

Ground Rules

Issue 1, Canterbury, 13 July 2016

Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of Ground Rules, our environmental newsletter to keep you up to speed with things relating to compliance and regional rules. The regulatory space is changing fast and many details about the rules are still up in the air with submissions being written and hearings still to come.

Most arable farmers want to be compliant with the new rules and move through the process efficiently with as little expense and aggravation as possible. We aim to provide you with targeted, timely information, not only about rules, but also with other updates that will help with managing your way through them.

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.

Canterbury Rules

The Canterbury Land and Water Regional Plan (LWRP) has new rules for farming activities relating to nutrient management. A process of developing sub-regional plans and catchment limits is underway. The Hurunui & Waiau and Selwyn Te Waihora catchments are completed and others are still being developed and negotiated through the submission and hearings or appeal processes.

By now you should be familiar with the zone your farm is in and the rules developed for that zone. If you are not sure, this [information](#) on the Environment Canterbury website is a useful summary of the regional rules. If a sub-regional plan has been developed you will need to know its details. Information about the Selwyn - Te Waihora, Hinds, South Coastal Canterbury Streams and Waitaki sub-regional plans can be found [here](#).

There are different timeframes for implementation for different zones within the region. If you need more information, Environment Canterbury staff on the [zone teams](#) are available to answer any questions.

Understanding the terminology in the rules

The Land and Water Regional Plan requires owners of properties larger than 5 hectares to establish a “nitrogen baseline” and a “nitrogen loss calculation”.

The nitrogen baseline is the average nitrogen loss from a property (as estimated using OVERSEER®) from 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2013.

The nitrogen loss calculation is the amount of nitrogen lost annually from a property over the most recent four-year period. The four-year period allows for variances in production, climate and farming operation to be taken into account.

In many zones, if the property nitrogen loss number exceeds a nitrogen loss threshold, then a farming activity resource consent is needed. For example in [Selwyn-Waihora](#), a nitrogen loss threshold for a consent has been set at 15 kg N/ha/year. Those farms that are larger than 10 ha with a nitrogen loss number higher than 15 will be required to get a consent. In most of the rest of the region the nitrogen loss threshold is 20 kg N/ha/year.

In some zones, there are zones within zones. In Selwyn-Waihora, two additional zones are important. Farms within the phosphorus and sediment risk areas and the [Cultural Landscape/Values Management Area \(CLVMA\)](#) will need a consent, irrespective of their nitrogen loss numbers.

Consents

Do I need one and what needs to be done?

Under the new rules many arable farmers will require consent. The question of whether or not a consent is required is answered by your N Loss number. If your N loss number is higher than the nitrogen loss threshold for your zone you will need a consent, if the N Loss number is lower, your farming is a permitted activity and you can carry on as normal.

This is where it gets tricky for arable farmers because we are now entering the realms of OVERSEER® nutrient budgets; a foreign territory for cropping farmers and a sticking point for knowing how to proceed.

A word about OVERSEER

OVERSEER is here to stay in the foreseeable future. It has been written into Regional Rules and Consent requirements in indelible ink, whether we like it or not. So we must find ways to live with it.

An OVERSEER nutrient budget, provides an estimate of the nutrient losses from the farm. It is a useful tool for identifying parts of the farm system where nutrient losses are high and scenario testing management changes to see if nutrient losses can be reduced. It is also useful for demonstrating how efficient a farming system is.

It is widely known that it is challenging to prepare an arable OVERSEER budget; the system is complex and there are many management blocks associated with the rotations. As a consequence, the accuracy of the nitrogen loss number in the nutrient budget is often questioned.

An alternative method to OVERSEER nutrient budgets

Many of you will not have had a single budget completed, let alone the number required for the baseline and nitrogen loss numbers required. Environment Canterbury staff are aware of the known cost and delays for getting budgets completed, they do not want this to discourage you from getting on with the consenting process.

An alternative approach is being developed for arable farmers. This is being developed by FAR, HortNZ and ECan. It is an interim method for finding your N Loss number and establishing your Nitrogen baseline as an alternative to a full OVERSEER budget.

The method involves accessing a 'GMP Estimator' in the [Farm Portal](#) with the matrix of good management numbers developed for the catchment modelling. This method will be available later this year.

