



Information for livestock farmers

The Government has a vision to see a noticeable improvement in freshwater quality in five years and to restore our freshwater to a healthier state within a generation. To achieve this, everyone has a part to play.

We need your feedback on the proposals to make sure they are practical and will achieve the Government's vision in the best way. See the box at the end of this information sheet to find out how you can have your say.

What's the problem?

We need to reduce the amount of pollution – nitrogen, phosphorus, sediment, *E. coli* and other contaminants – entering our waterways from our cities and from our farms. These contaminants can be harmful to human health and damaging to freshwater fish and other aquatic species. Higher nitrogen levels contribute to growth of slime and other harmful plants.

To do this, we are proposing **new requirements** to make real change for both urban and rural areas. This information sheet focuses on potential impacts for livestock farmers.

The Government is committed to supporting farmers to make the further changes needed to stop water quality getting worse, and starting the process of reversing past damage. We will continue to work with the primary sector through the transition to more sustainable land and water use. See the [What support will be provided](#) section for more details of the support that's available.

What are we proposing?

Many farmers are already following good practice and taking action to reduce their impact on freshwater. However, the proposals in the discussion document are intended to make sure everyone contributes. We want to make best practice, usual practice.

We are proposing changes to four key policies and standards:

1. The **National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management** (Freshwater NPS) provides direction on how local authorities should carry out their responsibilities under the Resource Management Act (RMA) for managing freshwater. The Freshwater NPS is implemented in regional and district planning documents.

2. The **National Environmental Standards for Freshwater** (Freshwater NES) set specific rules that need to be met.
3. **Regulations made under section 360 of the RMA** (Section 360 Regulations) set technical and/or complex requirements for specific activities, duties or other RMA matters.
4. **Telemetry** for water take.

What you would need to do in the next five years

These are the actions that will need to happen at pace.

Under the proposed new Freshwater NES and stock exclusion regulations, all farmers will need to:

1. **Have a farm plan that addresses freshwater**
Your farm plan will identify what you will do to reduce contamination and improve water health. Part of this is planning how you will keep stock out of streams less than a metre wide.
2. **Apply for a resource consent before changing to a more intense land use**
For example, such as moving from sheep and beef farming to dairying. These are interim controls on intensification until councils have new plans in place, so should only remain for five years.
3. **Exclude stock from rivers, wetlands and lakes**
This includes streams more than a metre wide, on flat and gently rolling country, and in steeper country with high stock carrying capacity. This will include setbacks and stock crossings.

Depending on the nature of your land and activities, **you may also have to do these things:**

1. **Look after wetlands and streams** – there will be tight restrictions on draining or clearing a wetland, and on piping or infilling streams.
2. **Meet minimum standards for intensive winter grazing of forage crops** – and potentially apply for a resource consent if you want to plant large areas or crop steeper land.
3. **Get a resource consent for any stock holding areas and feedlots** – feed pads, wintering pads, standoff pads and loafing pads if animals are held there for more than 30 days a year or 10 days in a row. The consent will require you to manage effluent, and be 50 metres back from a waterway.
4. **Report on water usage using telemetry** – if you extract large amounts of water.
5. **Reduce excessive rates of nitrogen loss** – if you're in a high nitrate/nitrogen catchment with no existing regional council rules on nitrogen loss and have very high rates of nitrogen loss. This will be expected to happen within five years. This is one option. Other options to address excessive nitrogen loss is a cap on fertiliser use or requiring nitrogen to be managed under farm environment plans from 2021. We are seeking feedback from you on these options.

What you would need to do longer term

These are the actions that will need to be part of your future planning, with implementation over a longer time, a generation or more.

As happens now, regional councils will develop plans and rules that farmers need to abide by, and you will be able to be part of this process at a catchment level.

The proposed new Freshwater NPS would raise the bar on ecosystem health. There are options for new bottom lines for nitrogen, phosphorus, *E. Coli* and sediment, which, if introduced, would require

councils to do more to reduce levels of these contaminants over coming decades. This might mean land-use change in some catchments.

The Government will decide on these proposed new bottom lines after consultation, and wants to fully understand what the potential impacts will be, so have your say and let us know.

