

CONCEPT SHEET 6

Water quantity and allocation

Taranaki gets a lot of rain and it's difficult to imagine the region ever running out of water.

However, there is growing demand for water from large-scale petrochemical, dairy and meat processing operations, as well as from agriculture for pasture irrigation. So we must pay careful attention to how water is allocated, particularly during drier periods and droughts, when water resources are stretched.

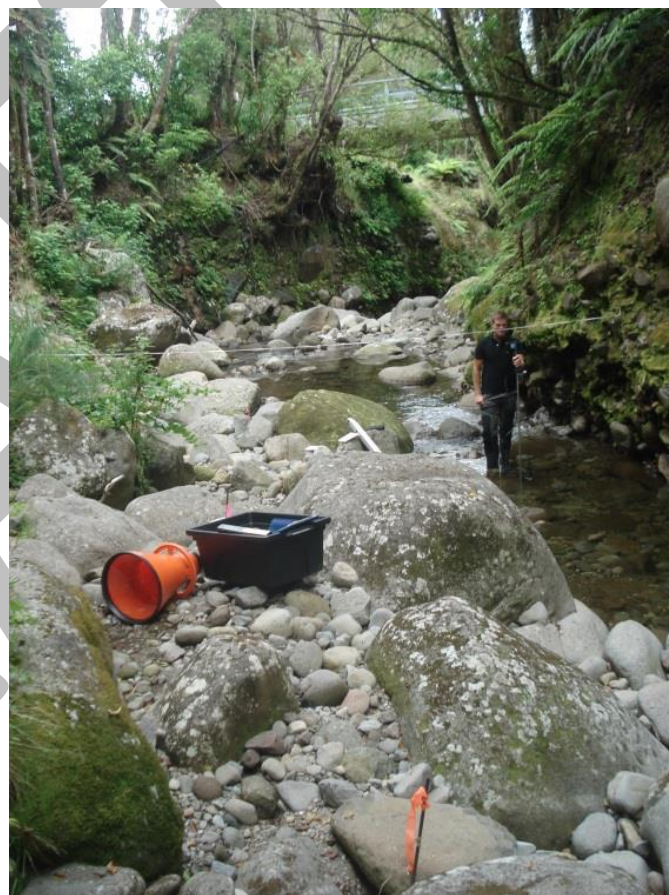
The Government has also introduced new requirements around the management and allocation of freshwater. Councils have been directed to 'zone' their waterways into Freshwater Management Units (FMUs – see Concept Sheet 1), to set water quality objectives and limits for each, and to ensure water is not over-allocated.

Who uses what, and how it's been decided

Five Taranaki catchments – the Waiwhakaiho, Waitara, Tangahoe, Patea and Waitotara – account for 51% of all the region's consented water takes. Since 2008 there has been an increased demand for water from other, smaller streams, mainly for pasture irrigation. So the overall percentage allocated in the five main catchments has decreased.

Pasture irrigation has surpassed municipal water supply and treatment as the greatest use of the region's surface water resources. Other major users include the region's five hydroelectric power stations.

While using water to generate power is considered non-consumptive because the water is returned to the river, it can affect downstream flows. Permitted takes (for reasonable domestic and stock use) also make up a portion of Taranaki's water allocation.



A key factor in water allocation decisions is the 'mean annual low flow', or MALF, which is the lowest flow that could be naturally expected on a year-to-year basis. A MALF is based on intensive data from long-term monitoring, and is regarded as the minimum needed to maintain a catchment's natural character and ecosystem health.



During dry periods, restrictions on water takes are imposed when the MALF is reached. The MALF is also used to determine the maximum quantity of water able to be taken per day.

What happens if we get it wrong?

Lowered water levels can reduce the area of habitat available for fish species and stream bugs, especially in shallow, wide streams. Species such as trout, eels and other native fish may be affected by higher water temperatures, lower dissolved oxygen levels, reduced feeding opportunities and poorer water quality in general.

If the flow and habitats are altered significantly, this can affect recreational activities such as fishing and bathing. Because of high rainfall, Taranaki's rivers and streams are regularly 'well-flushed', removing sediment and weed growths, and regular monitoring ensures that water is not over-allocated.

What is proposed in the Draft Freshwater Plan?

The Draft Plan sets specific allocation limits for each of the Freshwater Management Units, or zones, the Council is now obliged by the Government to establish. This ensures that streams and rivers will be used and monitored in a way which suits their differing values.

The Draft Plan would also enable those with existing takes to have priority over new applicants, and to renew their consents, without having to meet the proposed limits if they continue to take at the same rate, have a proven need for the resource and are using it efficiently. This recognises the reality that large water uses, including industrial users and hydroelectric power schemes require business certainty. These major water uses have previously been subject to resource consent processes, where allocation limits have been set as a result of discussions with those responsible for native and trout fisheries.

The Council will also develop a water accounting system by 2017 in order to monitor and report in real time actual water use in the region, and will continue requiring consent holders for significant takes to install a water meter and provide water-use records to the Council.

Feedback and more information

Go to www.trc.govt.nz/draft-plan to find:

- The Draft Freshwater and Land Plan in full.
- A summary and background document.
- Info sheets and background papers.
- An online form for giving us feedback.

You can also send us your feedback by emailing info@trc.govt.nz or writing to the Council at Private Bag 713, Stratford 4352. Or contact the Council's freshwater planning team directly by calling 0800 736 222. We can give you more information, take your feedback or arrange a meeting.

Our deadline for feedback is Friday 26 June.

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