



Freshwater farm plans

# Developing a freshwater farm plan



Ministry for the  
**Environment**  
*Manatū Mō Te Taiao*



**Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa**  
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# What are freshwater farm plans?

Freshwater farm plans are a regulated farm planning process for farmers and growers that will provide a practical way to identify, manage and reduce the impact of farming on the freshwater environment.

Freshwater farm plans have been legislated under Part 9A of the [Resource Management Act \(RMA\) 1991](#) and the [Resource Management \(Freshwater Farm Plans\) Regulations 2023](#) (the regulations).

Freshwater farm plans are a key part of the 2020 *Essential Freshwater* package. The package was introduced to:

- stop further decline to the health of our freshwater
- improve water quality
- reverse past damage
- bring our waterways to a healthy state within a generation.

The central concept of Essential Freshwater is Te Mana o te Wai – healthy freshwater supports healthy communities, a healthy environment, and a healthy economy. Te Mana o te Wai prioritises, the health and wellbeing of freshwater ecosystems, then the health of people, followed by commercial use.

Freshwater farm plans are intended to work in combination with the Essential Freshwater package which includes the:

- [National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 \(NPS-FM\)](#)
- [the Resource Management \(National Environmental Standards for Freshwater\) Regulations 2020 \(NES-F\)](#)
- [the Resource Management \(Stock Exclusion\) Regulations 2020 \(Stock Exclusion Regulations\)](#).

Over time, freshwater farm plans are expected to become a key tool for farmers and growers to manage all their freshwater requirements. They will also help farmers to understand and apply the principles of Te Mana o te Wai in the context of their farming operation, and to ensure their farming practices contribute to restoring the health of our waterways.

## Why freshwater farm plans?

Having a freshwater farm plan will help you to build on the work you are already doing to improve the health of freshwater and freshwater ecosystems in your catchment.

Your freshwater farm plan will be:

- a farm planning process that puts the health of the whenua (land) and wai (water) at the centre of your decision-making
- a way to plan for all on-farm freshwater management practices, including actions to meet existing regulatory requirements and council rules

- tailored to your unique set of circumstances based on, your local catchment, your farm landscape and climate, and your farming system
- a record of the practical steps you're taking now and into the future to improve freshwater quality in your local catchment.

## How to use this document

This document is intended to help you understand what is required under Part 9A of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA, the Act) and the Resource Management (Freshwater Farm Plans) Regulations 2023 when developing your freshwater farm plan (the plan).

It can be used to support development of your plan through one of the pathways outlined in the section below.

See the Ministry for the Environment's (the Ministry) [Freshwater farm plan system overview](#) for further information on the development, certification and audit process.

## Certification requirements

Certification requirements set out the information your freshwater farm plan must contain for it to be certified. The sections below will outline what is needed to meet certification requirements at each step of the freshwater farm plan process.

There are a variety of options available to assist you in preparing your freshwater farm plan to meet the certification requirements:

- Use your existing farm environment plan (or similar) as a starting point.
- Refer to the Ministry's guidance on [Developing a Freshwater Farm Plan](#).
- Refer to relevant regional council and/or industry resources.

It is the responsibility of the farm operator to ensure that the plan meets certification requirements.

You (the farm operator) can develop your plan yourself, or you can engage an advisor or freshwater farm plan certifier to develop the plan on your behalf. For more information on plan development pathways and the certification process see the Ministry's [Freshwater farm plan system overview](#).

See [appendix 2](#) for a full list of certification requirements.

## Data reporting

Some data from your freshwater farm plan will be reported to your regional council at the time your plan is certified.

The reported data will be used to help regional councils and the government to monitor, evaluate and refine the freshwater farm plan system over time and to ensure that it is delivering outcomes and operating effectively.

Your certifier will report the following information from your plan to your regional council within five working days of notifying you (and the regional council) of the final certification decision:

- administrative information (see [section 1](#))
- action plan information (see [section 5](#))
- a statement identifying any instances where you intend to use your plan to meet other regulatory requirements (see below).

A freshwater farm plan data reporting system is under development to support the recording of this data.

## Data groupings

When developing your action plan, it is recommended that you use the groupings suggested in [appendix 3](#) and [appendix 4](#) to group farming/growing activities and risks.

Using the suggested groupings will:

- enable efficient and effective reporting
- enable quicker and easier inputting
- provide more informative data outputs.

You could also use the groupings to organise your information as you work through the risk identification and risk management sections of your plan.

## Reliance on a freshwater farm plan to meet other regulatory requirements

In some instances, you will be able to use your freshwater farm plan to meet other freshwater regulatory requirements (eg, regional plan rules, national environmental standards, regulations under Section 360 of the RMA). This applies only to requirements where that regulation specifically allows for a freshwater farm plan pathway to be used.

If you are using your plan to meet other regulatory requirements this must be referenced in your plan. Once your plan has been certified, your certifier will report to your regional council any instance where you intend to rely on your plan to meet other requirements.

If you intend to use your plan to meet other requirements (eg, intensive winter grazing), it is recommended that you consult guidance on those specific regulations to ensure that you are meeting all requirements.

See the Ministry for Primary Industries' website for further information on [intensive winter grazing](#) requirements.

# 1. Administrative details

To meet certification requirements, you must include all the information listed below in your Plan.

The plan must contain the following business details:

- name and contact details of the farm operator
- New Zealand Business number of the farm operator (if applicable)
- name and contact details owner(s), lease or license holder(s) of the land (if different to farm operator)
- name of the person who has prepared the plan
- farm address
- legal land titles and parcels.

The plan must contain the following information about the farm:

- total farm area (hectares)
- leased or licensed area if any (hectares)
- any current resource consents held in respect of the farm that are relevant to the preparation of the freshwater farm plan
- land use.



## 2. Maps

To meet certification requirements, you are required to provide maps containing the following information where it relates to your risk identification and action selection process.

You may present the maps in a way that makes most sense to you, providing the requirements are met. This means you can decide on the form, number of maps, and the combination of features you display on each map.

