Submission on proposed Southland Water and Land Plan

Email your completed submission to policy@es.govt.nz by 5.00pm Monday 1st August 2016

Alternatively, you can post your signed submission to:
Southland Water and Land Plan
Environment Southland
Private Bag 90116
Invercargill 9840

You can also deliver your submission to Environment Southland’s North Road office or fax it on 03 211 5252.

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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 do wish to be heard in support of my submission; and if so,
☐ I would be prepared to consider presenting my submission in a joint case with others making a similar submission at any hearing

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: 
Date: 25th July 2016

Please note:
(1) all information contained in a submission under the Resource Management Act 1991, including names and addresses for service, becomes public information.
Submission on Southland land and water plan

We strongly oppose many aspects of the proposed Southland Land and Water plan due to the gaping holes in information in the plan. Submissions have been called for and people asked to provide feedback when in many areas there are inadequate details or available data to enable informed comment. While Environment Southland may have fulfilled requirements by going to the wider community they also have a moral obligation to consider the social impact and consequences of any planned change.

Timing is critical and burdening the farming community with additional compliance costs at short notice may impact very seriously on the mental welfare of many farmers and their families already under significant strain. There is no money to spare!!! We know of a couple running a dairy farm as well as holding down two other jobs each. Many people are exhausted, and while we all agree that we must take better care of our environment change has to be reasonable and at a pace farmers can manage financially. The report on the financial impact on the wider community is absent and should have been made available before submissions closed.

The Plan should have a Review process as more information comes to hand to enable farmers and Environment Southland to work together through the changes in future. Many Regional Councils throughout New Zealand have had to make significant changes to their plans as a consequence of the social impact and better science. This Review process is a vital tool and must include timelines and be reviewed regularly.

We are unaware of other councils taking such a considered approach in characterising the land resource prior to policy development. We note that the “Validation and Testing Report” for the physiographic zones has yet to be completed and placed on the Environment Southland website. This should have been made available prior to submissions closing to justify the use of the zones. This information has a huge bearing on the submission process. Those farming in the Old Mataura zone believe we have been singled out and have been unduly targeted after years of providing goodwill, good mitigation management practises and providing information. The people in the Balfour area are absolutely gutted that Environment Southland has taken the approach it has. Environment Southland has started limit setting in the Old Mataura zone and has seen fit to overlook other physiographic zones with the same issues but have not put the same restrictions upon them. Because the catchment/zone limit setting process is underway and because of the lack of detail this has made it even more difficult to provide an educated response in this area.

No consideration of good farming mitigation practises have been factored into anything in this plan. One size fits all is the approach!
Rule 20 – Farming

This rule requires all dry stock farms to have completed a farm management plan and nutrient budget based on a timeline of 30th May 2018 to 30th May 2020 defined by physiographic zones. If a farm completes this by the defined date it is a permitted activity except if it is a dairy farm or has intensive winter grazing.

The time lines are.

(a) All sheep, beef and deer farms 20 to 100 ha.
(b) Farming sheep, beef and deer in oxidizing, riverine or peat wetlands physiographic zones by 30th May 2018.
(c) Farming sheep, beef and deer in central plains, bedrock/hill country or gleyed physiographic zones by 30th May 2019.
(d) Farming sheep, beef and deer in old Mataura or lignite-marine terraces physiographic zones by 30th May 2020.

If Environment Southland are serious about having all dry stock farmers complete their management plans on time they will have to resource it adequately through their land sustainably service. This would require staff availability for hosting workshops and helping individual farmers plus user friendly online and hard copy information to aid in putting a plan together. Has the cost of this been budgeted for by the council and is the number of farms involved in each deadline date known?

What happens to farms that have two or more physiographic zones in their property? A farmer can’t be expected to complete one for each zone.

The rule does not expand on the Environment Southland register of independently audited self-management participant’s work. We would need further information to be able to comment on this.

If a farmer has not completed a management plan by the zone deadline, will a consent be required? I believe that if that is the case it would be very challenging for all farmers due to the proposed very tight time frames. As mentioned above the council needs to be more proactive with help and resources.

