

CONCEPT SHEET 4

Farm dairy effluent

Dairy farming is important and well-established in Taranaki, where it dominates the ring plain and coastal terraces to take advantage of free-draining and fertile soils and reliable rainfall.

While Taranaki has reasonably good water quality, the way that farm dairy effluent is disposed of can impact on the environment. It needs to be managed carefully, especially if we aim to protect and enhance water quality.

The environmental effects associated with the disposal of effluent are a major pressure on freshwater quality. In particular the discharge of treated wastewater to water is no longer considered best practice. Such discharges can contain elevated levels of sediment, organic matter, inorganic nutrients, pathogenic micro-organisms and bacteria. These can reduce water quality and the amenity values of waterways, and are culturally offensive to Maori.

What the Draft Plan proposes

Currently farm dairy effluent can be discharged to land or water if the appropriate resource consent is obtained from the Taranaki Regional Council. Nationally there has been considerable work on developing best practice for farm dairy effluent management, on the basis that land treatment is preferable to discharge to water.

The Draft Plan seeks alignment with industry best practice by:

- Requiring farm dairy effluent to be discharged to land as a general rule.
- Allowing discharges of treated dairy effluent to water in exceptional circumstances – for example, on farms on high-risk soils and on the upper ring plain where there is high rainfall and drainage density, limiting the ability to irrigate to land. High levels of treatment would be required.



- Requiring land treatment systems to have adequately sized and lined holding ponds to meet storage requirements.
- Requiring feed pad effluent to be managed as part of the farm dairy effluent system.

Many farmers will need to change or upgrade their systems. In terms of pond lining, existing clay-lined systems are expected to meet the standard and the existing oxidation pond storage system is expected to provide sufficient storage for a land based discharge system in most cases.

Approximately 995 farms currently discharge dairy effluent to water only or have dual water-land systems, while the remaining 800 discharge to land.

The new requirements would generally come into effect as resource consents are renewed.



What would these changes achieve?

The Council has undertaken a stocktake of the evidence, studies and research relating to improved dairy effluent management. A key finding is that farm dairy effluent is valuable as a fertilizer and soil conditioner, and for its water content, which farmers should use to its fullest potential. Significant improvements in dairy farms' environmental performance can also be achieved through increased discharges to land, which does not need to be at the expense of economic performance.

The Draft Plan represents an adaptive change to future farm dairy effluent management. The proposed changes would result in greatly improved protection of water quality. Our waterways will be cleaner.

The proposed changes are an opportunity for the dairy industry in Taranaki to remain at the forefront of dairy productivity, best practice and respect for the environment.

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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