### 2.1 Features related to inherent vulnerabilities

To support the risk identification and assessment process (see [section 3](#)) and the action selection process (see [section 4](#)) your plan must contain maps that show (where applicable):

1. farm boundaries, indicating any leased or licensed land
2. areas of land use, if the farm is split into distinctly different land uses
3. location of land units (see [section 3.2](#))
4. surface freshwater bodies
5. artificial freshwater bodies
6. soils
7. landform, including slope
8. potential areas of intensive winter grazing and critical source areas within areas of intensive winter grazing
9. critical source areas that are not within areas of intensive winter grazing
10. drainage systems and areas
11. irrigation and frost protection.

### 2.2 Features related to farming/growing activities

To support the risk identification and assessment process (see [section 3](#)) and the action selection process (see [section 4](#)) your plan must contain maps that show (where applicable):

1. fencing to exclude stock from freshwater bodies
2. planted riparian areas
3. soil erosion control plantings or works
4. effluent systems and application areas
5. water-take bores and surface water abstraction points or intakes including fish screens
6. freshwater crossings, including formed crossings, such as bridges, culverts, and fords and unformed crossings

7. stock-holding areas, including feedpads, winter pads, stand-off pads, and loafing pads
8. other livestock-related infrastructure, including milking sheds, wintering barns and shelters, and stock yards
9. farm accessways such as formed roads, tracks, races, and underpasses
10. point source discharges including, rubbish dumps, offal pits, silage pits, feed storage bunkers or sheds, agrichemical, fertiliser, and fuel storage sites, and agrichemical washdown areas
11. private drinking water supply points.

## 2.3 Catchment context information

To support the risk identification and assessment process (see [section 3](#)) and the action selection process (see [section 4](#)), you must indicate on a map/s any catchment context factors relevant to your farm as set out in the definition of catchment context, values, and challenges (see [appendix 1](#)).

See also [section 3.2](#).

## 2.4 Any new physical work set out in the action plan

You must indicate on a map or maps any new physical works that you will undertake when implementing your action plan (see [section 5](#)).

You must include maps containing all the information set out above as is relevant to your plan.

You may decide on the form, number of maps, and the combination of features you display on each map.

It may be helpful for certification purposes to include a legend indicating which requirements are indicated in which map.

Table 1 is one possible format for organising mapping requirements, it is not mandatory to use this table.

**Table 1: Example map(s) legend**

Mapping requirement	Map no.
Features related to inherent vulnerabilities	
Features related to farming/ growing activities	
Catchment context information	
New physical works	

# 3. Risks to freshwater

## 3.1 Risk

To meet certification requirements, you must identify and assess risks to freshwater and freshwater ecosystems by:

- identifying, mapping and describing land units
- identifying the inherent vulnerabilities for each land unit
- identifying the farming/growing activities undertaken within each land unit.

You must also have regard to relevant catchment context information when identifying and assessing risk.

Follow the process set out in the following sections to work through the risk identification and assessment process.

## 3.2 Catchment context challenges and values

Catchment context, challenges and values (catchment context) is about understanding your farming or growing operation as a part of your local catchment or sub-catchment.

Your regional council will make catchment context information available. It will help you to understand the unique environmental features, current environmental health status, cultural values and practices, and important recreational sites of your catchment.

You will apply your catchment context information to consider how your farm's natural landscape and farming and growing activities impact the health of freshwater and freshwater ecosystems in your catchment.

You will also apply your catchment context information to help to identify how best to manage or reduce those impacts to protect the health of your catchment for future generations.

**Context** is the key information about your catchment. This could include:

- soil data
- landforms
- freshwater data
- freshwater bodies
- climate data.

**Challenges** are the threats and issues facing freshwater and the identified values in your catchment. This could include:

- contaminants
- freshwater habitat loss
- degradation of sites and/or species of cultural or community significance.

**Values** are the things about your catchment that are important to the community. This could include:

- catchment freshwater objectives, priorities, or outcomes identified in policies, regional and/or iwi plans
- cultural significance and matters of importance to tangata whenua
- sites and/or species of cultural or community significance.

See [appendix 1](#) for the definition of catchment context, challenges, and values as it appears in the regulations.

**To meet certification requirements, when carrying out the risk identification and assessment process, and the action identification process you must have regard to:**

- **the catchment context information (that is relevant to the local area of the farm and available from the regional council)**
- **the impacts of the identified risks and actions on the receiving environment (the catchment).**

Where available this must include:

- existing local area information on:
  - landforms
  - soil data
  - climate data
  - freshwater data
  - freshwater bodies
  - contaminants
  - sites that are significant to the community
  - significant species or ecosystems
- identified cultural matters of importance to tangata whenua, including:
  - the cultural significance of the local area
  - the traditional name(s) of freshwater bodies
  - significant sites and species to tangata whenua
- any objectives, policies, rules in relevant to the management of freshwater or freshwater ecosystems in policy statements or the regional plan
- any relevant freshwater matters in planning documents that are recognised by iwi authorities and lodged with the regional council
- the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management and any action plans made by the regional council
- any secondary legislation made under the Act that is relevant to the management of freshwater or freshwater ecosystems (other than secondary legislation made under Part 9A of the Act).

**Your plan must include map(s) indicating the features as set out above. See section 2 for further information.**

**You should demonstrate in your plan that you have had regard to the relevant catchment context information when identifying and assessing risks, and identifying actions, and action implementation timeframes.**

In the risk identification and assessment this could be done by:

- including written identification of any catchment context information (factors) you considered when identifying and assessing each risk (see section 3.6)
- including a written summary of any identified risks that relate specifically to catchment context factors.

When selecting actions and action timeframes this could be done by:

- writing clear and measurable actions that describe how the selected action will manage the full scope of the identified risk including catchment context factors ie, how the action will manage the impacts of the risk on the receiving environment (see section 4.4).
- setting implementation timeframes that consider the significance of the risk.

### 3.3 Land units

**Land units** are an area of contiguous or non-contiguous land with similar biophysical features.

**To meet certification requirements you must identify, map (see section 2) and describe land units.**

You must divide your farm into land units.

