

## Background and summary

### *The 'what, why and how' of the Draft Freshwater and Land Plan for Taranaki*

#### **Working with people, caring for Taranaki**

This is about the Taranaki we enjoy today and the Taranaki we want for the future.

Freshwater and healthy soils are key factors in the thriving economy and great quality of life that make Taranaki one of New Zealand's leading regions. And right now, the Taranaki Regional Council is reviewing the 'rule book' governing the use of these vital natural resources.

The Council is firmly focused on what needs to be achieved, not just rules and policies for their own sake. And while the region's waterways are currently in reasonably good health, the Council is ambitious for improvements to keep Taranaki ahead of the field. We are confident the community shares this ambition.

Protecting and enhancing freshwater quality is a priority for today and for the future and the review aims to find the most practical and cost-effective ways to do so.

After a couple of years of detailed research and analysis, and engagement with iwi, agriculture, industry and others, the Council has drafted a new Freshwater and Land Plan.

The Draft Plan largely continues the existing freshwater and soil management regimes but with a number of important changes, particularly for those farming intensively on the ring plain and coastal terraces.

Now it's time for a wider conversation to test whether our proposals stack up and to see what might need changing before we advance to a more formal public consultation process late in 2015.

#### **What is a Freshwater and Land Plan?**

The Plan sets out policies and rules for taking freshwater, discharging to freshwater and discharging to land. It defines what can be done without a resource consent, what will require a consent, and what is completely prohibited. This regime will apply until the next Plan review, which is likely to be in a decade.

In conjunction with this, it also sets out a framework for the Council's continuing work to educate, advise and assist the community to maintain and enhance freshwater and soil health, for example through the successful Sustainable Land Management Programme.

#### **Background and context**

The new Plan will replace the Regional Fresh Water Plan and the Regional Soil Plan, which both date back to 2001. They're being merged because what happens on the land has a major effect on freshwater.

It's important to note that pressures on freshwater quality in Taranaki often differ markedly from those in other regions. Most notably, this region has not

seen the major changes in land use that have been experienced elsewhere, such as widespread dairy conversions resulting in increasingly intensive farming, or rapid urbanisation.

Generally speaking, Taranaki can be happy with the state of its rivers and streams. The Council's latest, peer-reviewed environmental monitoring data shows that the region's waterways are in reasonably good health, according to both ecological and physical-chemical measures.

This has not been achieved simply by good luck. Nor is it solely because the current Regional Freshwater Plan has proved to be an effective management tool. The entire regional community can take credit for the current state of our waterways. Large industrial waste treatment systems have been upgraded and almost all town waste discharges into rivers have been eliminated. Long reaches of rivers and streams are fenced and planted.

A report for the Council last year by Business and Economic Research Ltd (BERL) found that the annual environmental investment (capital and operating costs) by Taranaki industry, farmers and local bodies increased from \$47 million a year in 1997-2002 to \$117 million a year in 2008-2014. The bulk of this investment is aimed at protecting and enhancing freshwater quality.



### Why are changes needed?

The Council aims to build on the successes of the past and continue to improve water and soil management in the region. This reflects heightened community expectations and aspirations, not only regionally but also nationally and in vital overseas markets.

Protecting and further enhancing our freshwater and soil resources effectively 'future-proofs' the region. It ensures that Taranaki can continue to offer economic opportunities and desirable lifestyles to the children and grandchildren of today's citizens.

The Government has also introduced new requirements. Last year it directed Councils to maintain or improve overall freshwater quality, to set water quality objectives and limits, and to assess and manage water quantities to ensure that over-

allocation is avoided. It also introduced a set of environmental 'bottom lines', and a new requirement for Councils to zone their waterways into management units, with different rules for each.

In reviewing the way it manages freshwater, the Council has taken an evidence-based approach to ensure an efficient and effective approach based on tried and true methods.



### Changes suggested in the Draft Plan

- Requiring farm dairy effluent to be discharged (sprayed) to land, as a general rule. The previous approach had allowed farmers to treat dairy effluent before discharging it to waterways, although the number of land disposal systems and dual land-water systems has been steadily increasing in recent years.
- Requiring stock exclusion from waterways and completion of riparian planting on intensively farmed land on the ring plain and coastal terraces by 2020. This will lock in completion of the region's world-scale Riparian Management Programme, under which more than 3.5 million plants have already gone into the ground. 80% of ring plain streambanks are now fenced and 65% are vegetated.
- Increasing the protection for our rare wetlands, with tighter rules. Stronger rules on the piping of streams are also proposed, to protect fish habitats, as well as restrictions on the timing of stream work to protect whitebait spawning and fish migration.
- Establishing minimum flows (the point at which consent holders must stop taking water) and river allocation limits for all new water takes to safeguard the ecosystem health and mauri of all waterbodies.
- Increasing the recognition of tangata whenua values.
- Establishing a 5m setback from waterways for plantation forestry to avoid or minimise adverse effects on freshwater quality.
- Ensuring the well integrity rules for oil and gas activities align with the national Petroleum Regulations and international industry best practice, and efficiently regulate new technologies and techniques.
- Increasing the amount of gravel allowed to be taken as of right from river beds and lake beds. This has minimal impact if the right environmental controls are in place.

## What the Draft Plan does not include

Unlike other regions, nutrient caps are not proposed in Taranaki. The Council has worked closely with the industry and scientists to understand how nutrient run-off in Taranaki can be best managed to improve water quality.