The nutrient budget part of the management plan brings in a whole new level of complexity and cost for the farmer. At present in Southland there is around 15 trained professionals that are certified to put together a nutrient budget. This number is inadequate to process the number of dry stock farmers over the three year period ended 30th May 2020. What plans do the council have to increase this number?

Capability in both these areas is further skewed towards dairy farming systems, with sheep, beef and mixed systems a distant second and deer systems most poorly represented. As a result it is quite possible that many deer farmers will not have the ability to provide the required Management Plan within the given deadlines and would therefore have to apply for a resource consent as a discretionary activity.
While we agree that farm management/Environmental plans are an important part in a farmer's apparatus in understanding their farms environmental issues and documenting what they have done and plan to do in the future, the details on its implementation in the plan is very lacking in the proposed plan. Because of our above points we STRONGLY DISAGREE with the proposed dates (Rule 20 (,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,l,j,k) that farmers are required to apply and implement a Management Plan (INCLUDING MITIGATIONS RELEVANT TO THE FARMING TYPE) and provided to Environment Southland upon request or the farming activity will not comply.

**Rule 22 – New or expanded dairy farming of cows.**

The proposed Rule 22(f) Despite rule 22(e), where new or expanded dairy farming of cows includes land of less than 10 hectares in any one zone, the landholder may determine whether the physiographic zone for that area, or the prevalent physiographic zone for the landholding, applies to that area of land. This proposed rule does not take into account land holding size e.g. a 250 ha or larger property with 125 ha in the Old Mataura and 125 ha in the Gleyed physiographic zone. This proposed rule takes away the knowledge/opportunity of the farmer who may have farmed that particular property for generations and has always understood and managed the environmental impact on his/her soils along with not compromising good animal welfare practises. This proposed rule is unfair e.g Neighbours who have 10 ha or less within a discretionary/non complying zone have the opportunity to have their farm in a permitted zone even though they have fewer ha in the permitted zone than their neighbour. Farmers should have the opportunity to farm the land within that physiographic zone in accordance with the rules of that zone. This change of rule could be covered in the farm management/environment plan. Rule 22 as it stands in the Southland Water and Land Plan is another case of grand parenting which is unacceptable and grossly unfair and will divide the community. Environment Southland needs to be very careful to respect a farmer's knowledge regarding their own land to achieve a positive outcome.

**Rule 23 – Intensive winter grazing**

This rule is attempting to identify large scale wintering operations by making 50 ha as the trigger point for the need for a consent and 20 ha limit for the Peat wetland and old Mataura high risk zones where it is a non-complying activity if conditions (i) or (iii) are not met is a dog. This is the start of limit setting in the Old Mataura physiographic zone and to allow dairy and intensive wintering to continue ((C) (i) Intensive winter grazing) at the expense of other land holders in the Old Mataura zone is nothing but GRANDPARENTING and is completely unacceptable within the Balfour community. This will cause a huge negative effect on land values and farming options within this area. It will cause resentment among farmers as further limit setting within the catchment takes place (the Old Mataura catchment could quite possible be at its nutrient loss maximum) and farmers having unequal restrictions placed on their businesses compared to a neighbour operating a high nitrate leaching operation is unacceptable. This rule needs to insure that everyone
in a risk zone plays their part in reducing the risk and treated fairly. Under the proposed plan the Council is rewarding the polluter. The start of limit setting in the Old Mataura is ill conceived and the Council has no idea as to the outcome of section (C) (i) where there is no reliable data on the average winter grazing areas or tonnages of crops (tonnage of crops can vary significantly from one part of the province to the other) over the previous 3 years.

Rule 23 Intensive winter Grazing does not encourage good farming practise but encourages mediocrity. There are examples of very good wintering practises in the Balfour area which have gone a long way to mitigating nutrient loss, those farmers who have worked with ES for over 10 years are devastated with the proposed water and land plan. They look at the (C) (i) Grand parenting section in disbelief and feel they have been totally betrayed by Council who have encourage good practice at quite some expense to the individual farmer! While other farmers have continued with high nutrient losses and are being rewarded for their mediocrity under the proposed Water and Land Plan, this is rewarding the polluter and there will be hell to pay in this catchment!

