

FEPs key to improving business, environmental outcomes

Barrhill farmer Malcolm Cairns says the Farm Environment Plan (FEP) process gives farmers practical tools to improve their business operations, as well as meet environmental outcomes.

“It triggers a thought process and makes you think about the impact your operation is having on the environment,” he said.

Malcolm – whose farm is supplied by Barrhill Chertsey Irrigation – has purchased soil moisture monitors to help him improve his water use efficiency and has also started using Production Wise (a free online crop management system from FAR).

“After going through the FEP process I saw I needed to do more to measure soil moisture levels.

“Applying the right amount of water in

the right place and at the right time is really important. Given that we’re paying a charge for water delivery, any amount we don’t use is a financial saving and good for the environment.”

After completing two FEPs and going through the auditing process Malcolm says the most important advice he can offer farmers is to make sure their records are up-to-date.

“It takes a while to get your records organised but if you’re using a good system then you should have everything you need.”

Irrigo Centre environmental manager

Eva Harris has assisted Malcolm as well as another 170 Barrhill Chertsey Irrigation and Acton Farmers Irrigation Cooperative shareholders to complete their FEPs, which are now being followed up by audits.

“Most farmers see environmental sustainability as essential to passing on a solid business to the next generation.

Completing FEPs and audits are part of an overall continuous improvement programme,” she said.

“Being in a scheme also means there is help available to make the FEP and audit process easier.”

“Given that we’re paying a charge for water delivery, any amount we don’t use is a financial saving and good for the environment.”



Barrhill farmer Malcolm Cairns, Eva Harris (Irrigo) and Glen Treweek (Aqualinc). Glen completed two FEP audits at the Cairns’ farm in late March which included a chat around the kitchen table, a look at the farm records, and a walk around the farm to look at systems.

Fostering relationships, providing advice

Up to 100 farmers across Waimakariri and Selwyn Waihora zones are being visited by Environment Canterbury staff in a pilot one-on-one programme to encourage industry agreed Good Management Practices (GMPs).

The pilot is being led by Environment Canterbury Zone Managers Michaela Rees (Selwyn Waihora) and Andrew Arps (Waimakariri), supported by the people in their zone teams, which are working to deliver the community's multiple goals to align with the Canterbury Water Management Strategy.

"The aim is to have all farmers in Canterbury at industry agreed Good Management Practices by 2020," said Andrew Arps.

The Good Management Practices – designed to improve water quality – were first published in April 2015 and were developed by the six major agricultural sector groups¹.

"The question we have been asking ourselves is how do we get farmers to adopt the GMPs relevant to them?"

"We need to be really clear about what farmers need to do. We've also looked at where farmers get their advice from.

"What we've found is having a one-on-one conversation with a farmer is very effective. To help that work we are training our people how to ask the right questions, not to make assumptions, and to get a really good understanding of a farmer's situation before working on an action plan on GMPs.

"Small practical steps can make a big difference. This includes simply documenting and measuring what's going on. We'll also be referring farmers to useful software (such as FAR's Production Wise) which help them track their performance ahead of a farm audit."

ADVICE ON WHERE TO GET ADVICE

"Referring farmers to key advisors is also part of our role – which comes from talking to farmers and understanding their needs. What we want is farmers making good business decisions as well as addressing their environmental risks through adopting GMPs.

"It's about tailoring solutions to individual

farmers. A farmer could have a question about the best way to protect a stream, or it could be about applying for a new consent, or even a compliance issue. If we don't have the answer we'll know who to ask.

"We're also keen to get a commitment from farmers that they will take action.

After our visit we leave a farmer with an agreed action plan, taking into account their circumstances. Our commitment is to keep in touch and to follow-up to see how things are going."

PRIORITISATION IS KEY IN SELWYN WAIHORA

Michaela Rees said the priority in the Selwyn Waihora Zone is on farmers who are looking for support around the Selwyn Te Waihora Plan Change requirements (Plan Change 1 to the Land and Water Regional Plan).

"We're also looking at the farms with the greatest environment risk who are not already covered by a scheme.

We are targeting specific areas and farming types."

The Selwyn Te Waihora Plan Change sets out specific rules for different areas of the catchment – based on environmental risk – as well as recognising

the important of Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere to Ngāi Tahu.

"We are starting the one-on-one visits with arable farms in what the Plan defines as the 'lower Phosphorus Sediment Risk Area', and will also meet with industry representatives to discuss actions.

"The next priority will be visits to farms in the Silverstream Catchment followed by one-on-ones with farmers in the Cultural Landscape/Values Management Area, also defined in the Plan."



Michaela Rees, Zone Manager for Selwyn Waihora, wants to build an ongoing, trusting relationship with individual farmers and managers, so if they have a question they feel free to call someone in the Zone Team.

1. GMP industry partners: DairyNZ, Deer Industry, NZPork, Beef + Lamb, Horticulture NZ, and FAR.



Environment Canterbury has established six Zone Teams across Canterbury. Here (left to right) Michael Hide (Southern Zone Team), Paul Hulse (Christchurch and Banks Peninsula) and Andrew Arps (Waimakariri) discuss how they are working with land managers and farmers.

Zone Teams implementing community's aspirations

You may have heard about Environment Canterbury's six new Zone Teams and wondered what they are actually doing.

Zone Teams are focused on getting the on-the-ground work done to deliver the community's multiple goals to align with the Canterbury Water Management Strategy.