Councils have until 2025 to develop regional plans and rules, and set objectives and targets. Because every catchment and region is different, those plans can set their own timelines for reducing pollution to meet regional objectives and targets. The overall aim is to improve our freshwater quality in a generation.

Who developed these proposals?

A taskforce of people from the Ministry for the Environment, Ministry for Primary Industries, and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, with input and advice from a number of advisory groups, made up of scientists, farmers and growers, agribusiness leaders, environmental groups, resource management law specialists, and others.

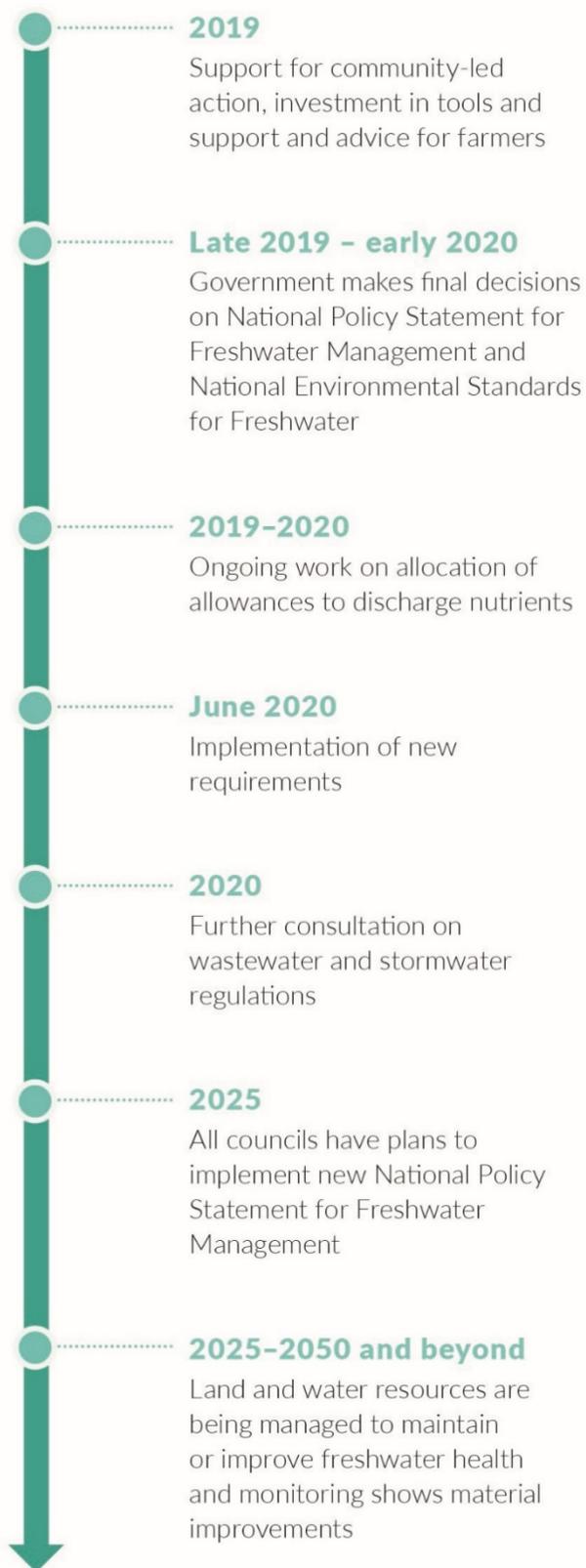
Members of the advisory groups were selected based on their expertise and insight.

See the Ministry for the Environment website for a list of members (<https://www.mfe.govt.nz/fresh-water/fresh-water-and-government/freshwater-work-programme>) and independent reports from the four advisory groups (<https://www.mfe.govt.nz/consultation/action-for-healthy-waterways>).

Out of scope for this consultation

- Broader changes to the resource management system and how freshwater is managed. The advisory groups made a number of recommendations that will be considered as part of the Government's Resource Management Act reforms.
- Allocation of allowances to discharge nitrogen and water takes. These issues will be addressed on a longer timeframe, starting with nitrogen discharge allocation.