When defining land units, you should consider the following features:

- soil types (eg, heavy soils versus free-draining soils)
- landform (eg, slope, aspect, underlying geology)
- climate
- presence of irrigation
- presence of land drainage (surface and sub-surface).

Areas where the above features are similar should form a land unit.

You should keep the number of land units to a minimum.

Land units must be indicated in your maps. You must also provide a written description of the key features of each land unit.

It is recommended that your land unit description includes:

1. A land unit name and/or number
2. The corresponding map number

3. A description of the following information as applicable:
  - soil types (eg, heavy soils versus free-draining soils)
  - slope
  - landform (particularly useful for erodible hill country)
  - climate (especially rainfall)
  - connectivity to water eg, (presence and location of fresh waterbodies, groundwater proximity)
  - critical source areas
  - sites, species, or ecosystems of cultural and/or community significance
  - irrigation
  - land drainage (surface and sub-surface)
  - land use.

Table 2 is one possible format for describing land units and identifying inherent vulnerabilities. It is not mandatory to use this format.

**Table 2: Land units and inherent vulnerabilities**

Land unit no.	Land unit name	Map no.	Land unit description	Inherent vulnerabilities
				<i>See Section 3.4. for information on Inherent vulnerabilities.</i>

## 3.4 Inherent vulnerabilities

**Inherent vulnerabilities** are risks to freshwater and freshwater ecosystems from the biophysical features of the land including from irrigation and/or drainage.

**To meet certification requirements, you must identify the inherent vulnerabilities in each land unit.**

To identify inherent vulnerabilities, you should consider the nature of the biophysical features described in your land unit description and, how the nature of those features could give rise to risks to freshwater or freshwater ecosystems.

Your plan must include map(s) indicating the features related to inherent vulnerabilities set out in [section 2](#).

You must describe identified inherent vulnerabilities in your plan. It is recommended that your descriptions of inherent vulnerabilities include:

- the biophysical feature(s) relating to the inherent vulnerability (this may be included in the land unit description), eg, landform, and climate
- the specific nature of the feature(s) that may give rise to vulnerabilities to freshwater (this may also be included in the land unit description) eg, siltstone hill country in a high-rainfall area that is prone to shallow slipping
- the specific adverse effect the vulnerability may lead to, for example, sediment loss to surface water resulting in sedimentation of streambed.

You can include an indicator of the significance of the vulnerability where this will help to assess the risk (see [section 3.6](#)). See [appendix 5](#) for examples of inherent vulnerabilities.

## 3.5 Farming/growing activities

**Farming/growing activities** are the activities undertaken in the management or operation of the farm.

**To meet certification requirements, you must identify the farming/growing activities undertaken on each land unit.**

[Appendix 3](#) provides a list of common farming/growing activities by group and sub-group. It is recommended that you use this list to help you identify your farming/growing activities. For activities not contained in the list you can add your own.

Your plan must include map(s) indicating the features that relate to farming/growing activities set out in [section 2](#).

## 3.6 Identifying and assessing risk

You must identify the inherent vulnerabilities and farming/growing activities occurring on each land unit.

To identify the risks occurring on each land unit, you must consider how the inherent vulnerabilities and farming/growing activities interact to create individual risks.

You must also have regard to any catchment context factors relevant to each identified risk.

The order in which you identify inherent vulnerabilities and farming/growing activities is not prescribed, but both factors must be considered together when identifying each risk.

It is important for the risk identification and assessment process that you do not factor in any current actions you are taking to manage the risks arising from farming/growing activities. You should identify and assess risk arising from only the activity itself.

Once you have identified a risk you must assess the significance of the risk to freshwater and freshwater ecosystems. You may choose the method you use to assess the significance of the risk provided it is a credible method (see *Is the action based on best available information* in [section 4.1](#) for more information on credible methods).

You must demonstrate in your plan that you have considered how both the inherent vulnerabilities and the farming/growing activity occurring in a land unit come together to create individual risks to freshwater.

You must also include an indicator of the significance of the risk posed to freshwater and/or freshwater ecosystems.

You must also demonstrate that you have had regard to any relevant catchment context factors when identifying and assessing each risk.

When describing risks, the plan developer should set out:

- the land unit name/number
- the relevant farming/growing activity
- the relevant inherent vulnerabilities (to the farming/growing activity)
- the risk posed by the interaction of the activity and vulnerabilities
- an account of any relevant catchment context factors
- an indicator of the significance of risk posed to freshwater/freshwater ecosystems.

You may choose the (credible) method you use to assess and indicate the significance of the risk.

Table 3 is one format you could use for identifying the risks that will allow you to demonstrate that both inherent vulnerabilities and farming/growing activities occurring in the relevant land unit have been considered when identifying risk(s). There is also space to account for any relevant catchment context information.

The use of activity and risk groups is recommended but is not mandatory. See [appendix 3](#). for the suggested activity groups and sub-groups. See [appendix 4](#) for the suggested risk groups.

**Table 3: Risk identification and assessment**

Land unit no.	Farming/growing activity group	Farming/growing activity sub-group(s)	Farming/growing activity description	Inherent vulnerabilities	Catchment context	Risk group(s)	Risk
#	See appendix 3.	See appendix 3.	Describe the specific farming/growing activity.	List any inherent vulnerabilities that may impact the level of risk created by the farming/growing activity.	List any catchment context information that is relevant to the farming growing activity and/or inherent vulnerabilities.	See appendix 4	Describe the risk created by the interaction of farming/growing activity and the relevant inherent vulnerabilities. Include an indicator of the significance of the risk.



# 4. Managing risks to freshwater

## 4.1 Actions

**Actions** are the way in which a farm operator avoids, remedies, or mitigates one or more adverse effects on freshwater and freshwater ecosystems, and includes:

- a physical work (eg, fencing or planting)
- a practice (eg, how an activity is undertaken)
- a process or procedure (eg, training staff in how to undertake an activity).

**To meet certification requirements, you must identify existing and new actions that avoid, mitigate, or remedy (manage) your identified risks.**

You must set out a timeframe in which you must achieve or implement each identified action.

When identifying actions and setting timeframes, you should consider:

- the significance of the risk to freshwater or freshwater ecosystems
- whether a timeframe for a specific action is a regulatory requirement (eg, a deadline required under other rules or regulations).

