

Waikato Regional Council

Proposed Waikato Regional Plan Change One.

Healthy Rivers Initiative- Waikato and Waipa River Catchments

Distinction Hamilton Hotel and Conference Centre, 100 Garnett Ave, Te Rapa, Hamilton.

1.30 pm – Monday 20 May 2019

Submitters

Bob, Judy, Kim and Janette Osborne

Commissioners

1. We are the Osborne family, we have farmed Te Toko Station for 34 years. The farm is a 1,300-hectare property near Waitomo Caves in the headwaters of the Moakurarua catchment, which is Priority One in Plan Change One.
2. The farm is the headwaters for three major catchments – the Marokopa, the Awaroa and the Moakurarua.
3. Our farming operation is sheep and beef with 65% sheep, it is low intensity with less than eight stock units per effective hectares. We have retained over 400 hectares in native vegetation, have gifted some of this to QEII, covenanted other parts to Waikato Regional Council and planted many poles to stabilise the very few areas where there is erosion potential. In the next year we intend to plant a further 32 hectares of native plantings.

4. We support the outcome of clean and healthy waterways but we need a common-sense plan.
5. A tailored approach, in our opinion, would be the best way forward because every catchment has different pros and cons (terrain, stocking rate, soil type etc). To achieve this, water monitoring data is paramount. As outlined in our submission there are no current measurements or eighty-year targets for our catchment – yet we are defined as Priority One.
6. We understand the eighty-year targets are already met for nitrogen and phosphorus in the Waipa (which our catchment runs into). We do not have any information as to what or even if there is a problem with sediment and e-coli in our sub catchment.
7. Our farming operation has a nitrogen reference point of 13 which is lower than most operations. The proposed rules will put our livelihood at risk as we will no longer be able to balance our stock operations to adapt to weather and market conditions. There will be no avenue to mitigate adverse events through balancing stock and feed mix and animal welfare could be put at risk because of an arbitrary nitrogen reference point in a catchment which apparently doesn't have a nitrogen problem.
8. On the other hand, other farming operations below us in the sub-catchment with very high nitrogen reference points will be able to continue their operations unabated.
9. The proposed plan would require us to fence all permanently flowing waterways – of which we have many kilometres in steep V Shaped valleys. We have deliberately retained and encouraged native vegetation in these valleys to avoid erosion as shown

below:



10. Cattle are only grazed in these paddocks in summer when it is dry. In winter there are only sheep in these paddocks.

11. With fencing comes earthworks and paddocks that don't flow for stock movement leading to blind corners in which stock would congregate and defecate. Fencing these waterways would cause massive environmental damage and sediment run off into the very waterways we are trying to protect.

12. The fencing and associated water reticulation would be too costly to be economic and there is too much uncertainty regarding future requirements from both this plan change and central government legislation for us to risk borrowing hundreds of thousands of dollars to

make this type of investment when the environmental payback is not even defined or assured.

13. Another problem with the fencing for stock exclusion is finding the labour that is willing to fence by hand digging on terrain that you can't get machinery on and that drives the cost up massively even if these people can be found.

14. The only way to afford to fence and reticulate the steeper portions of the property would be to intensify the rest of the farmed land – which is more likely to have poor environmental outcomes.

15. On the flatter land where the streams are in places one metre wide – they are meandering and naturally change course – a fence put up at great cost one day may not be there tomorrow. With three metres of annual rainfall there are often flood events with the entire flats being inundated. The photos below show normal flow and one of three recent weather events.



16. The sediment load in the pictured flood water was greatly increased by sediment running off the unsealed public road following flow off cuts being put on the downward side of the road. The following pictures show the muddy water running straight off the road and onto the neighbouring farm. Better mitigation methods need to be found for both point source and diffuse discharges by all parties not just farmers.



17. For farming we believe the undefined environmental risks around sediment and e-coli can be better managed through low stock numbers, stock crossings (which we have put in) and other mitigating measures as part of a farm environment plan. For low intensity farming the costs of fencing and reticulation even on the flat are not economic – to balance the books we would need to increase our stocking numbers which we can't because of the nitrogen reference point limitation.
18. Critical Source Area management is better than blanket fencing and all farming types need a farm environmental plan which is specific for their unique situation.
19. The whole plan change boils down to economics. If the people on the land are receiving a reasonable income, they are more prone to being more environmentally proactive – you have to be in the black to be green.
20. This plan change as proposed leaves us with the choice of borrowing hundreds of thousands of dollars for no extra income or getting rid of our 300 cattle and slashing our income to dramatically below minimum wage while also putting us at further risk by only having one income stream. In poor years we end up losing money as will others in a similar situation.
21. The financial impacts do not align with the intention of the Vision and Strategy for the plan – affecting community well-being and mental health. Rural communities and sheep and beef farmers are struggling to survive as it is.