Submission on proposed Southland Water and Land Plan

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Public hearing
Please choose one of the following options:
☐ I do not wish to be heard in support of my submission; or
☒ I wish to be heard in support of my submission; and if so,
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Trade Competition
If you could gain an advantage in trade competition, your submission must only include matters which affect the environment.

Please tick the sentence that applies to you:

☐ I could not gain an advantage in trade competition through this submission; or
☒ I could gain an advantage in trade competition through this submission.

If you have ticked this box please sign below to declare that you are directly impacted by an adverse environmental effect.

Signature: Stuart McDonald & Robyn Halder

Date: 31 July 2016

(Signature of person making submission or person authorised to sign on behalf of person making the submission)

Please note:
(1) all information contained in a submission under the Resource Management Act 1991, including names and addresses for service, becomes public information.
A General Comments - Concern about Compliance Costs and Implementation Practicalities

- Acknowledge the positive efforts of Environment Southland in engaging with stakeholders. The public consultation has been first rate, engaging and robust. Long may this continue.

- Accept that this plan is about Environment Southland doing its job, that it is charged by legislation with formulating a plan. We assume that liaison exists with other regional councils to share ideas and develop best practice solutions. Being a trailblazer is expensive. It is easier to follow the precedents of others.

- "Dairy farmers have been milked for years by Environment Southland. Do not assume that the old ewe has any extra fat on her back". We express concern about the financial burden which could be imposed on the Southland farmer by the "compliance industry" and ask that Environment Southland always remain aware that they are not dealing with a "cost plus" industry. The economic viability of farming in Southland is directly exposed to international market forces, and there exists no mechanism to pass compliance costs on. Sheep and beef farmers are well aware of the cost imposition on the dairy sector by the consent process. This must not continue with the new plan, for any type of farming operation.

- "Carrot" versus "Stick". Council focus needs to remain on consultation and education, and not on punitive measures. Resources must be directed towards getting "alongside" farmers. Information delivery through the website, field days, etc, with land sustainability staff. Employment of an army of compliance officers is not helpful to anyone. Active surveillance by aeroplane and helicopter, or by random roadside inspection is not a good look for public relations. We would submit that implementation of the plan is accomplished with either present or reduced staffing levels, without the need for yet another office space extension at the North Road – Price St intersection. This province needs employment in the direct production of exports, not in compliance.

- The plan needs to publicly acknowledge the special relationship between the Southland farmer, and his land. This is just as important as the "tangata whenua". The farmer views his role as that of the custodian of his/her land and animals.

- Production Forestry - The Plan seems strangely silent on forestry land use. The impacts of logging operations on water are surely significant enough to warrant mention (and rules!). Are management plans and/or resource consents required to mitigate the inevitable environmental issues from logging steep land above watercourses?

- Physiographic Units Definition
  Must be viewed as work in progress, and subject to alteration in Management Plans if soil type proves to be different
  Accuracy of mapping dependent on historical records like soil maps, the Topoclimare exercise. There is a danger of oversimplification when superimposing generalised maps onto a specific farm.
- Farm Management Plans
  We support the individual farm plan concept as an acknowledgement that every farm is different, and that good management practices are preferable to blanket rules. There is no indication of costs associated with filing these with the Council. We would submit that these documents are filed free of charge.

- Tile Drains
  This area requires further consideration, and is potentially one of the most contentious long term issues in the Plan. Farm production requires drainage of land, and Environment Southland policies seem to imply that water flow needs to be slowed, impaired and generally impeded at every opportunity. There is more to drainage than "tile drains". Farm drainage now uses plastic drain coil rather than clay tiles (not to mention mole drains, subsoiling and aerating) so this section might be more correctly titled Artificial Drainage or Installed Drainage or some similar broader term. Mapping requirements will prove quite onerous. Where farm ownership has changed, records may be nonexistent.

- Fencing of Waterways
  This is likely to occur over time as part of good farming practice, in conjunction with installation of stock water schemes, as economics allow. Leniency for sheep grazing is a good practical move, but remember that much cattle and deer grazing in Southland hill and high country is also quite extensive rather than intensive, and will have as minimal impact on waterways as sheep grazing.

- Critical Source Areas – Some elaboration is needed on these

B Specific Comments on Policies and Rules

- Policy 37 Climate Change - Some “Rules” could be included to aid in this Policy Implementation. In particular these would need to identify the role of the farmer, the manager on the land, in coping with extreme and/or variable climate and weather conditions. For instance, drought conditions may require relaxation of stock exclusion from waterway rules, just as extreme summer rainfall causes effluent disposal issues for dairy farmers. Even the extremely mild May-June period this year meant the temporary fencing rules were somewhat irrelevant. Give the farmer some discretion please and acknowledge his “hands on" management, coping with everyday issues, given that most environmental challenges arise during weather extremes.

- Rule 14 Discharge of Fertiliser
  (a)(iii)(2) 10 metres from the bed of any watercourse is overly harsh. This ignores the efforts made by the ground topdressing industry to guarantee placement of fertiliser to a much greater degree of accuracy than that. 3 metres would be more appropriate.
• Rule 23 Intensive Winter Grazing
  Please specifically state that “intensive winter grazing” does not include grazing on grass pasture, only forage crops.
  (b)(vii) Concern about the arbitrary nature of the slope restrictions. Is this based on science or just rules for rules sake? This rule is overly restrictive for hill country farms. For simplification, the 3 metre rule should apply regardless of slope.

• Rule 25 Cultivation on Sloping Ground
  Please make it clear that your definition of “cultivation” includes “spraying” by using the term “Cultivation and Spraying”
  (a)(ii) Delete the reference to mechanical cultivation not being permitted on land with a slope greater than 20 degrees. This is ambiguous, as while cultivation of steep land may not be possible close to a watercourse, it certainly is elsewhere on an open hill country paddock. Leave this to individual discretion of the farmer.
  Again, as in Rule 23(b)(vii) above, delete the slope rules and replace with one standard 3 metre limit. This will negate the need for much disagreement. A 3 metre wide strip of overgrown rank pasture will act as an adequate barrier for runoff for most paddocks for most of the time.
  Under the proposed rules (admittedly under a hypothetical worst case scenario) the cultivable area of a 4 hectare headland paddock requiring 20 metre setbacks right around the perimeter on strongly rolling (16 degree) hills would be reduced by up to 36% to just over 2.5 hectares. If an internal gully or other “critical source area” were to be present, then even less of the paddock could be sown into winter crop
  (b) The exemption for a once only cultivation of setback areas no more than once every five years to allow for pasture renewal is appreciated.

• Rule 35 Discharge of Agricultural Effluent
  (b)(2) Delete this subsection, as surely the individual farmer ought to be able to decide if he requires more than one feed pad on his farm.