**Existing actions** are actions you are already doing.

**New actions** are actions that will be needed to manage the risks that are currently partly managed, or unmanaged.

To identify actions, you will need to examine the risks you identified and assessed in [section 3](#). For each risk you will identify what existing actions you are already doing to manage the risk (if any), and which risks are partly managed or unmanaged.

Once you have identified risks that are partly managed or unmanaged, you will identify new actions to manage those risks.

## 4.2 Identifying actions

You will identify actions to manage each of your risks. A suggested approach for identifying actions is outlined below.

### Consider the risk

First you should consider the nature and significance of each risk that you identified and assessed in the previous section, and what actions might be appropriate to manage it effectively.

When considering the nature of your risk it is important to remember that each risk is unique to your catchment context, inherent vulnerabilities and farming/growing activities.

Once you have identified a possible action or actions, you should consider the factors set out below to ensure the action is fit for purpose.

## **Is the action based on best available information?**

Actions should be considered and selected using the best available information. Best available information means information that is:

- from a credible source (ie, scientifically proven information that is free from errors and bias)
- current (ie, information that is up to date and is being applied)
- applicable to the situation (ie, information that is relevant to the farming system or environment).

## **Is the risk related to other regulatory requirements?**

Farmers and growers must comply with all regulatory requirements relating to freshwater.

If there is another regulatory requirement (other than freshwater farm plan requirements) related to the risk, the selected action(s) must, at a minimum, meet this. If the action(s) do not meet a regulated requirement, they will not be fit for purpose.

If you intend to use your plan to comply with another regulatory requirement, you must indicate this in your plan. See [section 1](#) for more information.

## **Does the action manage the risk to freshwater?**

If the action is a regulated requirement, you should consider whether it will also adequately manage the identified risk and the assessed significance of the risk.

If the action is based on best available information such as an agreed industry or practice standard, you should consider whether it will adequately manage the identified risk and the assessed significance of the risk.

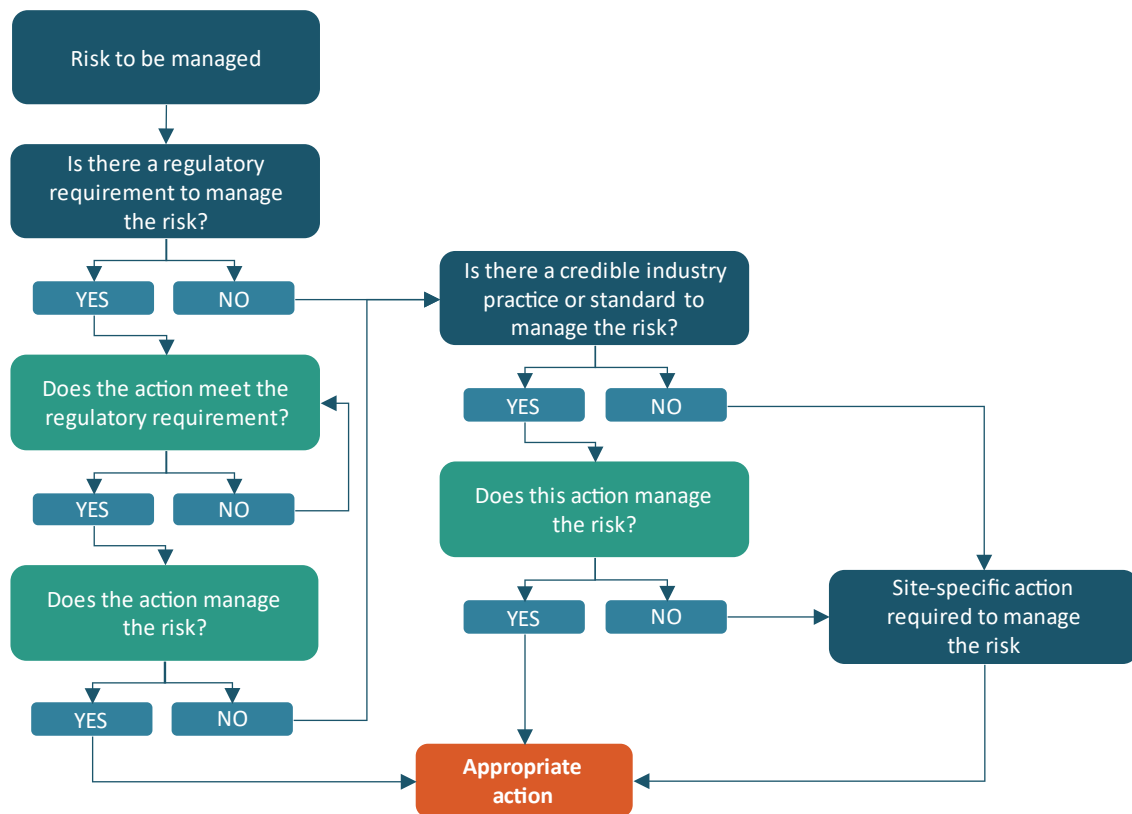
It is important to remember that each risk is unique to your catchment context, inherent vulnerabilities and farming/growing activities.

A regulated requirement or agreed industry or practice standard may not be adequate to manage the full scope and significance of a risk when you consider inherent vulnerabilities and catchment context factors in combination with your farming/growing activity.

In this situation, you will need to select an action or actions that go beyond those requirements or industry or practice standards to adequately manage the identified risk.

You can use Figure 1 to test the appropriateness of a selected action.

**Figure 1: Selecting an action – decision tree**



## Fair and reasonable

Selected actions must be fair and reasonable. Your certifier will consider if your actions and the timeframes you set to achieve or implement them are fair and reasonable based on the following criteria:

- feasible (ie, achievable for the farming system or business)
- possible within the assigned timeframe
- at least meet accepted minimum industry practices or standards
- based on best available information (all sources of credible information should be considered).

## 4.3 Setting implementation timeframes

You must set a timeframe for each of your identified actions to be achieved or implemented by. The identified timeframe must be included in your action plan (see section 5).

