

BEFORE THE

Waikato Regional Council

IN THE MATTER OF

**Healthy Rivers Wai Ora Plan Change 1 and
Variation 1A**

STATEMENT OF

Walter Partnership

21 May 2019

Contact for service:

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Scope of Statement

1. This statement:
 - a. Introduces my farming business, and the ways that we farm to the natural capability of our property
 - b. Outlines which parts of the proposed Plan will make it difficult to continue delivering these on-farm environmental gains;
 - c. Specifically, I will focus on:
 - Nitrogen reference point- Rules 3.11.5.2 to 3.11.5.7 and all other
 - Stock exclusion- Policy 3 and 4, rules 3.11.5.1 to 3.11.5.4, Schedule C and any other provisions.
 - d. Outlines alternative ways to better meet the plans objectives

Introduction

2. I am farming at Oparau on a 900ha sheep and beef farm. We are currently running 2500 ewes in conjunction with dairy grazers and fattening cattle.
3. Ewes are run over our steeper country with cattle set stocked throughout the summer to help with pasture control. Cattle are then wintered on easier country with ewes remaining on the steeper country.
4. Our farm is located in the West Coast zone. Along with the sheep and beef farm is a dairy farm run by my parents and myself in Pirongia. This farm falls under Zone 1 Waipa catchment. The dairy farm is a low input farm with little supplement fed. We rear all calves and once weaned they are taken out to the Oparau farm to be finished.
5. My Grandparents moved up from Taranaki to purchase the 100ha dairy farm that is still the family farm today. My mother and father purchased the dairy farm in 1995. They went on to purchase a 400ha sheep and beef block at Oparau in 2000.
6. When I finished school I went to Massey University to study a Bachelor of Applied Science. Upon completing my degree I spent four years working as a shepherd, on two separate stations, in the Taihape area. I then headed overseas for my O.E. returning home at the end of 2014 to run the family sheep and beef farm. We have had the opportunity to grow our family business by purchasing another two properties that bound onto our sheep and beef operation.
7. Robyn Williamson, Heather Gilbert and I have set up two sub-catchment groups for the Kawhia Harbour to help farmers through this transition.

8. Our goal is to continue to be able to farm sustainably for future generations while remaining profitable. Environmental conservation has always been an important factor to our farming operation.
9. My grandfather began by planting trees around the dairy farm to help improve conservation while also providing shade for stock. My father and I have continued this by planting areas of the farm that cannot be utilised to their full potential.
10. We are currently working with the Regional council to fence off and plant critical source areas around our farm to help improve ecology and water quality. To date a total of 50ha of native bush has been fenced off and retired in an effort to improve native birdlife and plant species.
11. Our soil is predominantly mairoa ash. Because of its light properties it is prone to some erosion. This is mainly seen in areas where soil is exposed, however we see very few slips due to the class of the land.
12. To help control sediment runoff we use silt traps. These are placed the bottom of gullies to capture the majority of the silt before it runs into a major river or stream. The majority of cattle are removed from the steeper areas of the farm during the winter. We have found this has significantly reduced the amount of erosion and also increased profitability on the sideling's, by farming more ewes.

Specific parts of the plan I am commenting on

Nitrogen management and Nitrogen reference point (NRP)

13. NRP is not accurate when using the current overseer model, there are too many variables that give a wide range of values.
14. I think to obtain the NRP for each farm it should be taken over five years to give more of an average. This allows for variances in seasons and any changes to farming practices.
15. Farm environmental plans can be used to identify a NRP for each individual farm by obtaining soil type, stock classes, and stocking rate of that property. This will be fair and more accurate.
16. The 75th percentile method is unfair and disadvantages our sheep and beef operation. Why should we not be allowed to increase nitrogen use if we fall below the 75th percentile while other intensive farms are able to continue at their peak (as long as they fall under the 75th percentile)?
17. This is a one "one size fits all" rule that is unfair and disadvantages any progress wanting to be made by lower impacting farmers. Any land that will be purchased is limited to what the previous owner was doing.

Stock exclusion

18. The stock exclusion rule needs to be flexible and managed practically and sensibly. Water bodies that are below 15 degree slope should be fenced off as they are easy to get to with machine making it more time efficient and less costly.
19. We have a lot of water areas the come down sideling's and into creeks. I propose that sediment traps are put in at the bottom before going into main water bodies. Theses sediment traps can be fenced off easily to prevent stock access allowing sediments to settle. Reticulated water can then be drawn from these by way of gravity into a trough for drinking water. Reticulated water will help prevent stock drinking from natural water bodies.
20. There are three main rivers going through our farm. Currently we have three bridges and four stock crossings. To put in another four bridges would be a huge expense to the farming operation. Currently we have one main stock crossing that is fenced off from other paddocks and is only used when crossing stock.
21. Although there is still the fact of stock being in the water, they are only in for a limited time and large buffer zones help filtrate any sediments and contaminants.

Conclusion

21. I strongly believe, for this plan to work properly there needs to be changes made to make it more flexible to suit each individual farm. I would like to see the NRP changed to allow farmers, like myself, not be limited to how they farm because of previous generations or land owners. I would also like our future generations to be able to put "their mark" on our land.
22. Farm environmental plans are going to be the most efficient way to find out what each farms limiting factors are. These can be identified, ranked and the farmer can carry out tasks that will not only help improve the environment but also be compliant.
23. I feel a FEP should not be a one size fits all approach. They need to be flexible and planned to specifically suit the farm. No farm is going to get it 100% right but if they use their strengths to help mitigate limiting factors I believe more farmers will be accepting and look to help improve our environment.
22. Thankyou for listening. I am happy to answer any questions.