Timeline



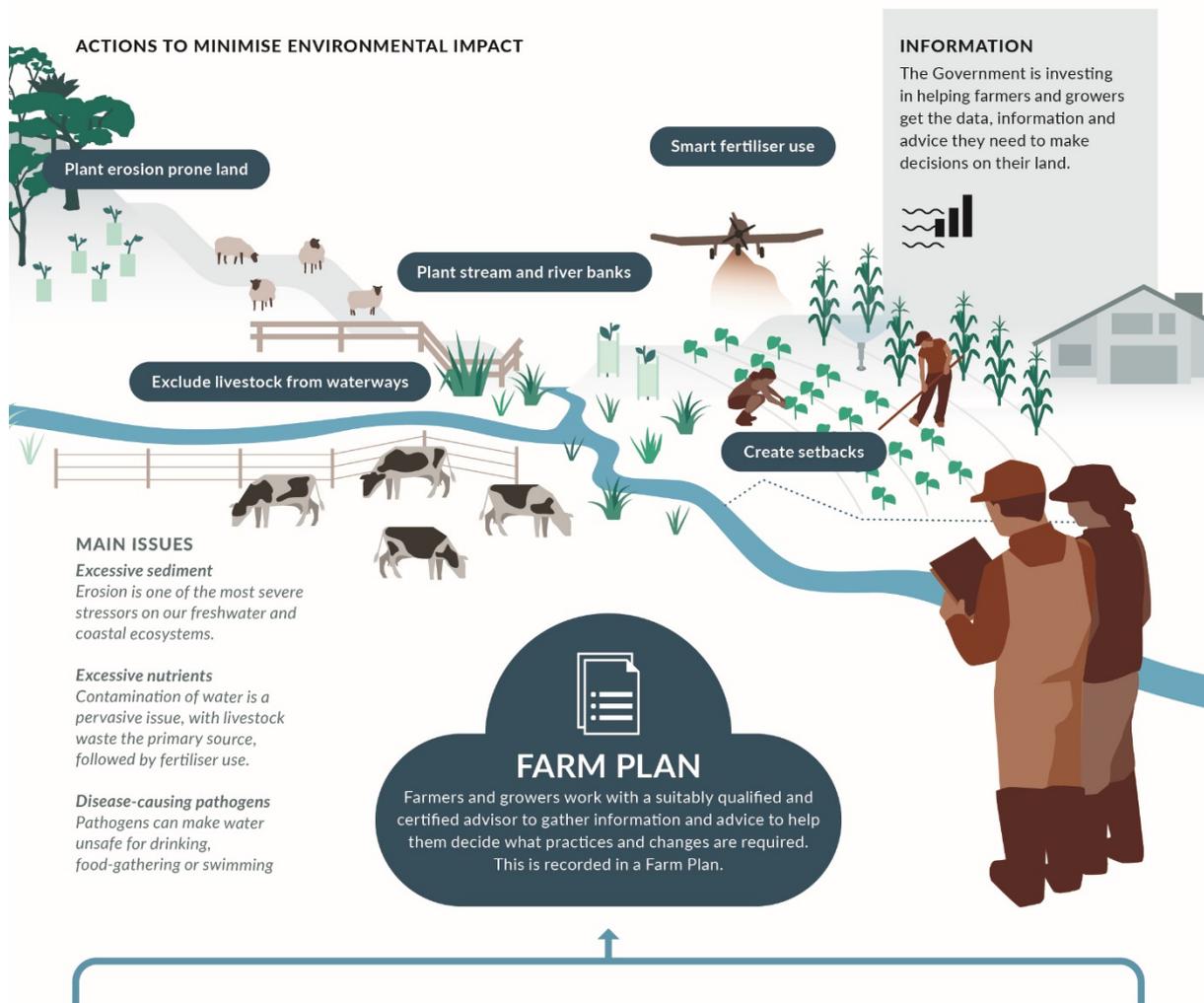
Detail of the main proposals

Improving farm practices through farm planning

We propose to require all farmers to have a freshwater module of a farm plan by 2025.

Farm plan freshwater module

What farmers and growers need to consider when planning for ecosystem health.