When identifying timeframes, you should consider:

- the significance of the risk to freshwater or freshwater ecosystems
- whether there is a regulated timeframe (under other regulatory requirements).

The timeframe could be a completion date (ie, the date by which the action will be fully complete), or an implementation date (ie, the date by which an action will be put into practice or become required procedure).

For existing actions or actions that could be considered ongoing (ie, actions that become an ongoing practice or procedure from the date of implementation or have a requirement for ongoing maintenance from the date of completion) the timeframe could be a start from date. For existing actions, the start from date can be the date the plan is submitted for certification.

Timeframes must also be fair and reasonable. To assess whether a timeframe is fair and reasonable, refer to the information regarding fair and reasonable actions above.

## 4.4 Writing actions

All actions must be written in a clear and measurable way in your action plan (see [section 5](#)).

When your plan is audited, your auditor will assign your grade based on their assessment of whether you have implemented the actions as set out in your action plan.

Your written actions should be:

**Specific** – define the action as specifically as possible. Describe exactly what will be done, implemented, and/or achieved.

**Measurable** – ensure you can practically demonstrate (show evidence) that the action has been or is being implemented.

**Attainable** – ensure that the action is achievable for your farm system in the timeframe you have assigned.

**Relevant** – ensure that the action will manage the identified risk. Describe how the action relates to the risk (and farming/growing activity) that it is intended to manage.

**Time-based** – identify a specific and realistic date for implementation or achievement.

See table 4 for a table format you could use to work through the action selection process.

Continue to section 5 for information about how your selected actions must be documented to meet certification requirements.

You can use table 4 to work through the action selection process outlined above.

See appendix 3 for the suggested activity groups and sub-groups.

See appendix 4 for the suggested risk groups.

**Table 4: Action selection process**

Land unit no.	Risk		Action						
	Risk group(s)	Risk	Farming/growing activity group	Farming/growing activity sub-group	Existing action	Is the risk managed?	Farming/growing activity group	Farming/growing activity sub-group	New action
#	See appendix 4	Describe the risk created by the interaction of farming/growing activity and the relevant inherent vulnerabilities. Include an indicator of the significance of the risk.	See appendix 3	See appendix 3	Describe any existing action(s) you are doing to manage the identified risk. Describe how the action relates to the risk (and farming/growing activity) it is intended to manage.	Yes/ Partly/ No	See appendix 3	See appendix 3	Describe any new action(s) required to manage the identified risk. Describe how the action relates to the risk (and farming/growing activity) it is intended to manage.

# 5. Action plan

To meet certification requirements your freshwater farm plan must include an action plan.

The action plan must include the following information:

- describe each action that will be taken over the next five years
- identify whether each action is an existing action (that is already being carried out on farm), or a new action
- describe the land unit/s in which each action is to occur
- describe how each action relates to the identified risk that it is intended to avoid, remedy or mitigate (address)
- identify the category of each action
- identify the timeframe by which each action must be implemented or achieved.

You must also indicate on a map/s any new physical works set out in the action plan. See section 2. Maps for further detail.

Actions must be written in a clear and measurable way see section 4.4. Writing actions.

Each action must be assigned a category, see section 5.2. Categorising actions for information on the required framework for categorising actions.

## 5.1 Data groups

The data included in your action plan will be provided to your regional council by your certifier once your Plan has been certified. A freshwater farm plan data reporting system is under development to support the recording of this data.

It is recommended that you use the groups suggested in [appendix 3](#) and [appendix 4](#) to categorise your overall risks and farming/growing activities related to each specific action in your action plan.

Using the suggested groups will make data reporting simple and easy.

You can also use the data groups to inform your risk identification and action selection process.

## 5.2 Categorising actions

You must categorise each action identified in your action plan using the following framework:

- **Regulated actions** are actions that address a risk to freshwater and freshwater ecosystems and also relate to another relevant regulatory requirement.
- **Catchment actions** are actions that address risks to freshwater and freshwater ecosystems that directly relate to catchment context, challenges and values but exclude regulated actions.

- **Supplementary actions** are actions that address risks to freshwater or freshwater ecosystems but exclude catchment and regulated actions.

Your auditor will consider whether an action has or has not been implemented as set out in your action plan and the category of that action when assigning your audit grade. Your audit grade will determine the interval at which your farm is next audited. For more information on audit grades see the Ministry's [Freshwater farm plan audit guidance](#).

Table 5 is a suggested format for an action plan. It is not mandatory to use this format.

See appendix 2 for the suggested activity groups and sub-groups.

See appendix 3 for the suggested risk groups.

**Table 5: Action plan**

Land unit	Risk		Action							
	Risk group	Overall risk	Farming activity group	Farming activity sub-group	Specific action	Map no.	Category	New or existing	Implementation timeframe	Regulatory action type
<i>Name/number and/or description of the LU on which the action will occur.</i>	<i>See appendix 4.</i>	<i>Describe the risk created by the interaction of farming/growing activity and the relevant inherent vulnerabilities. Include an indicator of the significance of the risk.</i>	<i>See appendix 3.</i>	<i>See appendix 3.</i>	<i>Describe the specific action you will take to manage the identified risk. Describe how the action relates to the risk (and farming/growing activity) it is intended to manage. See section 4.4.</i>	<i>Corresponding map number (if applicable).</i>	<i>Category of the action based on the categorisation framework set out in section 5.2.</i>	<i>Identify if the action is a new action or and existing action.</i>	<i>Identify the timeframe for implementation of the action.</i>	<i>Identify the regulatory requirement (other rule, standard or regulations) related to the action (if applicable) and if the plan is being used to meet that requirement.</i>



## 5.3 Long-term actions

Some actions may need to be implemented over a longer timeframe than the five-year action plan cycle (eg, farm-scale soil erosion control programmes, infrastructure upgrade projects). These actions are referred to as long-term actions.

When planning long term actions, you should consider:

- the cost and extent of the overall actions required in relation to the farm system
- the implementation complexity of the action.

These factors will help you plan an overall timeframe for the required work to be completed, and identify smaller components of the overall action that will be part of the overall implementation.

