

Landowners urged to get in quick for subsidy

Farmers and landowners are being encouraged to take advantage of a fund designed to protect waterways and wetlands on their properties.

Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) has set aside over \$1m to subsidise fencing and planting schemes alongside the region's most important waterways and wetlands. The primary focus of the initiative is to prevent uncontrolled stock access.

GWRC Healthy Waterways Project Manager, Caroline Watson, says farmers need to get in quick smart and apply or they could end up missing out.

"We encourage eligible landowners to make use of the funding sooner rather than later, as funding will be allocated on a first come first served basis," says Caroline.

GWRC is providing the funding to assist individual landowners to make the changes necessary to comply with new regulation.

For fencing, a condition of the fund is that the landowner will pay half of the material and labour costs, with GWRC contributing the other 50%.

Category 1 or 2 waterways and wetlands have been identified and prioritised to receive funding support for fencing, planting and,

where appropriate, controlling pests and animals. These waterways and wetlands have been identified as having significant values such as ecological or mana whenua values.

The work to exclude stock is required to comply with future regulations, including the rules set out in the proposed Natural Resources Plan (pNRP) for the Wellington region.

The pNRP is currently at the hearings stage with a decision expected next year. This document will provide a regional direction for managing water quality and quantity. In addition, all regions must now set limits on water quality and quantity, as a requirement of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPSFM), set by central government. GWRC will be working with communities to set these limits through the whaitua processes. The first of these, in the Ruamāhanga, is expected to complete its work in early 2018.

Keeping all stock types out of water bodies improves water quality. Research has also demonstrated stock access is a major source

of bank erosion, loss of riparian plant cover, increased stream temperature, degradation of aquatic habitat and a direct source of faecal pathogens and nutrients to water bodies.

NB: If you are a landowner and want to find out if you are eligible for funding, visit www.gw.govt.nz/healthy-waterways or ring Petra Fransen, Land Management Advisor, GWRC on 06 826 1589.

WE ALL WANT THE SAME OUTCOME, SAYS FARMER

Last year, the regional council as part of its proposed Natural Resources Plan identified approximately 920 sites in the Wellington region with significant values including ecological and cultural values. The Kourarau Stream and Reservoir was identified as having significant mana whenua values including wahi tipuna and wai ora. This meant that the site would require stock exclusion and would be eligible for funding and support from GWRC.

Fifth generation Wairarapa farmer, David Blackwood lives beside the Kourarau dam.

"We're mainly a sheep and beef breeding and fattening operation here and the only practical way of [excluding stock] was fencing it off."

Mr Blackwood came together with local iwi, Trust House, Fish & Game, neighbours, the local fly fishing club and the regional council to agree how to look after the significant site.

"It's not just this farm... but it's [also] the other farms upstream... so the whole catchment area here got together and looked at ways of improving the water quality. We all want the same outcome, and that is for the best possible water quality."



Wairarapa farmer David Blackwood: "We all want the same outcome, and that is for the best possible water quality."

Sheep dairying has bright future

Miles King has no doubt sheep dairying has a bright future. He just wishes more farmers would latch on to it sooner.

Fundamental to an industry in Wairarapa reaching its potential is a critical mass of milk producers, Miles says. That will drive investment in the processing infrastructure required to maximise the high-return opportunities.

Sheep milk fetches big money in overseas markets, either as a commodity or value-add. While sheep produce less milk than dairy cows, the woolly animals are relatively low input by comparison and have a very low environmental impact.

The Ruamāhanga Valley is prime land for a productive and profitable sheep dairying industry, but holding it back is a shortage of available water, Miles says.

He and wife Janet have been pioneering sheep dairying in Wairarapa for more than 20 years. From pasture to plate, they have got the whole process covered, with their milk supplying their cheese making operation, Kingsmeade. So innovative they have even developed their own breed of milking sheep, Dairymeade NZ.

But as is typical for any trailblazer, progress is often only borne out of failure.

“It’s certainly been a case of two steps forward, one step back, at times,” he says.

The free-draining Greytown silt loams at Te Ore Ore, north of Masterton, are among the best soils in the valley, demanding little in the way of fertiliser. Reliable water is essential, particularly given that they are prone to dry summers.

“We have irrigation [here] which enables us

to keep sheep in milk for eight months of the year. Much of that is a genetic component, but if you keep them feeding you keep on getting milk.”

One of the challenges of sheep dairying is that sheep don’t lactate for as long as cows, nor do they milk out of season as easily.

“You have to concentrate on the summer period for a lot of your milk, therefore irrigation is key.”

Milking sheep requires considerably less water than cows. Sheep are contented with a much lesser quantity of feed than their bigger bovine dairy counterparts, and they also load the land with far fewer nitrates.