Rule 25 – Cultivation on sloping ground

The proposed setbacks seem to climb very rapidly from 3 meters at 4 degrees to 10 metres from 4 to 16 degrees. While we agree that having the appropriate set back from cultivation to the waterbody edge is extremely important to insure that no sediment enters the water. The proposed rule is too arbitrary in its approach and there should be a larger range of guidelines for sloping ground, with the responsibility put back on the farmer, with the understanding that any failure due to not following guidelines is a breach of the rule. This rule in regards to the 4 to 16 degrees and 16 to 20 degrees setbacks has the potential to be inappropriately enforced by compliance officers with clinometers when dealing with paddocks with huge variations in slope within short distances along a waterway or up a hillside.

Rule 70 - Stock exclusion from waterbodies

This rule as it stands will exclude Deer from all waterbodies where the land when measured over a width of 20 meters from the water body, has a slope of less than 16 degrees, by 1 May 2020. As this is just four years away it is unlikely to be achieved on all deer farms due to the physical task involved and the cost of deer fencing (up to $30 per metre labour included)

Farmers failing to meet the above deadline will need a consent and a detailed plan to complete the fencing by 2025. As many would not have the time or the finance available to complete the fencing by 2025 it would mean deer farmers WILL need a consent to farm deer or else go broke.

While we agree that flat and easier country should work towards fencing off waterways, farmers should be given to 2025 to achieve this without a consent process and the huge costs involved. This process must take into account what a farmer may have achieved in
protecting waterways on their farm in previous years. With a farm Management plan a farmer can clearly show how he/she plans to protect their waterways using the financial and physical resources available in the best and most effective way without the stress involved in a consent process.

The application of the 16 degree and greater rule for exclusion from having to fence of waterways is confusing. We understand that the council is trying to differentiate between land types, but this rules fails to understand that very extensive country with low stocking rates will have a lot of waterways with slopes less than 16 degrees. It is totally uneconomic and impractical to try and fence some of these areas, as they don’t have the stock pressure of down land farms. The cost per stock unit in this country is considerably higher and would be uneconomic if forced to fence extensive water systems. Another cost that is overlooked is water reticulated drinking water systems. These are easier install and more affordable on flat intensive country but can become a logistical and financial nightmare in extensive hill country. Even in medium rolling hill country applying this rule will be very confusing as the slopes will vary in short distances beside creeks. The farmers should be able to apply a practical fencing programme that best protects the major water systems on the farm, through double fencing where practical and using sediment traps/filter zones on the lower reaches of awkward water systems. Environment Southland has encouraged and helped deer farmers set up sediment traps/filter zones on farm very successfully. Evidence has shown that water leaving a deer farm after filtering through a sediment/filter zone is cleaner than entering the property. Why has this option been left out of the Water and Land plan?

The risk to water systems should be defined by stocking rates, soil type risk, and understanding the pros and cons of deer fencing in a hilly environment. When it comes to intensive winter grazing it is covered in previous rules requiring protection for waterways from all stock under intensive winter grazing. This fencing rule can be covered by using the farm management plan as it will clearly document the progress and plans in conjunction with help from LEP. The use of a consents process is unnecessary with yet another cost being passed onto farmers.

Protecting water ways on a deer farm is more than just lines on a map, it is about understanding it’s topography and at risk areas and the best use of any farmer’s resources in achieving a good result. The farmer’s have to understand these factors as do council staff involved in helping or auditing the farm.

In summing up.

As a Rural Support Trustee I have grave concerns about the welfare of some members of the rural community and the timing and extra stress the Water and Land plan will place on those families. There is never a perfect time, but the rural communities are under tremendous stress right now and the timing couldn’t have been worse.

As a farmer who has spent many hours/days during the last 10 years travelling to attend Environment Southland meetings, holding field days and championing the work of
Environment Southland at considerable private expense, I am extremely disappointed that there has been very little value placed on the farmers’ viewpoint and feel totally excluded from the final plan. I have tried to help with the process but feel that Environment Southland have had their own agenda and our inclusion in the process has been a token gesture to enable Environment Southland to tick the box on farmer participation.

David Stevens

p.p. DH & L M Stevens