

# FARM ENVIRONMENT TRUST INC. (WAIKATO) SUBMISSION

**19<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2019**

1. My name is Neil Roderick McLean. I am the current secretary/treasurer of the Farm Environment Trust (Waikato) and have held this position for 3 years. My wife and I also farm 55 hectares milking 150 cows at Gordonton which is in the Komakarau sub catchment. I am also a private Farm Consultant for over 25 years with an interest in farm systems that have been optimised for productivity and profitability for the individual farm owner. My qualifications are as follows
  - a. B.Sc (Biochemistry) and B.Agric.Sc (Farm Management) from Massey University
  - b. Advanced Sustainable Nutrient Management (Massey)
  - c. QCONZ Certificate for Dairy Effluent Warrant of Fitness
2. I am a current director of AnexaFVC which is one of the larger veterinary practices in New Zealand.
3. The Farm Environment Trust (Waikato) was formed as a charitable trust in September 1995 and is currently administered by seven Trustees. The Trust supports the aspirations of Plan Change 1 (PC1) to deliver the vision and strategy of the Waikato River Authority (WRA) for the Waikato and Waipa river catchments. The underlying theme in the PC1 document is that the final end points will only be achieved through the goodwill and subsequent buy in by the various stakeholders. This strategy closely aligns to the principal objective of the Trust.
4. The Trust's principle charitable objective shall be the advancement and promotion of sustainable environmental management of land and other resources within the Waikato Region. There are other charitable objectives that involve the promotion of the primary objective by way of education, prizes, events and otherwise that will allow the principal objective to be achieved. The Trust was formed out of the vision of Gordon Stephenson who farmed at Waotu and believed in sustainability before it was popular theme. Gordon's other legacy was the establishment of the Queen Elizabeth II Trust. His farm has the first block of native bushland that has been covenanted for future generations.
5. The Trust supports the proposed timeline of 80 years to complete the vision and strategy. Contaminants have taken a period of time to accumulate and to take effect on the river and its catchments. The proposed timeline will give time for the Waikato Regional Council (WRC) to

negotiate with various stakeholders to make the necessary changes to allow meaningful progress. The timeline also gives the WRA and the WRC the opportunity to review and consider possible modifications to the overall plan when future science highlights a better path to achieve the vision and strategy.

6. As a result of the Farm Environment Award program that the Trust has overseen for the last 24 years is that it can confidently state that one size does not fit all. The Trust sees that it is essential that the sub-catchments are considered as the best method to achieve change while demonstrating fairness to all stakeholders. The Trust has seen that successful momentum for change is built up from the ground up through the actions of individuals. The environment and sustainability achievements of the early Award winners have been adopted by the vast majority of farmers now as good farming practice. The actions of individuals within a sub-catchment has a visible impact which will ultimately arrive in the Waikato or Waipa river to its benefit.
7. The adoption of any future necessary on farm management changes will be greatly enhanced by the demonstration of good science having a benefit to the sub-catchment and while protecting the investments that have been made on farm. This may mean that the emphasis on the four contaminants within a single sub-catchment will not be the same emphasis on other sub-catchments.
8. With reference to Table 3.11.1 the Trust supports a pragmatic solution to achieving the targets that are listed in the table. However, there needs to be a clear pathway set out in the proposed Farm Environment Plans (FEP) that will link to these desired targets back to the current base line measurements. The FEP must have a flexible approach that will allow the critical contaminant in that sub-catchment to be the focus. In the FEP there should be an acknowledgement of the cost of any change to the farm system that will be carried out by the land user. The cost of the change as proposed in a FEP needs to be linked to the value of the outcome for the land owner and the community. The benefit of this approach that the land user will have shown commitment to the FEP and the WRC and WRA can measure this against the benefits of the outcome for the community.
9. The Trust supports the concept of contamination offset as outlined in Policy 11 but recognizes that there is a limitation to the amount of offset that can be achieved. This is the area where directed research as well as innovations by stakeholders will provide successful outcomes.
10. The Trust is comfortable that Overseer has a role in establishing an on farm NRP but recognises that alternative decision tools may appear in the future. The limitations of Overseer are real and

subject to improvements as new understandings of the nutrient losses in the environment are developed. The role of Overseer or any alternatives should be focused on supplying advice rather than be a regulation tool as the reported outputs are influenced by factors outside of the FEP and land owners control.

11. The Trust sees great value of each farm understanding the impact of their activity has on the catchment through a FEP. The FEP may show a pathway to control the designated important contaminants in the sub-catchment but this may be at odds to the level of a particular contaminant in the total catchment. The Trust believes that the approach to having the greatest benefit in the sub-catchment is to identify the contaminant that is having the most impact and not to be too concerned about the others. An example is in the Waipa catchment sediment and phosphate loss are highlighted in the plan as more of a target than Nitrogen loss. A sensible plan in this sub-catchment to reduce sediment and phosphate loss may not target Nitrogen loss. The consequence of this approach is that Nitrogen loss may not reduce in the total catchment.
12. The FEP should have the economic as well as the environmental value included in the outcomes. Over the history of the Farm Environment Awards there has been a change in the standards set by the winners of the awards. In the early years the successful awards were focused on the attractive physical features of the farm. The recent awards have been for the total farm system impact on the environment which will include the present physical impact and the future consequence of the farm plan. The proposed length of PC1 to complete will allow the land users time to change their behaviour through a combination of good science and peer pressure.
13. The WRC has to have the relevant structures that allow FEP to be developed and the progress toward the desired end points monitored. At the moment there does not seem to be any consequences for the non-compliance to carry out the plan. A compliance policy that is clearly outlined will assist with the understanding of all parties. This policy will show all parties that the outcomes delivered under Objective 2 can be demonstrated and if necessary, change the weightings between social, economic and cultural wellbeing.