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PROPOSED WAIKATO REGIONAL PLAN CHANGE WAIKATO AND WAIPA CATCHMENTS

(Please note that I live in the Taupo catchment and am member of the Farm Forestry Association)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

General Comments

I support the overall need for this plan change and support the overall direction. However it is of concern that once again we rely on grand parenting the existing nitrogen discharge to achieve a halt from intensification.

Although land use capability is discussed I think that this concept needs to have a stronger emphasis, especially after the first decade. It would be helpful if farming organisations took a lead on this issue. I continue to see cattle on steep slopes which is both uneconomic in the long term and destructive on the environment.

In the early 2000s I listened to scientists who stated then that even if we fenced all the water bodies we would still need to reduce the total nitrogen discharge level by 10%. Since then there has been extensive forest clearance and conversion to dairy farming. This could have been partially mitigated by the conversion of steep land into woody vegetation. I did not see this happen. Therefore more probably needs to be done to achieve the vision, unless of course you change the measure for swimmable and thus increase the likelihood that people will get sick.

Specifics

Stock, (cattle deer horses and pigs) exclusion from waterbodies, set backs, and riparian planting.

I strongly support the above requirements

Permitted Activity Rule 3.11.5.2. 4c.

“No part of the property or enterprise over 15 degrees slope is cultivated or grazed-“

I support this provision that encourages alternative uses of steeper land other than for the grazing of animals. However I do not object to grazing by sheep.

Heavy animals can shred the hillsides, increase erosion and thus cause the loss of precious topsoil into water bodies. This can increase the flood risk for downstream communities as well as smothering benthic communities and filling up estuaries. Denuding of the hill country accentuates the need for flood protection further down the catchment and thus adds cost to other areas.

Retain this rule though sheep grazing could be allowed.

Schedule 1. 2a ii.

“For areas with a slope exceeding 25 degrees and where fencing is impracticable, the provision of alternative measures.”

The grazing of horses cattle deer and pigs should not be permitted on land over 25 degrees. They simply shred the land and thus cause increased erosion with ongoing detrimental effects on water quality, increased flooding, and damage to properties further down the catchment. The continued loss of topsoil by accelerated erosion from our steep country is a nonsense and needs to be significantly reduced.

Therefore allowing alternatives to fencing is giving the wrong message re the grazing of heavy animals on steep land. This practice should be discouraged.

Decision Sought

Remove this exemption from fencing unless the steep areas within the paddock are only a small proportion.

In conclusion

Politically we hear much about how we need to be wealthy to be environmentally friendly. Yet I notice the greatest destruction of topsoil and deforestation when dairy prices are high. I agree with the discussion in the document re land use capability, but see little of this in practice except on farm forestry tours and Farm Environment Awards. I think it could be difficult to legislate land use according to capability. Therefore this concept should be promoted by land use authorities and farming organisations.

Thank you for proceeding with this plan.



Laurie Burdett

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