

# Waikato Regional Council Integrated Catchment Management Newsletter

## Welcome to the Summer issue of Integrated Catchment Management News.

Summer's well underway, with Christmas looming.

So, with the year coming to an end, it's a good time to reflect on where we've been and where we're going in the ICM project.

Earlier this year the ICM team caught up with those farmers with environmental farm plans who have been involved in the ICM pilot programme in the Little Waipa and Waipapa catchments.

The farm visit and questionnaire provided an opportunity to gather farmers' views on the farm planning process the ICM team used and to evaluate progress made on the recommendations made in the farm plan. The ICM team was greatly encouraged by the progress being made on the farm.

It's been heartening to see the investment farmers are making in on-farm options that improve nutrient efficiency and reduce the effects of leaching and runoff from farms.

Environmental concerns were a political issue at election time and it has been encouraging working with farmers who are at the cutting edge of an issue that has national importance. The ICM work is quite unique within New Zealand and progress will be followed with interest by others around the country.

In this issue we are providing a summary of the findings of the recent farm data collected from participating farmers in the two catchments.

The full report is currently being finalized and, when complete, can be obtained on request from **0800 800 401** or from [www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/community/farmers/integratedcatchmentmanagement](http://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/community/farmers/integratedcatchmentmanagement).

We are happy to discuss the finding of the report.

## Coming event

In February next year we plan to hold an event in each catchment that will allow the ICM staff to thank all those who have been involved in the pilot project to date. It has been a great learning experience for all involved in the project and we are keen to acknowledge the input of farmers into improving nutrient efficiency on farm and mitigating the effects of farming on water quality.

## Summary of survey results

Managing the water quality of the Waikato region's waterways is a core role of the Waikato Regional Council. In 2006, the Waikato Regional Council piloted a three year integrated catchment management project (the ICM project) in the Little Waipa and Waipapa catchments. As many of you will be aware, the project was set up to explore farm practices that would lower nutrient loss and measure environmental on-farm change over time, in these two catchments.

The preliminary results from our farm visits are shown below.

**Coverage:** As of 31 July 2011 there were 103 farms<sup>1</sup> in the two catchments. Of these 57 per cent (59) had a farm plan for nutrient management developed by an ICM team member. This represents an increase in coverage from the previous year when 47 per cent had a completed farm plan. This year has also seen a small number of farmers declining to participate. This was not unexpected, as the project is voluntary.

**Assessment visits:** Fifty three of the 59 farms were visited by ICM staff as part of the assessment of change - 49 dairy and 4 drystock<sup>2</sup>. Each farmer was interviewed using a structured questionnaire about farm system changes, the relevance of the farm plan, actions that had been undertaken and those that had not, and reasons why or why not.

**Nutrient data:** Analysis of the nutrient data from the 49 dairy farms visited shows that the average nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) leaching rates have decreased. On the 45 dairy farms in the Little Waipa, average N loss had dropped from 37kg/N/ha to 35kg/N/ha and average P loss had dropped from 1.3 kg/P/ha initially, to 1.1 kg/P/ha. In the Waipapa the 4 dairy farms showed average N loss fall from 41kg/N/ha to 34kg/N/ha and average P loss fall from 2.7 kg/P/ha initially to 2.3 kg/P/ha<sup>3</sup>.

**Actions implemented:** Analysis of the questionnaire data, collected during assessment visits, indicates that 50 per cent of recommended actions were implemented on-farm throughout the two catchments, and 15% were in progress.

<sup>1</sup> Due to land transfers the number of farms in the catchment changes from year to year, as some farms are amalgamated with existing ones and others are divided.

<sup>2</sup> Of the 59 farms, 3 farmers refused a visit and 3 farms had not long completed the farm planning process so were excluded from the sample

<sup>3</sup> The higher P loss in the Waipapa is attributed to pumice geology.



*A tributary of the Little Waipa Stream*

### The project and the farm planning approach to nutrient management:

- Overall, most farmers (85 per cent) were highly or very highly involved with the issue of nutrient management, which suggests that the information they are being presented with is more likely to inform their decision making.
- Ratings of the ICM project showed that the majority of farmers found the information received from ICM staff and through the farm plan, useful (98 per cent), important in their decision making about nutrient management on farm (85 per cent), and instrumental in changing decisions about managing nutrient loss on their property (69 per cent).
- Further analysis showed that, even when farmers considered they had high prior knowledge or understanding, the majority considered the one to one farm planning approach useful and important and that it changed their decisions about nutrient management practices. What these results indicate is that the ICM approach is providing a valuable service to farmers in these catchments.
- The majority (96 per cent) of farmers would continue to use a farm planning approach to nutrient management, indicating that farmers value this approach and will continue to use it. Farm plans and scenario development to improve nutrient efficiency has been an integral part of the ICM approach.

### Conclusions:

The report concludes that the ICM project continues to be well received by participating farmers. Over half the farms have farm plans. Farmers are making changes on farm with 50 per cent of recommended actions implemented, and another 15 per cent in progress.

Comparing dairy farm nutrient budgets indicates that N and P leaching rates have dropped during the project's life.

The survey indicates the majority of farmers have increased their knowledge and made changes to nutrient management practices as a result of the ICM project.

Many farmers commented that the one to one approach on the farm worked well.

Overall, the findings support the extension work that ICM project has undertaken in terms of assisting farmers in their on-farm decision making about nutrient management.

### Where to from here?

The ICM project has now moved into Phase II to cover the entire Upper Waikato catchment, from the Huka Falls to the Karapiro Dam. That's an area of 436,000 ha, with 700 dairy and 700 drystock farms.

The project is working with industry partners - such as fertiliser companies, DairyNZ, Beef and Lamb New Zealand, Iwi, dairy companies and agricultural consultants - to make available the knowledge gained from the pilot project to all farmers in the Upper Waikato.

The new project's name is 'Healthy Farms, Healthy River; preparing for change' and it aims to ensure that all farmers in the project area can farm profitably in a nutrient sensitive catchment.



*Little Waipa farmer Nelson Tanner (left) and council agricultural advisor Don Harford discussing nutrient management issues*