

Ground Rules

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A little bit of background

Action for healthy waterways sets out a new national direction for freshwater management. It consists of actions to quickly halt further freshwater degradation and sets us on a path to healthier freshwater within a generation. This is a long-term commitment that will require everyone to work together.

Resilient farming depends on the safe-keeping of our soils and water, and many farmers have already begun a journey of improvement to reduce the environmental risks on their farms, providing better outcomes for their businesses and communities.

The Action for Healthy Waterways measures, along with the support the Government is providing, will help all farmers reach the high standards many have already achieved.

This information sheet for mixed arable enterprises provides summaries on what needs to be done by when.

More information can be found on the Ministry for the Environment's website at www.mfe.govt.nz/action-for-healthy-waterways.

Farm planning

Depending on where they live, many arable growers already have Farm Environment Plans (FEP), but there are changes ahead. Over the next five years, it is likely that all farms, in all regions will require FEPs.

The Essential Freshwater Package will make it mandatory to have an **enforceable freshwater module** in a farm plan. This is not required immediately. Over the next 12+ months, the Government will work with primary sector representatives, iwi/Māori, regional councils and other interested groups to develop new regulations which will set out the exact requirements for these freshwater modules. These modules are likely to be phased in, with a prioritised roll-out in areas where waterways are less healthy.

It is intended that the new farm plan freshwater module be added to existing FEP templates, meaning that if you already have a FEP, it is likely to need adjusting in future.

The mandatory freshwater module will probably include:

- A farm map identifying features such as waterways, critical source (discharge of contaminant) areas, high erosion-prone areas, and other risks to the health of the freshwater ecosystem.
- A risk assessment across specific activities including irrigation, application of nutrients and effluent, winter grazing, stock-holding areas, stock exclusion, offal pits and farm rubbish pits.
- A schedule of actions to manage identified features and address identified risks.

Freshwater modules in farm plans will need to be:

- Approved by a suitably qualified and experienced person.
- Audited by independent auditors.
- Enforced by regional councils.

Although mandatory, the freshwater FEP module is considered a more flexible approach to ensuring growers and farmers are following best practice than prescriptive regulatory standards. It will take a few years to put in place and so regulations are required to drive immediate improvement in some farming practices.

Action for Healthy Waterways – Requirements for Farmers

The Ministry for the Environment (MfE) has prepared information sheets for various farm sectors, but not for arable. The following list of actions has been adapted from the MfE sheets for the dairy, pastoral and horticulture sectors. For more information, go to the **MfE website**, or check out the specific industry focused sheets:

For dairy farmers

For pastoral farmers

For horticultural growers

Timing	Rule
Existing	Keep synthetic nitrogen fertiliser use at appropriate levels.
Existing	Apply best practice to winter grazing on forage crops.
Mid-2020*	Farm wetland and stream protection. No draining or development, except in very limited circumstances.
Mid-2020**	Electronic reporting on water usage for existing water consents over 5 litres/second.
Mid-2020	Resource consent required to intensify land-use e.g. dairy conversion.
Mid-2020	Resource consent for feedlots.
Winter 2021	Resource consent for forage crops over 50 ha or 10% of farm (whichever is larger) or slopes over 10-degrees.
Mid-2021	Meet minimum standards or apply for a resource consent for stock-holding pads. (Stockyards and shearing sheds exempt).
2025 (at latest)	Keep all cattle, pigs and deer out of waterways more than 1 metre wide in low slope areas and from waterways on land used for fodder-crops, break-feeding, or irrigated pasture, including hill country.

*Exact date yet to be notified.

**Phased in over six years, depending allocation.

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