

UPDATE ON POLICY ROLLOUT IN THE CANTERBURY REGION

Leo Fietje¹ and Jessica Chalmers²

*¹Principal Planning Advisor and ²Senior Consents Planner
Environment Canterbury, Christchurch*

Canterbury's Policy framework for dealing with diffusely-sourced nutrients is a two-staged approach – the first being a regional “hold the line”, the second being a catchment-focussed community-driven approach looking at whether the regional approach needs fine-tuning to deal with specific challenges. The regional “hold the line” approach has been modified by Plan Change 5 which came into effect 1 February this year, addressing two key matters. Firstly moving away from reliance on fixed Overseer estimates as a threshold for requiring land use consent to farm and replacing these with narrative thresholds based on area in irrigation and area in winter grazing by cattle. Secondly adjusting the nitrogen limits to incorporate Good Management Practice, thereby creating a fairer and more level playing field.

In terms of the second stage, Council adopted recommendations presented by the OTOPI (Otaio, Temuka, Opihi and Pareora) and Waimakariri Zone Committees late last year. These recommendations will now be converted into proposed Plan Changes and notified this year, adding to the four sub-regional chapters already in place – Selwyn; Hinds, South Canterbury Streams and Waitaki.

Having the above in place enables increased focus on implementation and ensuring expected outcomes are actually achieved – the community's desire for results is as strong as ever with high expectations these will be delivered and delivered soon. A key tool in achieving that is the audited Farm Environment Plan – with emphasis on the ‘audit’. The Plan requires every Consent granted to be accompanied by a Farm Environment Plan requiring on-farm actions needed to achieve targets fixed in the Plan and these must be audited within 12 months of the consent being granted. Each audit results in a grade from A to D – A and B a ‘pass’, C and D a ‘fail’ – with timing of subsequent visits anywhere from 6 months to 3 years depending on grade.

Over 1,200 audits were completed last season with some very encouraging results, particularly when it's realised just how much effective and efficient systems contribute towards overall business success and bottom line.

Our presentation will provide examples of the above and highlight how we will incorporate new learnings into future Plan Changes.

Editor's Note: An extended manuscript has not been submitted for this presentation.