Smaller components or individual actions that will be implemented within the five-year action plan timeframe must be included in your action plan. Actions beyond the five-year timeframe will not be included in your action plan.

However, you will need to be able to demonstrate to your certifier and auditor that you have considered what is fair and reasonable relative to the multicycle action as a whole when choosing what to include and/or exclude from your current action plan.

You could include information pertaining to timeframes beyond the current five-year action plan timeframe as part of your wider non-regulatory farm planning process.

## 6. Certification and audit details

**You must include the following certification and audit details in your plan as received from your certifier or auditor:**

- the date of each certification and audit
- the name and identification number of the certifier or auditor responsible for the certification or audit on that date
- the conflict of interest declaration of the certifier or auditor
- the due date for the next audit
- the date by which the plan must be resubmitted for certification.

**You must also include the following audit information as received from your auditor:**

- Your audit report including:
  - individual actions that have been implemented within the timeframes set in the certified action plan
  - individual actions that have not been implemented within the set timeframes and the reason for not implementing them
  - the audit grade.

# Appendix 1: Glossary and definitions

The following definitions are those included in the RMA Freshwater Farm Plans Regulations 2023.

**Act** means the Resource Management Act 1991.

**Action**, in relation to an action plan,—

- (a) means the way in which a farm operator avoids, remedies, or mitigates 1 or more adverse effects on freshwater and freshwater ecosystems; and
- (b) includes (without limitation)—
  - i. a physical work (for example, fencing or planting):
  - ii. a practice (for example, how an activity is undertaken):
  - iii. a process or procedure (for example, training staff in how to undertake an activity).

**Action plan** means the plan set out in a certified freshwater farm plan under regulation 10 (see Appendix 3).

**Catchment actions** –

- (a) means actions that address risks to freshwater and freshwater ecosystems that directly relate to the catchment context, challenges, and values; but
- (b) excludes regulated actions.

**Catchment context, challenges, and values** includes (without limitation) the following:

- (a) existing local area information on landforms, soil data, climate data, freshwater data, freshwater bodies, contaminants, sites that are significant to the community, significant species or ecosystems:
- (b) identified cultural matters of importance to tangata whenua, including:
  - i. the cultural significance of the local area
  - ii. the traditional name(s) of freshwater bodies
  - iii. significant sites and species to tangata whenua.
- (c) any objectives, policies, rules in relevant to the management of freshwater or freshwater ecosystems in policy statements or the regional plan
- (d) any relevant freshwater matters in planning documents that are recognised by iwi authorities and lodged with the regional council
- (e) the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management and any action plans made by the regional council
- (f) any secondary legislation made under the Act that is relevant to the management of freshwater or freshwater ecosystems (other than secondary legislation made under Part 9A of the Act).

**Certification requirements** means the requirements in section 217F of the Act.

**Critical source area** has the meaning given in regulation 3 of the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) Regulations 2020.

**Inherent vulnerabilities** means risks to freshwater and freshwater ecosystems from the biophysical features of the land including from irrigation or drainage.

**Intensive winter grazing** has the meaning given in regulation 3 of the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) Regulations 2020.

**Land unit** means an area of contiguous or non-contiguous land with similar biophysical features.

**National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management** means the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management whose approval under section 52 of the Act was notified in August 2020 (as amended or replaced from time to time).

**Regulated actions** means actions that—

- (a) address risks to freshwater and freshwater ecosystems; and
- (b) relate to a relevant requirement under a specified instrument.

**Supplementary actions**—

- (a) means actions that address risks to freshwater and freshwater ecosystems; but
- (b) excludes catchment actions and regulated actions.

**Stockholding area** has the meaning given in regulation 3 of the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) Regulations 2020.

**Te Mana o te Wai** has the meaning set out in the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management.

# Appendix 2: Certification requirements

The following are the contents of a freshwater farm plan required for that plan to be certified (certification requirements) as set out in section 217F of the Act and Part 2 of the Resource Management (Freshwater Farm Plans) Regulations 2023.

## **Freshwater farm plan must identify risks and actions**

1. In order to identify the risks of adverse effects of farming activities on freshwater or freshwater ecosystems, a farm operator must—
  - (a) identify, map, and describe each land unit of the farm; and
  - (b) identify and assess for each land unit—
    - i. its inherent vulnerabilities; and
    - ii. the risks from farming activities being carried out.
2. The operator must—
  - (a) identify existing and new actions to avoid, remedy, or mitigate the risks identified under subclause (1) of adverse effects of farming activities on freshwater or freshwater ecosystems; and
  - (b) set a time frame within which each action must be implemented.
3. When identifying actions and setting time frames, the farm operator must consider—
  - (a) the significance of the risk to freshwater or freshwater ecosystems; and
  - (b) whether a time frame for a particular action is required under a specified instrument.

## **Farm operator must have regard to catchment context, challenges, and values**

If information relating to the catchment context, challenges, and values is available from the relevant regional council, a farm operator must have regard to the following when identifying the risks and actions under regulation 8:

- (a) the catchment context, challenges, and values for the local area in which the farm is situated; and
- (b) the impacts that farming has on the receiving environment.

## **Action plan**

1. A farm operator must set out an action plan in the freshwater farm plan.
2. The action plan must, for each action identified under regulation 8,—
  - (a) state whether it is an existing action that is already being carried out on the farm or a new action that the operator intends to take during the next 5 years; and
  - (b) describe how each action relates to the identified risk that the action is intended to address; and
  - (c) describe the land units in which each action is to occur; and

- (d) categorise each action in accordance with subclause (3); and
  - (e) state the time frame within which each action must be implemented.
3. The operator must categorise each action in the action plan as belonging to one of the following categories:
- (a) catchment actions:
  - (b) regulated actions:
  - (c) supplementary actions.