They do this by bringing together staff with differing skills and basing them in the communities they are working with.

The people in the Zone Teams are available to provide practical advice for farmers and land managers on good management practices, farm environment plans, environmental protection and restoration, as well as other land management issues that people want to talk about.

So just start by getting in contact with one of the Zone Managers or Customer Services (ecinfo@ecan.govt.nz).

ZONE MANAGERS

Hurunui/Waiapu and Kaikoura – Kevin Heays

027 646 2230 or kevin.heays@ecan.govt.nz

Waimakariri – Andrew Arps

027 554 4007 or andrew.arps@ecan.govt.nz

Christchurch and Banks Peninsula – Paul Hulse

027 535 0549 or paul.hulse@ecan.govt.nz

Selwyn Waihora – Michaela Rees

027 404 1472 or michaela.rees@ecan.govt.nz

Ashburton – Donna Lill

027 839 1539 or donna.lill@ecan.govt.nz

Southern Zone Team – Michael Hide

021 242 3779 or michael.hide@ecan.govt.nz

IN BRIEF

WATER USE RECORDS ARE DUE IN JULY

Water consent holders in Canterbury need to provide their water use information for the current season (which ends on 30 June) to Environment Canterbury by 31 July.

We recommend that you talk to your service provider to make sure this happens. Failing to supply water use data is a breach of consent conditions. Data logger and manual water data also needs to be supplied to Environment Canterbury by the end of July. If you have a telemetry system, the data is typically submitted automatically.

NOW'S A GOOD TIME TO THINK ABOUT YOUR WATER USE

With winter here now is a good time to start thinking about water efficiency and whether you are getting the most out of your irrigation system.

An efficient irrigation system can save you money and time so check in with your service provider. You can also ask about installing a telemetered system. Many farmers are already benefiting from these systems which allow users to know exactly what they are using without heading to the shed.

YOU CAN'T MANAGE WHAT YOU DON'T MEASURE

Environment Canterbury has been working with water users and industry groups to ensure the resource is being managed efficiently. Measuring water use helps inform future planning and provides time and cost saving benefits for users. The deadline for water consent holders with a take of 10l/s or more to measure their takes has already passed, and many people have taken action.

Environment Canterbury is writing to consent holders that are not meeting their consent conditions and providing them with an achievable time-frame to take action and prevent enforcement action. For information talk to your service provider or visit the Environment Canterbury and IrrigationNZ websites.



Adopting a collaborative partnership for sustainable land use

By Brent Walton, General Manager, Waimakariri Irrigation Limited.

Ensuring farmers actively manage irrigation to guarantee water is being used efficiently is central to the core of Waimakariri Irrigation Limited.

We know that over the past decades land-use intensification has placed significant pressure on our rivers and aquifers.

The Canterbury Water Management Strategy, a partnership between Environment Canterbury, Canterbury's city and district councils, Ngāi Tahu, and water stakeholders, has played a vital role in identifying sustainable water management solutions.

Over the past five years, Waimakariri Irrigation has worked collaboratively with Environment Canterbury and the Waimakariri Water Zone Committee, one of ten committees established as part of the Canterbury Water Management Strategy.

Environmental stewardship is a central part of Waimakariri Irrigation's day-to-day operations. We are working towards a future where individual farmers actively manage irrigation, applying precisely the right amount of water at the right time. Because of this, our farmers will be able to increase their yields, reduce their fertiliser and energy usage, and achieve improved environmental outcomes.

NEW CONSENT LINKED TO WATER USE EFFICIENCY AND NITROGEN LIMITS

In February this year Waimakariri Irrigation was issued with a replacement consent to take and use water. This new consent removes the previous 18,000 hectare restriction. The area over which our water is used will now be limited by requirements to use water more efficiently, and to significantly limit the leaching of nitrogen into groundwater.

We were also granted a discharge consent for five years which removes the obligation for shareholders to obtain and hold their own land use consents for farming. The discharge consent sets the annual amount of nitrogen



Waimakariri Irrigation Limited consultant Paul Reese with shareholder Andrew Stokes discussing Andrew's Farm Environmental Plan

that can be lost to water from all properties that Waimakariri Irrigation supplies water to.

In February this year, Environment Canterbury notified Nutrient Management (Plan Change 5) of the Land Water Regional Plan. This change will require all farms to operate under Good Management Practices in the near future, most likely before 2021 when our discharge consent has to be renewed.

SUSTAINABLE WATER MANAGEMENT NEEDS GOOD MEASUREMENT

From the scheme's inception we have worked towards sustainable water management. Our approach has always been if you can't measure your water you can't manage it properly. From 2009, we installed 140 flowmeters on all large takes and put telemetry, or monitoring systems, on all of them.

This initiative was undertaken well in advance of any conditions set by the Land and Water Regional Plan or discharge consent requirements. From early on, our farmers

could use this data as a management tool to determine if the right amount of water was being used.

Because of our proactive approach to water management, meeting the new strict discharge consent conditions will not be too onerous. The conditions we will meet include greater accounting and reporting of what is happening at an aggregated level across all farms in the scheme.

Our farmers are currently developing Farm Environment Plans. These will allow individual shareholders to identify, implement, measure and audit farming actions that will result in a targeted reduction of nutrient leaching over the next five years. The purpose of these changes is to ensure that water quality outcomes are improved in the catchment, and that is good for everyone.

