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Submitter No: 179

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Submission 179 - 14/9/17 - Speaking Notes

We are Jonathan and Sarah Crooks, sheep and beef farmers within a family farming company located at Wendonside, near Waikaia.

Our property is a self-contained farming unit of 730 hectares where we farm 6000 sheep and beef stock units.

Our property is of rolling contour with elevation from 200 metres to 560 metres. Currently we are classed within the Hill Country physiographic zone.

We range from intensive rolling paddocks of 5-6Ha at the lower end of the property to extensive 40-50 Ha hill blocks out the back.

We have been farming the property for 15 years after we previously farmed at Mabel Bush. In that time, we have developed the property and increased our stocking rate by 1500 Stock Units. We have recently taken on management of the property from the last generation.

We recognise and support that some land use activities or peoples behaviours in Southland are certainly accelerating water quality degradation and that some activities should require consent to operate.

But for the majority of hill country farmers, especially self-contained properties, we believe that investment in education and resources to improve sustainable good management practices in the hill country will produce much better results than the proposed rules in the Plan.

We have submitted on the Plan to raise our concerns regarding the practical implementation of the rules and the costs that will fall on farmers to achieve compliance under the Plan and we would now like to highlight the key points of our submission.

Farm management plans

We realise there does need to be rules in place but blunt blanket rules don't work for everyone so we wish to see in the rules an ability for properties to continue to farm with the right management practices in place and to be able to be assessed on a case by case basis.

This is where the farm management plans and utilisation of LSOs will come into play.

So with the farm management plans we initially submitted against them for the reason being they were technical and required nutrient budgets. When we initially looked at the information required we knew a consultant would need to be used to complete these.

We have since become aware that it is likely these plans will be simplified in some areas, for example with templates, to allow your average farmer to complete these themselves, working alongside Land Sustainability Officers.

We haven't yet contacted the Land Sus team but we are aware of them. We think utilising the knowledge in this team is a better path to follow than having to gain resource consent.

We believe that self-contained operations are just trying to get through a 12 month period with static stock numbers, they shouldn't be required to get a resource consent to operate under. Particularly because they are only cropping around 5% of their property to winter their stock.

In our opinion the situation is different for properties that undertake specialised winter grazing who are bringing large numbers of additional stock onto their property in traditionally the wettest period of the year for a period of time. These properties do need to operate under a resource consent due to the seasonal change in intensity of their farming activity.

Setbacks for cultivation and winter grazing

NEW RULING – 5m up to 9 degrees, 20m over 9 degrees

We submitted that we think that any slope should have a maximum 10m setback especially on land that has already been cultivated and broken in otherwise too much productive land that is currently in use will be lost to setbacks. You may think that 20m isn't a lot of land but for us on some of our lower intensive hill country 20m on either side of gullies will be significant land lost for winter cropping purposes etc.

For example, if we had a paddock that was 10 or 11 Ha's it would be down to 6 Ha with the 20m setback applied which would require us to cultivate more additional paddocks to have the required area of crop to winter our stock.

The majority of our crop is grazed off within the month of August. 90% of our Sheep are on crop a maximum of 30 days in total.

So our solution to this would be to have a lesser setback of 10m at maximum and being able to work within good management practices to achieve the same result. Without having to gain a resource consent.

Stock Exclusion

We support the exclusion of sheep from the stock exclusion rules. In hill country where there are a lot of natural gullies and so forth, exclusion of beef cattle from these gullies is near impossible and in a lot of circumstances that is the cattle's drinking water source. We believe that if all cattle had to be excluded from hill country waterways it would be crippling and impractical in the majority of circumstances to fence off these areas.

Riparian Management

In the draft plan it proposes that a riparian management plan is to be achieved by 2025. We believe that this is an extremely short timeframe bearing in mind the costs of fencing and planting and the achievability of this for hill country properties. We already have a lot of areas fenced off and in forestry, and are happy with this and intend to do more if this would meet expectations for good management practices. But these things take time and can't be achieved in 7 years.

We think a better approach is that farmers can allow for riparian improvements year upon year within their farm management plans, with an ability to allow for poor income seasons. Having a short deadline on this rule is practically unachievable for most farmers.

Summary

We support good environmental stewardship of land use in Southland. However, we are concerned there is a lack of consideration to the economic and social impact that the proposed Plan rules will have on Southlands farming community. We are aware of the Southland Economic Project and the good work it will produce for Catchment Limit Setting. However, its timing is too late for guiding the rules and policy of this Plan.

We are the next generation of farmers, this generation are very aware of environmental stewardship and the perception of the farming industry to non-farming individuals such as the urban based population. We want to see the industry thrive but also manage the land in good stead for our future generations. Our generation are keen for knowledge, mentoring and good management practices. Successful farmers are those that are passionate. We don't want to see farming regulated to a point that it takes the enjoyment out of doing something that we love.

We wish to see Environment Southland create a plan with rules and objectives that promote and support good education and environmental management practices on farms. Rather than regulation and compliance as we very much want to give the next generation an ability to farm, similar to what the last generation has given us.

Thank you for your time, We are happy to receive any questions.