

# Ground Rules

Issue 2, Waikato, 27 September 2016

## Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of **Ground Rules for the Waikato region**. Our new environmental newsletter is designed to keep you up to speed with things relating to regional rules and the implementation process.

When FAR staff talk to arable farmers we hear that your "right to farm" is very high on the list of things we need to address. We also know that most arable farmers want to be compliant with the new rules and to move through the process with as little expense and aggravation as possible.

This newsletter aims to provide you with targeted, timely information, not only about rules, but also with other updates that will help to manage your way through the process.

The following information and links to useful websites and information pages will help you with this process. Use the links in the newsletter to dig down for more information.

## Waikato Rule Development

In August 2016, the [Waikato Collaborative Stakeholder Group \(CSG\)](#) Waikato Collaborative Stakeholder Group (CSG) completed its collaborative process with industry, iwi and community and made recommendations to the Waikato Regional Council for a Regional Plan Change for the Waikato and Waipa River catchments.

On 15 September the Waikato Regional Council approved the Plan Change Proposal for public notification. **At this stage, it is important to know that this is a proposal and not Waikato Regional Council policy.** There is a submission process to go through and opportunity for the public to have their say before the proposal is developed into the final Plan Change.

### **Submission process**

Public notification of the plan change proposal opens the formal submission process to the wider community. Anyone, groups and individuals, can make a submission and can either support, oppose or take a neutral stance on the plan and its various parts. The Council has set a time frame of 80 days for submissions to be developed and delivered. A summary of the submissions will be available early in 2017.

### **Hearings**

The next step in the process will be the hearings, where submissions are considered by a Hearings Committee. This is a formal process where people have the opportunity to present their submissions to the committee. The Hearings Committee is responsible for making the final decision about the Plan Change and their recommendations will be considered by the Council. Further appeals to the Plan Change can be made through the Environment Court. This can become a long and expensive business.

## FAR's role in the process

FAR will be working with Federated Farmers to test the impact of the proposed Plan Change on Waikato farm businesses. A project is underway to develop 12 case studies for a range of farm types and management regimes throughout the Waikato and Waipa catchments. An arable and a mixed cropping farm are among the 12 selected for the study.

The case studies will include analysis of:

- The cost of producing and developing a farm environment plan, including the nitrogen reference point.
- The cost of the consent process both to the farmer and Council.
- The cost to the farmer of implementing the farm environment plan actions and any resource consent requirements.
- The impact on farm profitability.

This is an important piece of work as it will test the impact of the Plan Change on a range of farm systems and the outcomes will be used to develop an informed submission about the cost, both financial and social, on the farm business. Federated Farmers will lead the development of this submission, FAR staff will assist with provision of research data and you may also have a part to play.

Take the time to become familiar with the [proposed rules](#) and consider them in context with your farm. If you have concerns that your farming activities may be affected, tell us or your Federated Farmers' representative. It will be important to include farmers' feedback in the submissions as they are developed.

Note any feedback relating to the proposed rules must be sent to us as soon as possible. Time will be tight for the preparation of focussed and effective submissions.

## Important Rules for Arable and Mixed Cropping Farms

[Rules 2, 4 and 7](#) are the rules that have most relevance to arable and mixed cropping farms.

- **Rule 2** is designed to identify properties with low risk factors, which will be “permitted activities”. The sort of farms where this rule might apply are maize systems with light winter grazing on grass. These farms are considered to be low intensity and will not need a farm environment plan or a consent.
- **Rule 4** is likely to cover most mixed arable systems with a range of crops and stock on the farm. They will be “controlled activities” and will need a farm environment plan and a consent.
- **Rule 7** covers the provisions for land-use change from less intensive to more intensive activities. This rule is the only one that becomes operative immediately.

## Farm Environment Plans (FEPs)

FAR will be actively working with the Council to develop a template for an arable farm environment plan. The proposed rules state that plans must be prepared by “certified persons”. This is disappointing, as FAR has worked with ECan staff to develop a good workshop process to enable farmers to develop their own plans. Our Canterbury experience shows that farmers are just as able as “certified persons” to prepare plans for their own farms and have a better understanding of the environmental risks on their farms and what to do about them, if they've worked them out for themselves.

This is a point I will be keen to see addressed in a submission.

## Farming on slopes

In **Rule 2** you will see that there is a reference to farming on slopes; “no land >15° slope cultivated or grazed”. This is a point of concern for many farmers, especially knowing what a 15° slope looks like.

A good explanation for assessing slope is given on pages 38-39 in Andrew Barber's [Erosion and Sediment Control Guidelines for Vegetable Production](#). Check it out and get your eye-in to “slope” with the terrain maps for the Bombay and Pukekohe hills.

If you are farming on sloping land, a future requirement will be that you have measures in place to reduce run-off and prevent sediments leaving the farm. The above Guidelines will be a valuable reference for effective management practices for sloping land.

## How Can ProductionWise® help?

### ***Organised farm data has many benefits – More than you may realise!***

The ProductionWise team are continually adding features and improvements to the system to make data entry fast and easy. To see what's new, visit [ProductionWise](#) and check out their latest upgrades. Have you discovered the convenience of the “App” for real time data entry and explored the use of Templates to reduce repetitive data entry?

Organised farm records become important when regional rules require nutrient budgets and farm environment plans to be completed. Many farmers will need a [nitrogen reference point](#), this means an OVERSEER nutrient budget must be developed.

It takes time to do an arable OVERSEER nutrient budget. For each budget you need the farm records for two years, including all inputs for the crops and stock in the rotations. An easily accessible, electronic set of farm data makes the data collection job more efficient for everyone. FAR and the ProductionWise technical team are working to develop an OVERSEER Input Report which will capture:

- All paddock operations and inputs relating to crops grown e.g. cultivations, fertiliser and irrigation.
- Stock and grazing information.
- Soil tests and irrigation inputs.

This feature will be available soon. It will make farm data collation for your OVERSEER budget fast and easy, saving you time and money - but only if you are a ProductionWise user and your records are up to date!

*ProductionWise is an electronic farm recording system, developed by GrainGrowers in Australia and adapted by FAR for use in New Zealand. It is freely available to FAR levy payers.*

## For questions and feedback:

As this is the first of these newsletters for your region we are interested in your feedback. Please send it to us at:

[The FAR office 03 345 5783](#) or directly to [Diana Mathers 06 8779435, 027 5442 236, \[diana.mathers@far.org.nz\]\(mailto:diana.mathers@far.org.nz\)](#)

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