“The environmental component is very significant and I think people need to get their heads around where sheep fit in, with respect to effluent.

“The current thinking is 10 sheep per cow equivalent, I think it should be 15-to-1 when you consider the extra water requirements of cows.”

For a milk-only operation Miles says a flock of 500 milking ewes is sufficient, and unlike a dairy herd it requires a relatively small land holding.

Miles milks 200 ewes on 11 hectares, split into 17 paddocks. The younger stock are grazed elsewhere. There are currently two other milk suppliers in Wairarapa, with two more waiting in the wings, one with the potential to milk 600 ewes.

The operation employs nine staff, excluding Miles and Janet, five of them are permanent.

Kingsmeade makes 14 different varieties of cheese, half from ewes’ milk and half from

cows’. About 20 percent of their products are sold through their own delicatessen, fronted by Janet. The rest largely goes to stores in Wellington and Auckland.

With sheep dairying widely considered as something of a cottage industry, Miles is not surprised that growers have been slow to get onboard. Nonetheless, it is “frustrating” given the potential of sheep dairying, not just for the farmer but the regional economy.

Kingsmeade are turning away markets – on average at least one a month – for the simple fact that they don’t have the supply of product.

He has noticed a new energy and interest locally, and just as sheep tend to follow the leader, Miles is optimistic more producers will join the flock.

Growth in the industry elsewhere in the country will also be key to driving expansion. In Blue River Dairy there is already an established processor in Southland exporting to Asia and Europe. Landcorp and Spring Group Sheep Dairy in the central North Island have “sizeable” operations, and are currently using a hub in Hamilton to dry their milk.

Miles hopes that the emerging New Zealand sheep dairying industry steers away from the commodity product, and instead focuses on the value add.

“That’s where the returns are. Sheep milk is a high value, highly nutritional product that demands a premium,” he says.

European producers have the jump on New Zealand in the lucrative Asian market. This is probably due to Fonterra’s global profile giving the impression that down-under we are a now a land of cows, and not sheep.



From their boutique cheese making operation Kingsmeade makes 14 different varieties of cheese.



Kingsmeade have developed their own breed of milking sheep, Dairymeade NZ.

Full speed ahead for Water Wairarapa project

By Michael Bassett-Foss, Project Director.

There is no denying the water debate, which generated much heated discussion during the October election, had some impact on the final outcome. Despite differing and often conflicting views, all political parties put forward policies that they believed supported the best outcome for the environment and ultimately all New Zealanders.

Caught in the cross-fire were water storage projects like the proposed Water Wairarapa scheme which will be vital to the future prosperity of the whole of the Wairarapa region.

Having come out on the other side of the election, with a new government, I continue to be optimistic that we will get this project over the line. It should be noted that all three of the candidates who stood in the Wairarapa Electorate and gained entry into Parliament – Ron Mark (NZ First), Kieran McAnulty (Labour) and Alastair Scott (National) – publicly expressed their support for the scheme.

The new Labour-NZ First Coalition has indicated that it will be winding up Crown Irrigation (CIIL), whose primary purpose has been to provide funding and investment to assist schemes to reach construction. However, the Coalition Agreement confirmed it will “honour existing CIIL investment commitments”. With the current funding agreement in place through to August 2018, it is business as usual for the project team.

The new Government’s commitment to a \$1 billion annual fund for regional development, in addition to funding for other large-scale capital projects, may be seen as favourable for the Water Wairarapa scheme. There is now strong evidence that the scheme has the potential to generate significant long-term economic benefits and build regional resilience.

I view the establishment of the Minister of Climate Change Issues as another positive step forward. Climate change impacts and imminent environmental regulations form a big component of the reframed work programme currently being worked through. Most notably, the National Policy Statement for Freshwater

Management which mandates Regional Councils to set water quality and quantity limits that maintain or improve water bodies. GWRC is undertaking this work through the Whaitua committee, a collaborative community process that will release its findings in 2018. These water resource limits will likely impact water reliability and how water might be used by water users, including urban use, farmers, industry, councils and the environment.

“There is now strong evidence that the scheme has the potential to generate significant long-term economic benefits and build regional resilience.”

Additionally, the recently released climate change projections for Wairarapa are significant for town and country as their water comes from the same place. Climate change will impact water reliability, and together with more stringent water resource limits, the work programme will consider community-wide public implications, opportunities and benefits. Another important body of work will be understanding the impact to the region without water storage.

The primary outcome from all of the work over the next nine months is to establish what effects regional plan rules, together with climate change effects, might have on water reliability and the need for water storage. Based on this information, the aim is to gain the support of councils for an equity raise process and to provide water users, including the Councils, with sufficient information for themselves to participate in such an exercise. This demonstration of a commitment to the scheme is critical to proceeding to the next stage. What is clear, is that the whole of the region will benefit from the Water Wairarapa scheme, so if it is to ultimately get built it will require the whole of community to support it.



