

MEETING ITEM: 7	SUBJECT MATTER: Recommendations for nutrient loss reporting and collective/ farm plan requirements for normal dryland farming and update on conversations regarding off-sets to enable maintenance of water quality
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Action required

1. The Zone Committee makes a recommendation in relation to catchment accounting and Farm Plan and collective requirements for permitted dryland farming.

The suggested recommendation is:

The Hurunui Waiau Zone Committee recommends that the Canterbury Regional Council pursues a targeted change to the Hurunui Waiau Rivers Regional Plan, to be notified in 2018. In addition to permitting dryland farming within previously specified limits¹, the plan change will address the current requirements for dryland farmers to be a part of a nutrient management collective and report nutrient losses by requiring that farmers undertaking a “normal dryland farming activity”:

- a. report the area of their farm used for winter grazing of cattle on root vegetable or brassica crop through the Farm Portal and hold and implement a Management Plan for Farming Activities; or*
 - b. are a member of a dryland farmers collective group that has the purpose of reporting winter grazing area and encouraging the adoption of Good Management Practices through farm management plans.*
2. The Zone Committee receives an update regarding the conversations taking place with irrigation groups to identify off-sets for the anticipated increase in nitrogen load from dryland farming.

Discussion: Collectives and catchment accounting

At the 26 March meeting of the Hurunui Waiau Zone Committee, the Committee received a paper outlining options for addressing catchment accounting and collective requirements. The committee provisionally agreed that a mechanism for catchment accounting was needed, and also that a mechanism for driving Good Management Practices was needed.

Ben Ensor suggested an option that gave farmers a choice of either meeting these requirements through a collective, or individually (reporting through the Farm Portal and holding and implementing a Farm Management Plan). There was general agreement that this option achieved the nutrient management principles set out by the Zone Committee in August 2016 and that this option should be pursued.

¹ See recommendations made by the Zone Committee on 19 March 2018

Discussion: Off-setting anticipated increases in nitrogen from permitted dryland farming

There have been two meetings held with irrigators (Amuri irrigation, Hurunui Water Project and Ngāi Tahu Farming), Environment Canterbury staff, Hurunui District Landcare Group and Beef and Lamb NZ. Fish and Game (Scott Pearson) also attended the first meeting.

At the first meeting (12 March) we discussed:

- What are the options for offsetting a 0 – 3% increase in dryland load
- How much load is available for offset and from where
- What are the challenges / risks associated with making a load available?

At the second meeting (28 March) we discussed:

- Where (who) the offset load will come from; and
- process options for making load available

With regard to options for offsetting the load, aside from simply surrendering the load the only other option that has been considered closely has been the concept of reducing nitrogen concentration in tributaries (and consequently the main stem of the Hurunui) by irrigating with high nitrogen water. This concept has been included in the environmental enhancement package proposed by AIC alongside a staged implementation of the HWRRP minimum flows.

We have not yet reached agreement on where the off-set load will come from. Irrigation representatives are discussing this with their respective boards and will report back in May.

There are challenges and risks associated with making load available. In particular, the irrigation companies need certainty around how much nitrogen is needed and this has been the topic of much debate. We are generally agreed from a technical perspective that the nitrogen offset required is 8 or 38 tonnes. Fish and Game do not agree that the offset is appropriately precautionary. Ned Norton has provided two memos that set out the technical reasons for why we are comfortable with the 8 and 38 tonnes – these will be circulated prior to the Zone Committee meeting.

Because the Hurunui catchment is technically over-allocated (nitrogen load is fully allocated through consents and there is still an additional 10% increase in permitted losses provided for in the Plan), there is a question around whether water quality needs to be maintained or improved in the context of this plan change. If a Panel can be convinced that water quality can be maintained, 8 tonnes of N will be needed to off-set the dryland load. If a Panel consider the NPSFM requires water quality improvement, 38 tonnes of N will be needed to fully off-set the anticipated dryland load. We are investigating options for making the full 38 tonnes available, should it be needed.