You will be able to use this number as an alternative to the N loss number derived from OVERSEER budgets.

The development of this interim method is not complete. More information will follow.

For those of you on a waiting list to get an OVERSEER nutrient budget completed:

ECan have developed a "wait list register" for those of you who are unable to complete the consenting process because you are on the waiting list for an OVERSEER budget. This register is held by their Customer Services department.

Call from Christchurch: (03) 353-9007. Call from any other area: 0800 324 636 (0800 EC INFO)

If you register they will know your farm is on track to get a consent.

Our advice is:

- Make a start on your farm environment plan – these are needed for your consent. FAR have developed a FEP template for cropping systems if you need one.
- Collect and collate your farm information in preparation for an OVERSEER budget – eventually we expect you will need one.
- Find a trusted nutrient management adviser to prepare the OVERSEER budget and N loss when the time is right. The fertiliser industry and rural consultants have qualified people who can assist you in this area.
- Register on the ECan wait list register if you are unable to complete your consent because you are waiting to have an OVERSEER nutrient budget completed.

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 what's been developed in their latest upgrades. Have you discovered the convenience of the "App" for real time data entry and explored the use of templates to set up information for your repetitive farm operations?

FAR is also planning ways to make ProductionWise work for compliance with regional rules. OVERSEER budgets are here to stay and you will need cost efficient ways to get them done. Farm environment plans are required for consents, they will be audited and a full report of the farm records will help this process.

It takes time to do an arable OVERSEER nutrient budget. The data requirements for each budget are 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 Australian development team are working to develop the **OVERSEER input report** which will capture;

- Up to date S-map soil information for the farm
- Soil tests
- Irrigation inputs
- All paddock inputs relating to the crop including cultivation, fertiliser and irrigation.
- Stock and grazing information

The OVERSEER input report makes farm data collation for your OVERSEER budget fast and easy. Deliver the report, along with your ProductionWise farm maps, to your fertiliser rep over a quick cup of tea rather than spending a morning of paper sorting. This feature will be available soon. It will save you time and money but only if you are a ProductionWise user and your records are up to date!

As technology advances, it is not too difficult to imagine data being transferred directly between ProductionWise and OVERSEER. Nutrient budgets could be generated at the tap of a button! Our aim is to get there.

ProductionWise workshops will be held in late winter 2016. To get some hands-on experience and learn about the latest updates, register your interest by calling the FAR office: 03 345 5783

Farm Environment Plans (FEPs)

Managing environmental risks for better environmental outcomes

If a consent is required for your farming activities under the new Canterbury rules, you will need to prepare a Farm Environment Plan and it will then be subject to ongoing [auditing](#). The plan should outline the environmental risks on your farm, summarise your current management practices and develop a plan for management changes to get you to a level of good management. At our recent farm environment workshops we found that many of you are already there, so the management changes were minimal.

The good news is that ECan have approved that farmers can develop their own farm environment plans. However this does mean that the responsibility of developing a well-thought through plan sits in your hands. The plan must meet the requirements of the consent and be able to survive the scrutiny of the auditor during the auditing process.

If you are interested in developing your own plan a good option is to attend a **FAR farm environment plan workshop**. All the components of the planning process will be covered. Your plan will use the [FAR FEP template](#) (which does meet the consent requirements) and [Guidelines](#). FAR and ECan Land Management staff will be there to answer questions and help you through the process.

You may not finish the plan at the workshop but you will be well underway and there will be ongoing support to ensure plans are completed to meet the consent requirements.

You can make a start on your plan by copying the FAR FEP template onto your computer. The template is in PDF format and it only works on recent versions of ADOBE.

Before you start entering information into the template, follow these steps:

Save the template with a name you recognise e.g surnameFEP2016

File it on the computer somewhere easy to find in the future.

Regularly save the information you add as you fill it in.

Maps and management reports for your FEP and FEP audits can be developed in ProductionWise.

If you are interested in developing a FEP for your farm, let us know and we will organise a date for you to attend a workshop. Contact the FAR office: 03 345 5783

In the next edition of Ground Rules we will update you on:

- Good management Practices (GMPs)
- The Farm Portal
- Progress with the interim alternative for determining your N Loss numbers

For more information please contact Diana Mathers at Diana.Mathers@far.org.nz

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