



Healthy Farms Healthy Rivers

NEWS

New water allocation rules

Around 3500 Waikato dairy farmers taking water for dairy shed washdown and milk cooling are likely to require resource consents under new water allocation rules for the Waikato region.

Water Allocation (Variation 6) to the Waikato Regional Plan came into force in April 2012 and is designed to manage water for the health of waterways.

For dairying, the rules' main impact is that dairy sheds using over 15m³ per day of surface water (such as river, stream, creek or spring) or groundwater (such as bore water) need a resource consent. Fifteen cubic metres per day equates to around 215 cows.

Group processing saves costs

To reduce farmers' consenting costs, they can have their consents processed along with others in their catchment. This will lower the consent cost than if the consent is processed individually.

Upper Waikato farmers wishing to do this must apply anytime before 31 March 2014. They need to tick a box on the application form which indicates they are happy for the standard processing time to be extended if necessary to enable group processing.

Provisions guarantee amounts

Special provisions are in place for farmers with dairy shed takes that existed prior to 15 October 2008.

These farmers need to apply by 1 January 2015 for the volume of water to be allocated to the farm, and this will be granted as long as certain conditions are met, including providing third party records such as stock numbers from the financial set of accounts or LIC cow numbers. If the volume of water used in the shed is unknown, it can be based on 70 litres/cow/day for stock numbers as at 15 October 2008.

"It's crucial that farmers wanting the grandparented amount apply by 1 January 2015. After that, they could face a more difficult and costly consenting process, with no guarantee of getting the grandparented amount," said Waikato Regional Council project manager Amy King.

Some new forestry to farm conversions in the Upper Waikato may not have 'grandparenting' rights. If they do not already have water consent or have increased cow numbers since 15 October 2008, they should apply for their consent immediately.

Domestic and stock use

The new regulations do not include water for domestic and stock use. Farmers can still access water to supply the house and cows without consent, so long as there is no adverse effect on the environment as a result of their water take. Farmers, generally speaking, are protected under the RMA for use of domestic water and for stock.

Fencing and planting for surface water takes

Those taking surface water will need to fence the waterway from which they take water within three years and have a plan for planting. Planting will need to be carried out within the expected 15 year timeframe of the consent. This does not apply to those bore water takes.



Amy King, Waikato Regional Council project manager

Key dates

31 March 2014: Group processing applications closing date - for Upper Waikato dairy farmers wishing to have their water take resource application processed along with others, taking advantage of cheaper processing costs.

1 January 2015: 'Grandparenting' applications closing date - for all farmers with dairy shed takes that existed prior to 15 October 2008 wishing to apply for the 'grandparented' amount.

More information

Visit www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/watertakes for a copy of the water consent form or freephone 0800 800 401 to be sent a copy. Further information including links to frequently asked questions, complete rules and consent forms are also available on this page.

Questions about the consent process can be emailed to farmwater@waikatoregion.govt.nz or ring 0800 800 401

Development of the new rules

Over the last 10 years the Waikato region's fresh water has come under increasing pressure from a range of different, often competing users. The new rules aim to ensure adequate water to protect aquatic life and provide for recreation, while also meeting domestic, municipal, agricultural, cultural and industrial needs.

The Government's National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2011 requires regional councils to have policies in place by 2030 to prevent overallocation of fresh water. It also requires limits be set to sustain aquatic life, while also providing for users such as farms, industry, towns, electricity generation and recreation.

The proposed version of Variation 6 (Water Allocation) was notified in 2006. A range of parties including Federated Farmers, Fonterra, irrigator groups and power companies submitted on the proposal and took part in the hearings.

The plan was appealed in the Environment Court in 2011, and the new rules were decided after all those with an interest in water, including farming industry representatives and other water user groups, had presented their case.

Major project underway

The largest environmental good-practice catchment project ever undertaken by the dairy industry is underway in the Upper Waikato.

The project has been co-funded by DairyNZ (\$1.4 million) and the Waikato River Authority (\$685,000) and allows for one-on-one advice and support to be delivered to the door of every dairy farmer from the Huka Falls to Karapiro Dam. There is no charge for this advice and support; it is free to every participating farmer.

"We're excited about this project as it builds on work we've done in two pilot catchments, Little Waipa and Waipapa, over the last five years. It also complements two other Upper Waikato projects currently on the go; Dairy Push in Putaruru and Tokoroa and Tomorrow's Farms Today in Reporoa," said Waikato Regional Council's Healthy Farms, Healthy Rivers Coordinator Ross Abercrombie.

DairyNZ project leader Dr Mike Scarsbrook said the project has learned from DairyNZ's environmental work in the Waituna Lagoon in Southland and many other catchments around New Zealand and had the strong support of the dairy industry including Fonterra, Open Country and Miraka dairy companies.



Dr Mike Scarsbrook, DairyNZ project leader

"It will accelerate the adoption of good environmental practice, while maintaining farm profitability," Dr Scarsbrook said.

The project aims to support on-farm changes to enhance the Waikato River and demonstrate to the wider community farmers' voluntary commitment to sustainable dairying. Actions around nutrients, effluent, land and waterway practices will reduce nutrients, sediment and faecal bacteria entering waterways.

The actions will be captured in a DairyNZ Sustainable Milk Plan. The practical one-page plan will outline the steps to be taken, on-farm, to contribute to catchment scale environmental targets.

Any actions included in the plan will be agreed by farmers. Farm information will be confidential and only pooled data will be used for reporting purposes.

Ross Abercrombie suggested farmers in the Healthy Farms, Healthy Rivers project (formerly known as the Integrated Catchment Management project) who already have farm plans could make best use of the free consultancy advice by looking at the technical and financial implications of the more difficult and challenging actions still outstanding.

Dr Scarsbrook said the project aims to reduce the nutrient and sediment loads from the upper Karapiro catchment to the Waikato River as well as improve water use efficiency.

"Individual actions aggregated across the whole catchment should make a real difference to the health of the Waikato River. We need to see how far collective farmer action will take us and improve farmer understanding of links between their farm business and the river" Dr Scarsbrook said.

For more information contact DairyNZ Environmental Extension Specialist Mike Bramley on mike.bramley@dairynz.co.nz or phone 021 2700074.

For your calendar: Effluent Expo

Make sure the Effluent Expo at Mystery Creek on Tuesday 26 March 2013 is in your calendar.

Around 40 indoor and outdoor sites will display effluent management equipment and services. Seminars will be run throughout the day on a range of topics including water allocation and use, pond construction, managing high risk soils, lessons learnt by farmers on effluent upgrades, effluent designs for smaller herds and Waikato Regional Council's approach to monitoring for compliance.

The Expo runs from 9am to 3.30pm and entry is free thanks to Waikato Regional Council and Dairy NZ sponsorship.

In the Autumn issue

The next issue of Healthy Farms, Healthy Rivers will include a story on the Effluent Expo, a review of the Upper Waikato Drystock Nutrient Study and a change of focus for the Healthy Farms, Healthy Rivers team.