ELEMENTS OF A FRESHWATER MODULE

Including a freshwater module in farm planning is a step towards environmentally-sustainable production, protection of our freshwater environment, and meeting consumers' expectations.

FARM MAP

Include a map identifying waterways and risks to water quality such as sources of contaminants and areas prone to high erosion.



RISK ASSESSMENT

Assess the risk across specific activities including irrigation, application of nutrients, effluent management, stock exclusion, and farm rubbish pits.



ACTION PLAN

Create, implement and maintain a schedule of actions for managing identified features and address identified risks.



Managing the environmental impact of agriculture and horticulture requires different actions depending on the farm type, the location and type of land, the stock and crops being grown, and other local circumstances. Many farmers and growers are using farm plans to help them understand and respond to the unique environmental situation on their properties.

Under this proposal, freshwater modules would be independently audited and progress would be reported to the regional council. The introduction of the freshwater module requirements would be phased in, starting with higher-risk activities and catchments where pressure on freshwater is higher.

We acknowledge there are costs associated with farm planning – around \$3,500 to develop a plan, depending on the degree of preparedness and complexity.

Existing industry body or agribusiness farm plans in use could be recognised provided they meet national standards, though they may need development over time.

We want feedback on how to make farm plans as cost effective and environmentally effective as possible.

See pages 65–69 of the discussion document for details.

Restricting further intensification of rural land use

By 2025, it is anticipated that regional council implementation of the Freshwater NPS will manage intensification to ensure it remains within sustainable limits for the affected land and water.

In the meantime, we propose a short-term restriction on land-use changes and increases in farm inputs by setting out the requirements that must be met before a resource consent for the change is granted.

We propose to apply restrictions to the following activities:

- increases in the area of land in irrigated pastoral, arable or horticultural production above 10 hectares
- changes in land use above 10 hectares from:
 - arable, deer, sheep or beef to dairy-support
 - arable, deer, dairy-support, sheep, or beef to dairy
 - woody vegetation or forestry to any pastoral use
- increases in forage cropping beyond the area in intensive winter grazing in the past five years; or if the applicant didn't previously carry out intensive winter grazing, then beyond a minimum threshold. We are seeking feedback on this minimum threshold – whether it should be 30 hectares or 5 per cent of the property, or 50 hectares or 10 per cent of the property, or somewhere between.

See pages 64–65 of the discussion document for details.

Excluding stock from waterways

Keeping livestock out of waterways is one of the simplest and most direct ways of protecting waterbodies from pollution.

We are proposing a two-tier approach; national standards, enforced by regional councils for larger waterbodies on flat and rolling land; and using farm plans to develop bespoke approaches for excluding stock from smaller streams and drains on hill country.

National standards for larger waterbodies including streams more than a metre wide

We propose to set minimum requirements for excluding dairy and beef cattle, pigs and deer from wetlands, lakes and rivers more than one metre wide, in flat and gently-rolling (low-slope) areas; and in other areas where the concentration of cattle or deer is similar to dairy stocking rates. These requirements must be complied with within one year for dairy cattle and pigs, and within three years for beef cattle and deer.

Low-slope land

Low-slope land has been mapped nationally, and cadastral maps are available online through the Ministry for the Environment website:

<https://mfe.maps.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=1ecbdd2c04e147599a519a229f327d0f>.

We have mapped three variants. These are based on land parcels with a mean slope of less than or equal to five degrees, seven degrees, or 10 degrees. We are seeking feedback on which variant should be used.

Land outside the low-slope category

In areas that are not mapped as low-slope, stock exclusion is still important, particularly where the land can sustain reasonably intensive uses. The stock exclusion requirements (that is, to exclude cattle, pigs and deer) will therefore also apply to areas where:

- at the farm scale, the land has a base carrying capacity equal to or greater than 14 stock units per hectare
- at the paddock scale, the land has a base carrying capacity equal to or greater than 18 stock units per hectare (regardless of the average carrying capacity of the farm)
- at the paddock scale, the land is or has previously been irrigated
- at the paddock scale, the land is used for fodder crops when cattle, pigs or deer are on that land, or is used for break-feeding.