Importantly, both dairy cow numbers and fertiliser use have changed little in the region over the past decade, unlike the regions which have seen widespread dairy conversions. Nutrient caps may be seen as an answer to increasing pressure on freshwater quality in these other places, but their issues are not the same as those in Taranaki.

Using the industry-standard nutrient budgeting model 'Overseer' to impose nutrient caps could impose very high costs on the dairy industry in Taranaki, to the detriment of the regional and national economies. And the clear environmental benefits would be uncertain and at present unknowable. The inaccuracy rate for Overseer in Taranaki is significantly higher than elsewhere in New Zealand – in the order of plus or minus 300%. There is too much uncertainty for Overseer and its associated models to be used as regulatory tools.

In contrast, the benefits of riparian fencing and planting are well known. Fences prevent stock from directly fouling waterways, while vegetation effectively intercepts runoff from stock effluent and fertiliser before it can enter the stream. The plants also provide shade for the stream habitat.

The community can share the Council's confidence that over time, the region's waterways will benefit greatly from riparian planting and the removal of farm dairy effluent.



## Who would be most affected?

The Council acknowledges that many **dairy farmers** may face significant costs to meet the proposed new provisions on riparian management and effluent management. That's why the Draft Plan allows time for transition. The Council will also continue to supply riparian plants at cost and

continue to help farmers work through the rules to ensure compliance.

The Council also acknowledges that because of high rainfall and particular soil types, a small percentage of farmers will be unable to discharge effluent to land. They would be able to obtain a discretionary resource consent allowing them to continue discharging pond-treated wastewater to water.

Dairy farmers will understand that the new provisions on riparian management and effluent management would be broadly aligned with industry requirements such as, for example, those in the Sustainable Dairy Water Accord.

Provisions in the Draft Plan would give dairy farmers certainty about their management approach for the future.



**Holders of existing water-take permits** would have priority over applicants for new permits. This is to ensure business certainty. However, when existing permits come up for renewal, issues around water efficiency would be looked at as part of the consent process.

The Council plans to develop a Freshwater Accounting System which will provide a real-time, transparent system to ensure that water is not over allocated. For catchments nearing the limit of allocation, new water permits will be strictly regulated.

The Draft Plan sets limits and bottom lines for all new water takes to ensure healthy ecosystems and high water quality for recreation. Water takes for reasonable domestic and stock requirements would be permitted activities not requiring a resource consent.

Those engaged in **forestry harvesting** on 5ha or more will find the new rules simpler to understand and comply with. They incorporate current industry good practice, and for most forestry harvesting activities mean that a resource consent would not be required.

Forestry harvesting on steep land would require the preparation of an Erosion and Sediment Control Plan, and the Council will produce guidelines to help operators put this together.

New planting and harvesting within 5m of a permanent river wider than a metre, a lake or a regionally significant wetland would require a resource consent. Council officers will be available to help operators work through the rules to ensure compliance.

For **other sectors** the Draft Plan largely means 'business as usual' in terms of freshwater use and discharges to land.

### How the Draft Plan is structured

The Draft Plan identifies issues which provide the context for its approach. These can be grouped into the following themes:

- Integrated land and water management.
- Water quality.
- Recognising tangata whenua values.
- Sustainable use and development of land and water resources.
- Ensuring efficient use of water resources.

To address these issues the Draft Plan has objectives, strategic and operational policies and methods, including rules.

The objectives are the resource management outcomes or goals. Under these objectives, freshwater and land resources are managed to:

- Provide for appropriate use and development (Taranaki is a working landscape).
- Maintain and enhance overall water quality.
- Ensure ecosystem health and the mauri of freshwater and land resources.
- Ensure our remaining wetlands with significant indigenous values are protected.
- Recognise and provide for tangata whenua as kaitiaki of our water and land.
- Promote the sustainable management of erosion-prone land.
- Ensure people's enjoyment of freshwater bodies for secondary contact recreation such as boating.
- Ensure use and development of our freshwater lakes and rivers does not increase the risk of flooding.

The policies are the how. They are the courses of action to achieve the objectives. The Draft Plan contains two forms of policies:

- General (overarching) policies – these apply to all activities and provide overall direction.
- Specific policies – these apply to activities, such as discharges, water takes, and structures.

The rules implement the policies and determine whether a person needs to apply for a resource

consent or whether the proposed activity can be undertaken without a resource consent (known as permitted activities).

### More information

Go to [www.trc.govt.nz/draft-plan](http://www.trc.govt.nz/draft-plan) to find:

- The Draft Freshwater and Land Plan in full.
- This summary and background document.
- Info sheets and background papers.
- An online form for sending feedback to the Council.

### Let us know what you think

Use the website to send us your feedback, or email [info@trc.govt.nz](mailto:info@trc.govt.nz) or write to the Council at Private Bag 713, Stratford 4352. You can also 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.

### What's next?

This is the timeline for the Freshwater and Land Plan.

- 1 May-26 June 2015: Sector meetings/ stakeholder/iwi consultation.
- 26 June 2015: Comments close on the Draft Plan.
- July-late November 2015: Consider comments, redraft plan.
- Early December 2015: Proposed Freshwater and Land Management Plan publicly notified.
- April 2016: Submissions close on publicly notified plan.
- Mid-2016: Public hearings.
- Late 2016: Decisions.



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