**Maps** to be provided in freshwater farm plan

*Features related to inherent vulnerabilities*

1. To support the risk assessment under regulation 8(1)(a) and (b)(i) and the identification of actions under regulation 8(2), a freshwater farm plan must contain maps that show—
- (a) farm boundaries, noting on the map any land that is leased or licensed:
  - (b) areas of land use, if the farm is split into distinctly different land uses:
  - (c) location of land units:
  - (d) surface freshwater bodies:
  - (e) artificial freshwater bodies:
  - (f) soils:
  - (g) landforms, including slope:
  - (h) potential areas of intensive winter grazing and critical source areas within areas of intensive winter grazing:
  - (i) critical source areas that are not within areas of intensive winter grazing:
  - (j) drainage systems and areas:
  - (k) irrigation and frost protection.

*Features related to farming*

2. To support the risk assessment under regulation 8(1)(b)(ii) and the identification of actions under regulation 8(2), a freshwater farm plan must contain maps that show—
- (a) fencing to exclude stock from freshwater bodies:
  - (b) planted riparian areas:
  - (c) soil erosion control plantings or works:
  - (d) effluent systems and application areas:
  - (e) water-take bores and surface water abstraction points or intakes, including fish screens:
  - (f) freshwater crossings, including formed crossings, such as bridges, culverts, and fords, and unformed crossings:
  - (g) stock-holding areas, including feedpads, winter pads, stand-off pads, and loafing pads:
  - (h) other stock-related infrastructure, including milking sheds, wintering barns and shelters, and stock yards:

- (i) farm accessways (for example, formed roads, tracks, races, and under- passes):
- (j) point source discharges, including—
  - i. rubbish dumps, offal pits, and silage pits;
  - ii. feed storage bunkers or sheds; and
  - iii. agrichemical, fertiliser, and fuel storage sites; and
  - iv. agrichemical washdown areas:
- (k) private drinking water supply points.

*Features related to catchment context, challenges, and values*

3. To support the risk assessment and the identification of actions under regulation 8, a freshwater farm plan must contain maps that show information referred to in regulation 4(a) and (b) that relates to the catchment context, challenges, and values, if the information is available from the relevant regional council and relevant to the farm.

*New physical works*

4. A freshwater farm plan must contain maps that show new physical works (if any) to be undertaken on the farm as set out in the action plan. Examples of physical works are set out in subclause (2).

**Factors that farm operator does not need to consider in risk assessment**

When developing a freshwater farm plan, a farm operator does not need to consider the risks of adverse effects of the following on freshwater and freshwater ecosystems:

- (a) areas of exotic or indigenous forestry:
- (b) processing facilities or packhouses:
- (c) residential or commercial premises:
- (d) visitor accommodation.

**Administrative information in freshwater farm plan**

A freshwater farm plan must contain the following information:

- (a) the name, contact details, and New Zealand Business Number (if any) of the farm operator:
- (b) the names and contact details of any other persons who are the owners, leaseholders, or licence-holders of land on the farm:
- (c) the name of the individual who has prepared the plan:
- (d) the physical address of the farm:
- (e) legal land titles and parcels of the farm:
- (f) the total farm area in hectares:
- (g) the leased or licensed area (if any) in hectares:
- (h) any current resource consents held in respect of the farm that are relevant to the preparation of the freshwater farm plan:
- (i) land use.

### **Reliance on certified freshwater farm plan to meet other regulatory requirements**

If a specified instrument enables compliance with a regulatory requirement by way of a certified freshwater farm plan and a farm operator intends to use their plan to comply with the regulatory requirement, the operator must refer to the regulatory requirement in their plan. (See, for example, regulation 13(3) of the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) Regulations 2020.)

### **Certification and audit details in freshwater farm plan**

A freshwater farm plan must contain the following information as received from the certifier or auditor:

- (a) each date of certification and audit:
- (b) the name of the certifier or auditor on each occasion the plan is certified or the farm is audited:
- (c) the identification number of each certifier and auditor:
- (d) a conflict of interest declaration of each certifier and auditor:
- (e) the date by which the farm operator must arrange for the next audit of the farm:
- (f) the date by which the plan must be submitted for recertification.

### **Further audit information in certified freshwater farm plan**

A certified freshwater farm plan must contain the following information as received from an auditor:

- (a) individual actions in the action plan that have been implemented within the time frames required under the action plan:
- (b) individual actions in the action plan that have not been implemented within the required time frames and the reason for not implementing them:
- (c) the audit grade.



# Appendix 3: Farming/growing activities data groups

**Table 6: Farming/growing activities data groups**

Farming/growing activities		
Activity group	Activity sub-group	Specific activity
<i>Select one or more</i>	<i>Select one or more (within corresponding activity group)</i>	<i>Free text</i>
<b>Nutrients</b>	Nutrient management	
	Nutrient storage and loading	
	Nutrient application	
<b>Land and soil</b>	Cultivation	
	Earthworks	
	Erosion control	
	Pasture and grazing management	
<b>Intensive winter grazing</b>	Site selection	
	Crop establishment	
	Grazing management	
	Post grazing management	
<b>Waterbodies and wetlands</b>	Stock exclusion	
	Riparian management	
	Drain management (channels and sub-surface)	
	Critical source areas	
<b>Point source</b>	Tracks and gateways	
	Troughs and stock camps	
	Stock waterbody crossings	
	Yards, feed pads, and barns	
	Silage pits and feed bunkers	
	Farm dumps	
	Offal pit	
<b>Hazardous substances</b>	Fuel and agrichemical storage	
	Agrichemical use	
	Agrichemical disposal	
<b>Effluent</b>	Storage, treatment, and application infrastructure	
	Application management	
<b>Water use</b>	Take and application infrastructure	
	Use management	
<b>Irrigation</b>	Take and application infrastructure	
	Application management	
<b>Other</b>	Other	

# Appendix 4: Risk data groups

**Table 7: Risk data groups**

Risk	
Group	Specific risk
<i>Select one or more</i>	<i>Free text</i>
<b>Impact on species significant to tangata whenua</b>	
<b>Impact on threatened species</b>	
<b>Impact on site(s) significant to tangata whenua</b>	
<b>Impact on area of indigenous biodiversity</b>	
<b>Impact on recreational site</b>	
<b>Nitrogen – groundwater</b>	
<b>Nitrogen – surface water</b>	
<b>Phosphorous – groundwater</b>	
<b>Phosphorous – surface water</b>	
<b>Pathogen – groundwater</b>	
<b>Pathogen – surface water</b>	
<b>Sediment</b>	
<b>Other</b>	

# Appendix 5: Inherent vulnerability examples

The following table contains a non-exhaustive list of possible on-farm inherent vulnerabilities. You can include inherent vulnerabilities not identified in this list in your plan.