If these proposals are adopted, it would be necessary to develop a methodology (or identify an existing methodology) to calculate carrying capacity. The methodology could be based on the one used for calculating carrying capacity on Crown Pastoral Land.

In practice, stock exclusion will mean permanent or temporary fencing, but the requirements will allow the use of other technology such as 'virtual' fencing and 'smart' stock collars.

See pages 73–76 of the discussion document for details.

Protecting wetlands and streams

Wetlands support a high proportion of threatened species – 67 per cent of freshwater and estuarine fish species and 13 per cent of nationally threatened plant species, as well as critically endangered birds. They also act as the 'kidneys' of the land and giant sponges by filtering contaminants, contribute to erosion control, carbon sequestration, and buffer against floods and storm surges.

We propose to protect remaining natural wetlands and put tighter controls on certain activities that damage inland and coastal wetlands. This does not include wet pasture or paddocks where water temporarily ponds after rain, or that contain patches of exotic sedge or rush species, or constructed wetlands.

Through the new Freshwater NPS, regional councils would be required to identify all existing natural inland wetlands, monitor their health, set policies to protect them, and think about how to make restoration easier.

Through a new Freshwater NES there would also be restrictions on activities that are the most destructive to inland and coastal wetlands: these are drainage, damming, diversion, water takes, reclamation, or disturbance of the bed, or clearance of indigenous vegetation.

In addition, streams (in urban and rural areas) will not be piped or filled in unless there is no other option, for example to provide a crossing.

See pages 44–45 of the discussion document for details.

Reducing pollution from stock holding areas

Holding stock in a concentrated area creates a higher risk of pollution (nutrients and pathogens) entering waterways. To mitigate that risk, stock holding areas would be required to get a resource consent that would set standards for permeability and managing effluent. This would apply to areas where stock are held for a shorter time than in a feedlot but longer than in yards or milking sheds (more than 30 days in a year or more than 10 days in a row).

Stock holding includes management practices such as feed pads, wintering pads, standoff pads, and loafing pads.

Sacrifice paddocks will need to be more than 50 metres from a waterway, or they will need a consent, and do not have any critical source areas.

This proposal does not include stock yards, milking sheds, shearing sheds, or woolsheds.

We recognise this may lead to a large number of consent applications, and we are seeking feedback on what would be required to ensure this proposal could be effectively implemented.

See page 79 of the discussion document for details.

Controlling intensive winter grazing

We propose that winter grazing would be a permitted activity if the grazing management meets standards, and the area is below a defined threshold. Farmers would have six months to comply with the new standards after the regulations come into effect (expected to be June 2020).

There are two options for the standards:

1. Nationally-set standards through regulation. A resource consent would be required for winter grazing above a defined area and on steep land. We are seeking feedback on where the thresholds and national standards should be set.
2. Current industry-set standards. Under this option, a resource consent would be required for winter grazing not meeting industry-set standards.

These standards would be supplemented by best practice standard guidance for issues such as strip grazing, protecting critical source areas, and crop cover as part of freshwater modules in farm plans.

See pages 76–78 of the discussion document for details.

Immediate action to reduce excessive nitrogen loss

Nitrogen contamination of water is a pervasive issue, with livestock effluent the primary source, followed by fertiliser use. It remains one of the most significant impacts of agriculture and horticulture on freshwater health.

By 2025, it is anticipated that regional council implementation of the current Freshwater NPS will mean that every council will have a process in place to reduce contaminant losses, including nitrate-nitrogen leaching.

In the interim, immediate short-term action is needed to reduce excessive nitrogen leaching arising from poor management practices, to 'hold the line' on water quality. At this point, there are about a dozen catchments likely to be affected, half of which are in Southland. The catchments to which these interim measures would apply, and how they have been identified, is set out on page 72 of the discussion document.

There are three options for rapid reduction of excessive nutrient leaching:

1. Setting a cap in catchments with high nitrate-nitrogen levels, so farms with excessive losses will have to reduce over five years to come under the cap.
2. Setting a national nitrogen fertiliser cap.
3. Requiring farmers in catchments with high nitrate-nitrogen levels to show, in the freshwater module in their farm plan, how they will reduce nitrogen leaching, and auditing their progress.

