sediment and bacterial contaminant losses; and
- Show how nutrient losses will be kept track of at a catchment level.

We are considering recommending that Environment Canterbury introduces rules that require dryland farmers to:

- Have a Farm Management Plan that is not audited, but will need to be shown to Environment Canterbury on request; and
- Report the area of winter grazing on your property by either:
 - Being a member of a dryland farmers' collective group that will report on the winter grazing area of all members in aggregate (the sum total of winter grazing occurring over all members' farms); or
 - Logging on to Environment Canterbury's Farm Portal¹ website and answering a few simple questions about your farm (location, stock type and numbers and winter grazing area).

Why do we need rules?

Environment Canterbury is required to implement the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPSFM). Any changes to the Hurunui Waiau Rivers Regional Plan must meet the requirements of the NPSFM. In particular:

- Water quality must remain the same or get better than it is currently. That means we need to limit nutrient losses from farming.
- We also have to be able to account for nutrient sources within each catchment. That means we need to be able to estimate nutrient losses from farms.

Any plan change the Zone Committee recommends is open to public submissions and will be decided by an independent hearing panel. The hearing panel must weigh up all of the submissions and make recommendations that make sure the plan gives effect to the NPSFM and promotes sustainable management.

To have the best chance of success (a better rule framework for dryland farmers to operate under), the proposal considered by the independent hearing panel must show how the requirements of the NPSFM will be met. If we try to change the Plan without showing how water quality will be managed, or how we will know how much nutrient dryland farming contributes to waterways, the hearing panel will either not accept the plan change, or will amend it so it meets NPSFM requirements - there is a risk we will not get a better outcome for dryland farmers.

Why should we have a rule for reporting nutrient losses?

In the Hurunui catchment, water quality is near limits so Environment Canterbury will be expected to have a system in place that helps it understand where nutrients are coming from. The Hurunui Waiiau Rivers Regional Plan currently includes provisions that achieve this – farmers are required to identify average losses using OVERSEER™ and report losses via collectives.

The Zone Committee considers that the requirements in the current plan are overly onerous for dryland farmers and Environment Canterbury staff and the Zone Committee are looking for options that would meet the catchment accounting requirements (a system that enables us to identify nutrient source loads), without requiring dryland farmers to have their farming practice audited, or report on OVERSEER™ loss rates.

The approach being considered by the Zone Committee focuses on understanding the area of winter grazing of cattle on root and brassica crops, because changes to this area will have the greatest impact on nutrient losses from dryland farms.

Environment Canterbury can model nutrient losses, at a catchment scale, if it has information on the amount of winter grazing on dryland farms either for individual farms or in aggregate. Two ways are proposed for getting this information on winter grazing, with dryland farmers able to choose to either:

- join a dryland farmers' collective, with the collective reporting the winter grazing area in aggregate (not individual farm information); or

- register on Environment Canterbury's Farm Portal¹ and answer simple questions relating to stock numbers and area of winter forage crops.

Neither of these options require dryland farmers to use OVERSEER™ to estimate nutrient losses. Irrigated farms need to use OVERSEER™ to estimate and report losses.

The information provided by dryland farmers through the Farm Portal will only be used by Environment Canterbury to estimate nutrient loads at the catchment scale.

The Zone Committee has considered other options for getting information on winter forage area for catchment accounting, but does not favour these over the proposed approach. One alternative approach considered was using aerial photography or satellite imagery to identify the area of winter forage grazing every year. This would be more expensive than the proposed approach, possibly leading to a rate increase. Some stakeholders have expressed concern about the difficulties of identifying winter feed areas on satellite images and about what else the imagery might be used for. Another approach considered was using surveys. Again, this approach would be expensive and would probably lead to a rates increase.

¹The Farm Portal is a website that has been developed by Environment Canterbury.

You can learn more about the Farm Portal here: <https://farmportal.ecan.govt.nz/>.

Under this proposal you won't need OVERSEER™ files.

Why have a rule for Farm Plans?

The Zone Committee has encouraged collectives and farm environment plans (FEPs) to drive good management practices (GMP). Demonstrating good management practices relating to losses of nutrients, sediment and microbial contaminants will be important in the proposed plan change to show dryland farmers' commitment to maintaining water quality.

The proposed plan change supports the collaborative approach to GMP with an option for dryland farmers to join a dryland farmers' collective – a new type of nutrient management collective that

requires members to have a FEP and encourages a collaborative approach to GMP, but is not required to audit or grade farm practices. The FEPs do not need to be audited, as they do for irrigated farms. Dryland farmers' collectives could also provide the aggregate information for the catchment accounting.

Farmers who do not want to be in a dryland collective will need to complete a Farm Management Plan (FEP 'lite' introduced for other parts of Canterbury through Plan Change 5 to the Land & Water Regional Plan, which is yet to be made operative) and have the plan available if requested by Environment Canterbury. The Farm Management Plan is not audited.

We want to know what you think about the rules we are proposing and if you have other options we should consider.

You can let us know what you think by emailing us at Hurunui.Waiiau@ecan.govt.nz

Or, come along to one of the public meetings we are hosting:

- 7.30pm, 25 June at the Waikari Hall
- 7.30pm, 3 July at the Cheviot Trust Hotel