**Table 8: Inherent vulnerability examples**

Biophysical feature	Considerations	Resulting vulnerability
<b>Climate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rainfall amount</li> <li>• Rainfall seasonal distribution</li> <li>• Temperature</li> <li>• Temperature variation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flood</li> <li>• Drought</li> <li>• Sheet erosion</li> <li>• Mass movement erosion</li> <li>• Streambank erosion</li> <li>• Nutrient loss through run-off</li> <li>• Pathogen loss through run-off</li> <li>• Nutrient loss through drainage</li> </ul>
<b>Landform</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slope</li> <li>• Aspect</li> <li>• Geology</li> <li>• Location in landscape, eg, river flats, river terrace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mass movement erosion</li> <li>• Surface erosion</li> <li>• Streambank erosion</li> <li>• Nutrient loss through run-off</li> <li>• Pathogen loss through run-off</li> <li>• Flood</li> </ul>
<b>Soil</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent material</li> <li>• Texture including organic matter content</li> <li>• Soil profile limitations such as, natural pans or depth to stones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soil compaction and pugging</li> <li>• Surface erosion</li> <li>• Nutrient loss through drainage</li> <li>• Nutrient loss through run-off</li> <li>• Pathogen loss through run-off</li> </ul>
<b>Groundwater</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depth to groundwater</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nutrient loss through drainage</li> <li>• Nutrient loss through run-off</li> <li>• Pathogen loss through run-off</li> </ul>
<b>Surface water</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source (spring versus run-off)</li> <li>• Flow variability (permanent, intermittent)</li> <li>• Vegetation cover</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streambank erosion</li> <li>• Flood</li> </ul>
<b>Critical Source Areas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Area (size and location)</li> <li>• Slope</li> <li>• Vegetation cover</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surface erosion</li> <li>• Nutrient loss through run-off</li> <li>• Pathogen loss through run-off</li> </ul>
<b>Irrigation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irrigation type (flood, spray or drip-micro)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nutrient loss through drainage</li> <li>• Nutrient loss through run-off</li> <li>• Pathogen loss through run-off</li> </ul>
<b>Drainage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drainage type (surface and sub-surface)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nutrient loss through run-off</li> <li>• Pathogen loss through run-off</li> </ul>
<b>Significant site</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site type (recreation, significant to tangata whenua eg, mahinga kai and wahi tapu, indigenous habitat)</li> <li>• Uniqueness of site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of or impact on significant recreational site, or site significant to tangata whenua or indigenous habitat site</li> </ul>

Biophysical feature	Considerations	Resulting vulnerability
<b>Significant species</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Species type (significant to tangata whenua, threatened, or other)</li> <li>• Abundance of species (threatened or endangered)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of or impact on significant species, including those significant to tangata whenua</li> </ul>

# Appendix 6: Example table templates

## Maps

Table 9: Maps legend]

Mapping requirement	Map No.
Features related to inherent vulnerabilities	
Features related to farming/growing activities	
Catchment context information	
New physical works	

## Land units

**Table 10: Land units and inherent vulnerabilities**

Land unit no.	Land unit name	Map no.	Land unit description	Inherent vulnerabilities
				<i>See section 3.4 for information on inherent vulnerabilities.</i>

## Risk identification

**Table 11: Risk identification and assessment**

Land unit no.	Farming/growing activity group	Farming/growing activity sub-group(s)	Farming/growing activity description	Inherent vulnerabilities	Catchment context	Risk group(s)	Risk
#	<i>See appendix 3.</i>	<i>See appendix 3.</i>	<i>Describe the specific farming/growing activity.</i>	<i>List any inherent vulnerabilities that may impact the level of risk created by the farming/growing activity.</i>	<i>List any catchment context information that is relevant to the farming growing activity and/or inherent vulnerabilities.</i>	<i>See appendix 4.</i>	<i>Describe the risk created by the interaction of farming/growing and activity and the relevant inherent vulnerabilities. Include an indicator of the significance of the risk.</i>

## Action identification

Table 12: Action selection process

Land unit no.	Risk				Action				
	Risk group(s)	Risk	Farming/growing activity group	Farming/growing activity sub-group	Existing action	Is the risk managed?	Farming/growing activity group	Farming/growing activity sub-group	New action
#	<i>See appendix 4.</i>	<i>Describe the risk created by the interaction of farming/growing and activity and the relevant inherent vulnerabilities. Include an indicator of the significance of the risk.</i>	<i>See appendix 3.</i>	<i>See appendix 3.</i>	<i>Describe any existing action/s you are doing to manage the identified risk.</i>	<i>Yes/ Partly/ No.</i>	<i>See appendix 3.</i>	<i>See appendix 3.</i>	<i>Describe any new actions required to manage the identified risk.</i>

## Action plan

Table 13: Action plan

Land unit no.	Risk		Action							
	Risk group	Overall risk	Activity group	Activity sub-group	Specific action	Map no.	Category	New or existing	Implementation timeframe	Regulatory action type
<i># LU on which the action will occur.</i>	<i>See Appendix 4.</i>	<i>Describe the risk created by the interaction of farming/ growing and activity and the relevant inherent vulnerabilities. Include an indicator of the significance of the risk.</i>	<i>See Appendix 3.</i>	<i>See Appendix 3.</i>	<i>Describe any existing action/s you are doing to manage the identified risk. See section 4.4. Writing Actions.</i>	<i>Corresponding map number (if applicable).</i>	<i>Category of the action based on the categorisation framework set out in section 5.2. Categorising Actions.</i>	<i>Identify if the action is a new action or an existing action.</i>	<i>Identify the timeframe for implementation of the action, this may be ongoing or a specific date.</i>	<i>Identify the regulatory requirement (other rule, standard or regulations) related to the action (if applicable) and if the Plan is being used to meet that requirement.</i>