See pages 70–73 of the discussion document for details.

What support will be provided

The Government has committed substantial funding for support programmes and products for farmers over the next four years:

- \$35 million to provide practical advice, information, tools and support for farmers and growers to improve operations on the ground
- \$12 million to support Māori landowners and agribusinesses to realise greater value and sustainability from their land
- \$5 million to build primary industry advisor capabilities and pathways
- \$43 million to upgrade relevant decision support tools, like Overseer® and S-Map
- almost \$17 million to improve on-farm data and monitoring.

The Ministry for Primary Industries has a range of funding available to encourage innovation, and support agriculture and horticulture producers and their communities: www.mpi.govt.nz/funding-and-programmes/.

Extension programmes

These will support farmers and growers across the country to learn from one another by sharing practical information, insights, advice and developing solutions to resolve local issues.

Over the next four years, we expect up to 2,200 farmers and growers in targeted catchments and regions to have direct on-the-ground support as part of extension programmes. These will start to be set up in late 2019 and through 2020.

Certified farm planners

To ensure farmers and growers have access to quality advice and support, work is progressing on a certification scheme for suitably qualified and experienced farm environment planners who would work with farmers to develop, implement and monitor farm plans. Certified farm planners would have to undertake on-going professional development activities. The certification scheme is anticipated to support the requirements in the proposed Freshwater NES.

Funding and advice available for community and on-farm planting projects

These websites contain numerous case studies of farmers and communities who have been taking care of their land for generations, and others who have started more recently to make changes. There are also links to sources of funding support to make improvements on your farm. Many councils also offer direct support and/or advice.

Dairy NZ – advice on caring for waterways

www.dairynz.co.nz/environment/waterways/

Ministry for the Environment – Good Farming Practice working group and guides

www.mfe.govt.nz/fresh-water/we-all-have-role-play/land

Ministry for the Environment - Freshwater Improvement fund and projects

www.mfe.govt.nz/more/funding/freshwater-improvement-fund/freshwater-improvement-fund-projects/table-of-projects

Ministry for Primary Industries – guidance on healthy waterways and links to other information

www.mpi.govt.nz/growing-and-harvesting/land-care-and-farm-management/farm-management-for-healthy-waterways/

Ministry for Primary Industries – hill country erosion programme

www.mpi.govt.nz/funding-and-programmes/environment-and-natural-resources/hill-country-erosion-programme/funded-hill-country-erosion-programmes/

NZ Landcare Trust – find out how to set up a catchment group

www.landcare.org.nz/resource-item/starting-a-catchment-group

One Billion Trees – Matariki Tu Rākau community planting projects

www.teururakau.govt.nz/funding-and-programmes/forestry/planting-one-billion-trees/matariki-tu-rakau/

One Billion Trees – landowner planting grants

www.teururakau.govt.nz/funding-and-programmes/forestry/planting-one-billion-trees/one-billion-tree-fund/#landowner

Rural Support Trusts

Are you a bit concerned about someone – a family member, partner, worker, yourself?

Your local Rural Support Trust is a great place to start for a free and confidential chat. Rural Support Trusts have people experienced in farming, adverse events, and stress management and, with your agreement, can put you in touch with other services that can help.

Call 0800 787 254 (0800 RURAL HELP) to arrange a free and confidential chat on the phone, at your place, or somewhere else that suits you.

www.rural-support.org.nz

Have your say

We welcome your feedback on this discussion document. Download the full document or a six page summary on our website: www.mfe.govt.nz/consultation/action-for-healthy-waterways.

You can make a submission in three ways.

1. Online

Use our online submission tool, available at <https://www.mfe.govt.nz/consultation/action-for-healthy-waterways>. **This is our preferred way to receive submissions.**

2. By post

Send your submission to:

Freshwater submissions
Ministry for the Environment
PO Box 10362
Wellington 6143

Please include:

- the title of the consultation (Action for healthy waterways)
- your name or organisation
- your postal address
- your telephone number
- your email address.

3. By email

Send your submission to consultation.freshwater@mfe.govt.nz as a PDF or Microsoft Word document (2003 or later version).

Submissions close at 5pm on Thursday 17 October 2019.

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