Primed for fresh fruit and veggies

With a “perfect storm” of urban sprawl and changes in climate threatening to seriously restrict fresh fruit and vegetable production in traditional growing areas, irrigating suitable parts of the Wairarapa could well provide the answer.

NIWA is predicting Wairarapa growing conditions in the near future will look like Hawke’s Bay and Bay of Plenty of today, making the Ruamāhanga Valley well suited to growing fresh fruit and vegetables. By the end of the century, Wairarapa is projected to have temperatures similar to those currently experienced by Northland.

Horticulture New Zealand has warned that prime fruit and vegetable growing land is being squeezed by rapid growth in towns and cities and high demand for new housing. Changes in weather patterns and extreme unseasonal weather events are becoming more frequent and damaging, impacting the supply and consequently the price of fresh, healthy food.

But whether or not Wairarapa can become the new fresh fruit and vegetable basket will first depend on having access to a reliable source of water during dry periods.

In Horticulture New Zealand’s just published “*New Zealand domestic vegetable production: the growing story*” report, water and land are identified as the key constraints to growth in horticulture production.

www.waterwairarapa.co.nz

Water Wairarapa is led and funded by GWRC with assistance from Crown Irrigation Investments Ltd.

 **Water
Wairarapa**

Securing a sustainable future

SUMMER 2017 IRRIGATION NZ NEWS

Restrictions protect water flow

Summer weather conditions affect how and why we need to manage low water flows.

Ensuring there is enough water for people to drink, and that farmers have enough water for their stock and crops is important to Greater Wellington Regional Council.

“We also have to make sure there is enough left, a minimum flow, to protect the life within the waterway,” says Stephen Thawley, GWRC, Project Leader, Environmental Regulation

This means that water restrictions are placed on water that is allowed to be taken from both waterways and underground aquifers when they are under stress. Restrictions usually describe the time of day or the amount that can be taken. When water availability is particularly limited, it may be directed that no water is taken.

Compared to the previous two summers when it was hot and dry, last summer was much wetter which meant that there were very few water restrictions for irrigators and other water users.

GWRC monitors river flows on a daily basis and provides information on the status



Flowing nicely, the Ruamāhanga River at Wardell’s Bridge near Masterton.

of flows on our website year round. Once a water flow drops to a predetermined level it is monitored closely. When a section of the waterway gets to the minimum threshold GWRC notifies consent holders by phone or email that a ‘compliance flow’ is in operation. Restrictions come into force from 9am the

following day until the restriction is lifted.

Information on low flows and consents with restrictions can be accessed at www.gwrc.govt.nz/resource-consents (look under water takes and bores)

Flow information of waterways can be accessed at <http://graphs.gw.govt.nz>

Compliance levels improved

Each year Greater Wellington Regional Council undertakes compliance audits across our region.

Last year GWRC audited 511 water take consents across the Wellington region. The vast majority of these water take consents are for irrigation purposes.

	2015/16	2016/17
Complying	68%	80% ↑
Minor non-compliance	26%	17% ↓
Non-compliance	6%	3% ↓

“We were pleased to find that most people were keeping to their consent conditions and compliance improved from the previous year,” says Stephen Thawley

ENSURE YOU MEET YOUR COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS:

- Check your consent conditions for what information you need to supply and when and what limits you must adhere to.
- Get connected – if you have low flow restriction conditions on your consent, these can be easily monitored by our website <http://graphs.gw.govt.nz>
- Contact an accredited verifier to get your water meter checked for accuracy so you can make sure you can supply the information you need. A list of accredited verifiers can be found on the IrrigationNZ website at: <http://irrigationaccreditation.co.nz/watermeasurement>
- Check your water meters, data logger and/or telemetry systems are working correctly.
- Check batteries are regularly charged so you can still send through your information.

IN BRIEF

PROGRESS ON PROPOSED NATURAL RESOURCES PLAN

GWRC are half way through hearings on the Proposed Natural Resources Plan. The third hearing stream included water allocation provisions. The remaining three hearing streams will take place in early 2018. The panel has until 30 November 2018 to release its decisions on the Plan.

IRRIGATOR OPERATOR TRAINING

If you’ve missed the Irrigator Operator Training Day in November, register for the next event by contacting Stephen Thawley on 06 826 1584 or stephen.thawley@gw.govt.nz. Organised by GWRC and Wairarapa Water Users Society, the training day is geared towards operators of irrigation systems, with a focus on applying best practice irrigation principles.



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