

SUBMISSION TO HEALTHY RIVERS WAI ORA PLAN: CHANGE ONE

Our business is based in the Waihou and Piako River catchments, but we have grave concerns around the restraints proposed in the Healthy Rivers Plan Change One, as we will be next to be regulated.

The following issues are of concern to us:

Land Use Restrictions: Using a blanket approach to restricting land use change is incompatible with farms having to establish a Farm Environmental Plan (FEP), where the land will not be utilised in an efficient manner environmentally, economically or socially.

Properties will be locked into systems that may not be beneficial to the land or the people. The plan must be flexible to allow choice. For example: as dairy farmers grow older or have health issues they may not wish to continue in their original chosen farming type and desire to change to grazing, dry stock or maybe cropping. Provisions like these must be allowed for in the Plan without consents at an additional inflated cost and/or long time delays. Property Rights of landowners will be eroded by harsh Land Use Restrictions.

A very disturbing feature of the Plan is

Rule 3.11.5.7 Land use change Non Complying

Changes in land use from woody vegetation to farming, or from dry stock to dairy, or arable cropping to dairy, require a Resource Consent.

Policy direction is that this application will generally be declined with the exception of Maori owned land.

This is practicing racism, all landowners must be treated the same. Maori have had an input into the rules but are allowing themselves to be exempt. All privileges and rights given to Maori in this Plan must be eliminated to make it fair and workable.

Slope: Classifying slope by > or < than 15 ° for cultivation is not allowing for the difference in soil types in the region. Much of the greater Waikato is classified as 'rolling land' and is farmed very successfully. There are already many waterways fenced and planted to catch water runoff and assist in the prevention of nitrogen leaching. A suggestion that any land greater than 25 ° slope should be excluded from farming will turn some high quality land into weed and pest infested scrub and have potential to become a fire risk in the dry seasons of summer and early autumn. No need for a reminder of the devastating recent fires in Northland, Hawkes Bay and Christchurch. Plantings of trees in such areas could also create issues with flooding when there is heavy rainfall; the wind can create havoc with fallen trees/ branches, and together with loose debris a dam can quickly be formed only to burst at an unexpected time. (This happened in Te Aroha and a life was lost as a result of a natural formed dam breaking).

From time to time small streams and drains need cleaning/maintenance, a sufficient setback distance must allow for this.

Nitrogen: We, as farmers are always concerned of nitrogen leeching, but nitrogen is an important chemical to life. Take a deep breath and most of what is inhaled is Nitrogen, in fact 78% of the atmosphere is made up of Nitrogen. All living things – plants, people, animals, trees, and insects - need Nitrogen and it is crucial to the natural processes to sustain living organisms. Many farmers have already fenced and planted waterways to filter any run off before it enters the waterway. We now spray our effluent onto pasture to fully utilise the nutrients available to plants/grass and to

lower our fertiliser applications. Gorse fixes Nitrogen in the soil and after rainfall, run-off from gorse covered land adds high amounts of Nitrogen to the waterways.

Other contaminants: It is overlooked that other contaminants, especially e-coli and sediment are polluters of our rivers.

E-coli: Waterways within the boundaries of cities and rural towns are high in e-coli. Raw sewerage is being allowed to be discharged into the Waikato River; other animal faeces (dogs), water fowl (ducks, geese, swans and pukeko) also contribute to the high e-coli levels. Wetlands are a 'lolly-shop' for water fowl and water tested after passing through such a water body have devastatingly high e-coli readings.

Sediment: There will always be run off from farmland and forests after heavy rain and this impedes the clarity of water as does the feral Koi carp which the Waikato River is heavily infested. This introduced species have been allowed to breed without any serious method of controlling their numbers. Rivers may never be clear enough for safe swimming if they are ignored; they also contribute to the e-coli levels. It is time to set up a catching and processing facility so they can be turned into a useful natural fertiliser.

Phosphorous: Is an essential nutrient for plants, and small amounts are a natural component of healthy rivers. Regional Councils focus their monitoring of phosphorus more on pastoral catchments than on other landscape use; therefore figures do not represent water quality uniformly across the regions.

Contaminants such as Lead, Copper, Chromium, Arsenic, Boron, lithium and Mercury are also toxic and enter waterways mostly through the urban/city storm water systems.

Lake Rotoroa, in Hamilton is a very dirty body of water with no cattle or sheep in sight. This Lake was once a much safer place for swimming than the close by Waikato River.

There is no doubt that the Nitrogen levels in waterways need to be controlled, and as stated, farmers are improving their environmental practice and improvements to water quality are now showing through.

Look at the other contaminates, especially e-coli, it is big contributor to the pollution our rivers and lakes and it is the most harmful contaminant to those who wish to use the rivers for swimming. We have to wonder just how much monitoring of waterways and rivers is focused on pastoral farming alone and what is the state of the water after it passes through the urban/city boundaries. Is it overlooked or kept hidden from the general public?

It is time to make it known that farmers are playing their part toward making our rivers healthy and at their own expense. We are sick and tired of "farmer bashing" in the papers, on the news and from the environmental activists that are uninformed of the true facts of the work already being done.

John and Margaret Osborne