

Water quality in Otago

RURAL WATER QUALITY

In 2014 the Otago Regional Council adopted the revised Otago Water Plan, incorporating new provisions for rural water quality (among other things) which ensures that rural landowners take responsibility for maintaining water quality where it is good and improving it where it is poor.

A key priority over the next few years is ensuring that rural landowners in Otago understand their responsibilities and change their land management, where needed, to meet the new water quality standards.

Our approach to regulating land-based activities allows farmers to manage their land as they choose – provided their activities don't negatively affect the quality of Otago waterways.

We are supporting landowners to meet the Otago community's desired standards by investing in new technology to allow for real-time water quality monitoring, through a programme of education and liaison with the community and key stakeholders, and by carrying out scientific monitoring and investigations.

Farmers in the Pomahaka River catchment in southwest Otago are a great example of how a community can take a collaborative responsibility to improving water quality in their area.

In a catchment where water quality has historically been poor, the NZ Landcare Trust, supported by ORC, started the Pathway for the Pomahaka initiative in 2013. This brought farmers and stakeholders together to develop a catchment plan, focusing on ways to improve water quality.

The Kakanui Community Catchment project, also run by the NZ Landcare Trust and



supported by Otago Regional Council, is also focused on increasing landowner knowledge and awareness of how to improve water quality, reduce erosion, and improve biodiversity.

URBAN WATER QUALITY

Cities and towns also have an impact on water quality in our rivers, lakes and coast.

Good progress has been made towards reducing major causes of waterway pollution from wastewater overflows from domestic and industrial systems, but as technology in this field advances, more can be done.

We will be looking more closely at the

impacts our urban communities have on water quality in 2016–17. This will involve consultation with the community, city and district councils, iwi, New Zealand Transport Agency, and Public Health South.

A Water Quality Forum is planned with key stakeholders to identify and share information about management of these resources.

The end result will be an Urban Water Quality Strategy complementing the existing rural water quality provisions in the Water Plan, and the development of a Coastal Strategy for Otago.

Award winners combine business smarts with environmental focus

Portobello couple Brendon and Paula Crosses' star performance at this year's Ballance Otago Farm Environment Awards wasn't just down to their on-farm focus on sustainable land use. It was also down to their extensive community involvement and preaching what they practice.

Brendon and Paula won the Supreme Award, the Otago Water Quality Management Award, the Beef and Lamb NZ Livestock Award, and the QEII National Trust/NZ Farm Environment Trust Farm Stewardship Award.

Their impressive haul of trophies was matched by the long list of key attributes the awards judging panel found their farming operations exemplified. These included:

- A commitment to enhancing water quality; initiating water testing at three sites; placing a priority on riparian fencing, doing stream health assessments, and developing an environmental management plan.
- The long-term development of farm management practices to improve sustainable land use – including erosion control and mitigation, and efficient nutrient management with a focus on reducing discharges of potential contaminants into Otago Harbour.
- A dedication to weed and pest management – providing production and community benefits.

The Crosses' farm 200ha Roselle Farm and 618ha of leased land on the Otago Peninsula, with nearly all of their breeding operation focused on sheep.

According to the awards' judges, the Crosses have struck a balance between maintaining above-average production while enhancing and protecting the environment.

This is a key objective of the new water quality rules in the Otago Water Plan – encouraging landowners to maximise their earning potential through innovative land use techniques which ensure they comply with the rules.

The judges said the Crosses' farming operation is underpinned by "well-developed business planning and an extraordinary commitment to community and building relationships".

The Cross family has strong historical ties to the area. Brendon took over Roselle Farm in 1995 after the death of his father Ron. His mother Annette still lives on the farm.

In 2001, Brendon and Paula, a teacher, expanded the business by adding the first block of lease land. They now lease four properties within five kilometres of Roselle Farm, including two blocks adjoining the iconic Hereweka-Harbour Cone.

Brendon and Paula were instrumental in the establishment of the Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Group, and Brendon is currently chairman.

The group has produced education kits



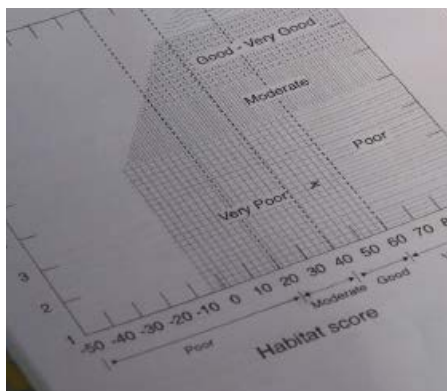
Brendon and Paula Cross

to encourage local children to do their own investigations of their environment.

