



Information for growers

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 growers.

The Government is committed to supporting growers 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 growers 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 three 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. **Telemetry** for water take.

What you would need to do by 2026

These are the actions that would need to happen in the short term.

Under the proposed new Freshwater NES, growers will need to:

- **Have a farm plan that addresses freshwater**
Your farm plan will identify risks to the health of freshwater from land where you are growing crops (or plan to), and identify what you will do to reduce any current contamination and improve water health going forward. This may be a stand-alone freshwater module, or part of a broader farm plan.
 - Vegetable growers will need a freshwater module of a farm plan by 2022.
 - All other growers, including arable farmers, will need a freshwater module of a farm plan by 2025.
- **Report on water usage using telemetry** – if using more than 5 litres per second.
- **Apply for a resource consent before changing to a more intense land use**
This includes if you plan to increase the area in commercial vegetable production or irrigated production.
- **Better protect wetlands** – this will only apply to growers with wetlands.
- **Reduce excessive nitrogen leaching** – this will only apply to growers in high-nitrate catchments.

You can find more details about these proposals in this information sheet.

There are other requirements for arable farmers who run livestock. If this applies to you, you should also read the *Information for Livestock Farmers* available at www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/fresh-water/essential-freshwater-action-healthy-waterways-information-livestock-farmers.

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 for land and freshwater use that growers need to abide by, and you will be able to be part of this process at a catchment level through your council's local planning rounds.

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 receiving feedback through this consultation. We want to fully understand what the potential impacts will be on growers, 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 goals. 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



