

Meeting notes

Hurunui Science Stakeholders Group

3.00 – 6.00pm Wednesday 07 March 2018 at St Johns Hall, AMBERLEY

Attendees:

Hurunui Waiau Zone Committee: John Faulkner, Ben Ensor, Michele Hawke, James Costello

Environment Canterbury: Ian (Whit) Whitehouse, Ned Norton, Simon Harris, Jeanine Topelen, Lisa Jenkins, Clare McKay

Beef + Lamb NZ: Andrew Burt, Helen Marr, Lauren Phillips, Julia Beijeman

Amuri Irrigation: Andrew Barton, Alistair Rutherford

Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu: Matt Dale

Hurunui District Landcare Group: Joshua Brown

Federated Farmers: Lionel Hume, Dan Hodgen

Dairy NZ: Justin Kitto

Rural Advocacy Network: Jamie McFadden

Ravensdown: Kelly Morris

Balance: Rebecca Hyde

Welcome and introductions

Key points

- Participants introduce themselves.
- The zone committee is asking the Science Stakeholders Group to review technical information and ensure it is “fit for purpose” to help the committee make its recommendations.

Corrections to meeting notes

Lionel Hume asked that the meetings notes from the 7 February SSG meeting be corrected as follows:

“With regard to item 8, the point was also made that a precautionary approach was already being taken (e.g. the assumption about potential area of winter grazing on dryland properties) and that it is not appropriate to have 2 layers of ‘precautionary buffer’.”

Beef + Lamb NZ: Overview of the Sheep and Beef Farming Sector within the Hurunui Region

Andrew Burt of the B+LNZ Economic service presented an overview of the sheep and beef farming sector in Hurunui. A memo was pre-circulated and a copy of the slides presented is attached. The key messages from Andrew's presentation were:

- Agriculture is the main economic activity within the Hurunui region. Sheep and beef is the dominant farm type, and a key employer within the district. These factors combined mean that the sheep and beef sector is inextricably linked to the region's viability and economic success.
- Sheep and beef farming systems are highly complex, diverse and varied across the Hurunui region. There is no such thing as a typical sheep and beef farm.
- Sheep and beef farming is not always profitable. The implementation of any significant new on-ground actions must be spread over a number of years to ensure costs extend over good and poor performing years.
- Sheep and beef farmers make management decisions for many reasons, with profitability being only one of the factors taken into account. Other important considerations may include long term farm viability, climate constraints, farm succession etc.
- The sheep and beef sector is an adaptable and resilient sector, continually making efficiency gains in how it produces red meat. Sheep and beef farmers have managed to increase meat production, while decreasing the total number of animals farmed, and while losing their most productive land to other land uses.
- In the Hurunui, winter forage crops are used for both sheep and beef cattle; as well as for dairy support winter grazing on some farms. Decisions on whether or not to grow forage crops are made based on the individual capacity of the farms due to climate; and the long term feasibility in terms of optimal use of the land for feed production.
- Land use flexibility enables farmer adaptability and resilience, and is essential to the long term viability of the sheep and beef industry.

There were questions relating to the sample size and whether it was considered the 22 farms surveyed in Hurunui each year are representative of the sheep and beef industry in Hurunui generally. There were several points made in relation to these questions:

- There are 22 farms in the Hurunui surveyed each year
- It is not the same farms each year (there is about a 15% turnover rate)
- The data is considered representative but there is a margin of error

There was a lot of discussion around the data relating to winter feed area. Key points were:

- B+LNZ survey data includes winter feed crops such as oats and Italian rye grass
- B+LNZ survey data does not distinguish between sheep or cattle winter feed area
- B+LNZ survey data includes irrigated and non-irrigated properties
- The survey data does not include dairy run-off blocks
- It was noted that in discussing the concept of limited winter grazing area, ECan have considered winter grazing to be cattle grazing on root vegetable or brassica crops.

It was identified that there is a live question relating to how many dairy farmer owned dry-land blocks will likely be subject to winter grazing limitations under a revised rule framework.

John Faulkner asked: “if dairy pay out increases, would that drive more dryland winter grazing?”. Andrew responded that there are corresponding numbers, but there is no proof of cause and effect. Whit asked, “if there was a longer term high dairy pay out (3-4 years), what would happen to winter feed?”. Andrew answered that there likely would be an increase, but it is hard to tell how much.

Kelly Morris pointed out that farm sales are the main risk for increasing intensity on dryland is farm sales.

Ned Norton: What is the risk of increase to the area of winter grazing of forage crops if “normal dryland farming” is permitted?

Ned’s presentation had been circulated prior to the workshop, however, he had added information. The revised presentation is attached with these notes

Ned talked the group through the various lines of evidence and assumptions that have been used to establish a “plausible worst case” for increased winter grazing (cattle on root vegetable or brassica). Most of the group agreed that a 50% increase in winter grazing in any given year (i.e. not year on year) is a plausible worst case that includes a high degree of precaution.

James Costello asked if there is a way to shift the focus onto the specific activity of dairy support grazing. Such a proposition would be difficult to justify and there would still be a need to understand the plausible worst case for beef cattle winter grazing in order to satisfy a hearings panel that water quality could be maintained.

Ned Norton: What is the “plausible worst case” increase in N load from permitting “normal dryland farming” – and thus what tonnage needs offsetting to stay within the Hurunui Catchment N load limit?

Ned talked through the various lines of evidence and assumptions that have gone into two methods for estimating a “plausible worst case” increase in N load from permitting dryland farming. The “plausible worst case” is represented by a 3% increase in catchment load.

With regard to Method 2 (P. Brown calculator 2018). it was noted that the assumption that there would be a 14% increase in losses above the Mandamus, with permitted dryland farming, is likely an overestimate. Josh and Ned will improve this estimate outside of the meeting.

B+LNZ asked for a better understanding of what the loads would look like in terms of kg/ha. It was suggested that this conversion would improve the understanding of what is being sought.

The group could not agree on the estimated loss numbers, however there were no significant concerns raised with the use of either method.

Ned asked if one method was preferable over the other. P.Brown’s calculator (method 2) has been widely used and accepted and on that basis there appears to be a preference for method 2.

The meeting concluded at 6.30.