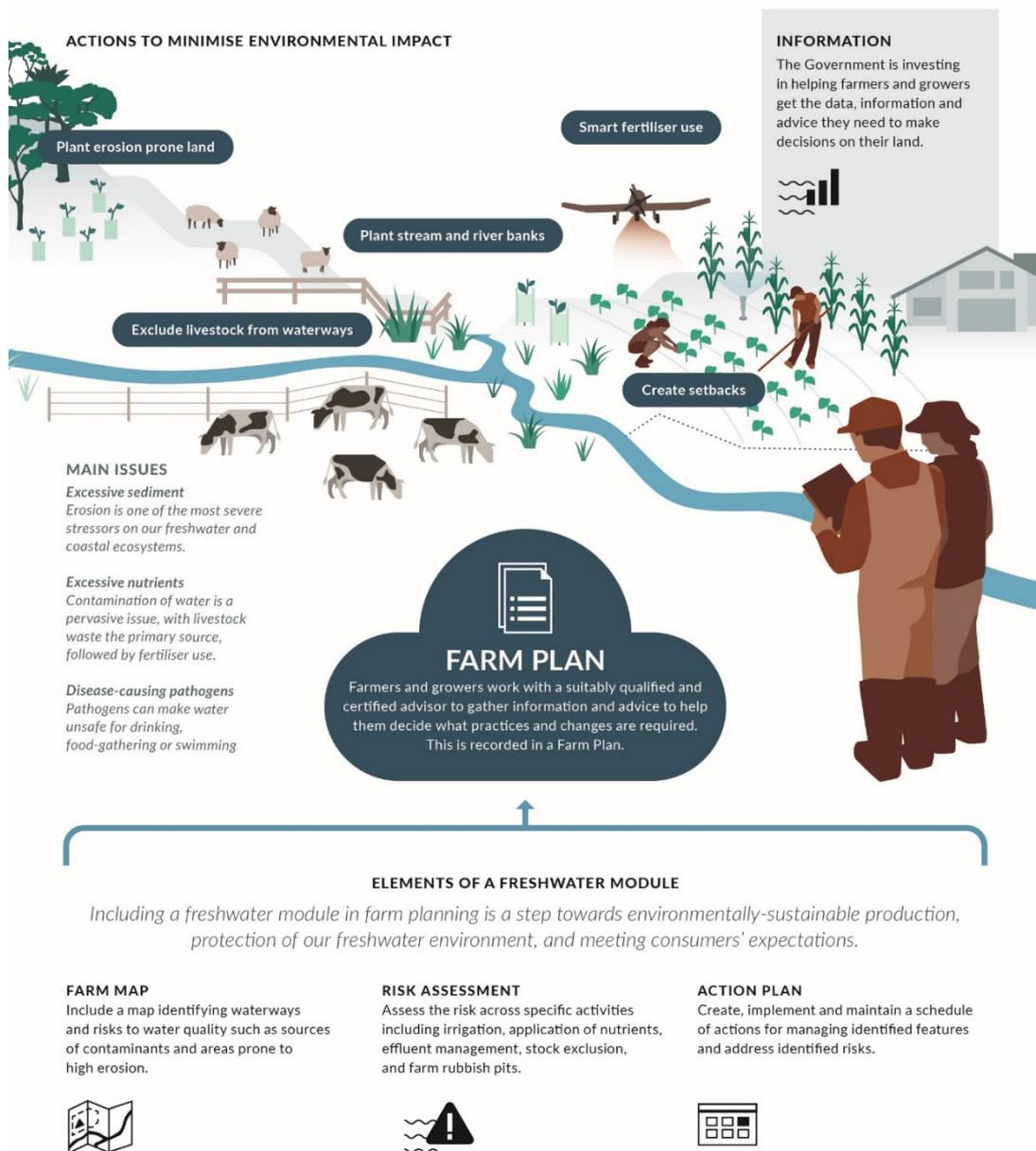
Detail of the main proposals

Improving growing practices through farm planning

We propose requiring all growers to have a freshwater module of a farm plan by the end of 2025.

Farm plan freshwater module

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



The introduction of the freshwater module requirements would be phased in, starting with higher-risk activities and catchments where pressure on freshwater is higher. Vegetable growers would be in the first tranche for farm plans, with plans required within two years of enactment of the Freshwater NES, likely mid-2022.

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.

Real-time reporting of water use

New Zealand already has a mandatory requirement to record the amount of water taken for most water permits. Currently, each region mostly has installed and verified measuring devices. However, the data supplied to councils is often inconsistent, limiting its usefulness for compliance, monitoring and enforcement purposes. For example, some records are supplied late, and can be in a range of formats from annual summaries on paper to real-time electronic reporting. Some data supplied has missing records or suspicious totals, eg, exactly the same amount of water being taken every day.

We propose amending the current regulations, to mandate telemetry (direct electronic transmission). This requires measuring water use every 15 minutes and transmitting daily electronic records using the cellular network, or where not available, wireless or satellite internet.

Growers with water permits for takes over 5 litres per second will need to install a telemetry unit to their water meter. The requirement would be rolled out over time, starting with consents of 20 litres per second or more having telemetry in place within two years after the regulations come into force, through to six years for smaller consents.

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.

For commercial vegetable growing, we propose that any grower who wants to increase the area of land they use for commercial vegetable growing in a freshwater management unit (beyond their highest area over the past five years) would have to get a consent. We are seeking feedback on options for resource consent requirements for land-use change to commercial vegetable growing.

- Option 1 – No increase in contaminant discharges – the applicant must have a freshwater module in a farm plan and cannot increase nitrogen, phosphorus, sediment or microbial pathogen discharges above the enterprise’s 2013–18 baseline (average for this period).
- Option 2 – Operating above good management practice – the applicant must have a freshwater module of a farm plan and must operate above good management practice.

For other types of intensification, we propose to apply restrictions to the following activities:

- increases in the area of land in irrigated pastoral, arable or horticultural production of 10 hectares or more
- 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.

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 4445 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, but only Options 2 and 3 below are relevant for arable and horticultural growers:

1. Setting a cap in catchments with high nitrate-nitrogen levels, so pastoral farms with excessive losses will have to reduce over five years to come under the cap.
2. Setting national nitrogen fertiliser caps.
3. Requiring growers 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 and growers 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 growers 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 or advice.

Good Farming Practice working group and guides

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

Horticulture NZ Good Practice Guidelines and Codes of Practice

www.hortnz.co.nz/our-work/natural-resources/?Sort=Good%20Management%20Practice

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/

NZ Farm Environment Trust Ballance Award winners. These farmers and growers lead the way in sustainable practice.

www.nzfeatrust.org.nz/award-winners

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

Sector newsletters and magazines such as From the Ground Up, NZ Grower, and The Orchardist include articles with practical advice and growers talking about how they have improved their property's environmental footprint.

www.far.org.nz/articles/1229/from-the-ground-up-issue-98

www.hortnz.co.nz/news-events-and-media/magazines/nzgrower/

www.hortnz.co.nz/news-events-and-media/magazines/the-orchardist/

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.