Paula takes great pride in incorporating conservation values into her lessons, including practical tasks like testing water quality in nearby streams.

"It's really rewarding, and amazing how much you can bring that element into teaching. Then children talk to their parents and we can get a greater understanding of how farming and conservation can be combined."

The awards' judges were struck by the Crosses' awareness of the potential effects of their land management on water quality, and their willingness to seek answers to water quality problems. This was a big factor for the judges in choosing Roselle Farm over others for the ORC Quality Water Award.



Stream monitoring.



Brendon Cross with the planted stream.



ORC Liaison Specialist James White and Kakanui Water Allocation Committee chairman Lyndon Strang looking at a copy of the ORC Water Users Guide. Source: Captur8 Photography

Mining privileges to make way for new golden era of water management

We have the gold miners of old to thank for many of the irrigation schemes which today power our rural economy. Many landowners use water from races, dams and channels carved into the landscape by those miners.

Back when the old mining privileges were granted they were done so on a first in, first served basis which led to some users getting priority over others. No one looked at how much water was available to use or gave any thought to protecting in-stream flows and river habitat.

In 2012, in consultation with our community, our Water Plan was updated to set out ways of managing how we take and share water equitably among users. Water users told us they wanted the water managed locally and for groups of people to be able to work together to use available water effectively and efficiently.

Replacing deemed permits with RMA consents will ensure that water use will follow

irrigation industry best practice. This will inevitably lead to more efficient irrigation techniques and reduced runoff and wastage, benefiting both irrigators and the environment.

Forming a water management group to hold a consent or consents isn't compulsory under the Water Plan – an individual is just as eligible to seek a new consent as a group is. However, from a practical and economic standpoint, forming a group is well worth considering.

Otago Regional Council has produced a step-by-step guide to applying for a new consent, which all deemed permit holders should have received in the mail by now. Copies of the guide are also available on our website www.orc.govt.nz, or by calling our customer services team on 0800 474 082.

Following the approval of the Sowburn Water Company application, several catchments are also forming groups, or are preparing to renew their permits.

Draft applications have been provided by groups in the Kyeburn and Luggate areas.

Putting a consent application together takes time and permit holders are encouraged to start now. Otago Regional Council is advising permit holders to get their application in by 1 November 2020 to ensure the application is complete enough to be received and processed.

If applications are made any later than 31 March 2021, the permit holder risks losing the ability to ever take water.

Otago Regional Council will support water users as much as possible to transition to the new consenting system. However, the ultimate responsibility for making the application change lies with those who know their patch best – the users.

For more information about what a water management group looks like, read story on following page.

Water management groups and water allocation committees

WHAT IS A WATER MANAGEMENT GROUP?

An effective water management group (WMG) is the collective voice of local water users in an area. It's also the structure that will best allow these users to re-apply for a new resource consent to take water in the lead-up to 2021.

A WMG can have anything from two members to more than 100 but needs to be a legal entity (i.e. a trust, a limited partnership, a limited liability company, an industrial and provident society, or a friendly society.)

WMG users can either hold individual water permits within the group's legal structure, or take water under a group permit. It is also possible to have a combination of individual and group-held water permits under a group umbrella to allow for individuals to join the group at a later stage.

Kakanui Water Allocation Committee chairman Lyndon Strang says being part of a water management group keeps control in farmers' hands.

"In tough times it's better to have an elected group of your peers making the hard decisions than someone isolated from the problem. The group encourages neighbours to work together to ensure everyone gets the best deal. There are no priorities based on the size of

operation or position on the river. Everyone is treated equally."

Getting professional advice about your most appropriate type of group and form of consent ownership and how this should be set up is important.

ORC has been briefing professionals such as lawyers and advisers on the new water quantity provisions in the Otago Water Plan, so many of them will be well placed to advise you on the best structure and how to set a group up.

An alternative to a water management group is a water allocation committee.

WHAT IS A WATER ALLOCATION COMMITTEE?

A water allocation committee is typically made up of three to five people elected from and by local water users, and which is a sub-committee of the Otago Regional Council. As a user in a water allocation committee area, you will hold a permit to take water, but when water is short, you will need to abide by a rationing plan drafted by your elected committee.

The Kakanui catchment, where users have had a functioning committee managing the rostering of their water takes for many years, is a good example of this.

WANT TO SET UP A WMG OR WAC?

If you're interested in setting up a group or a committee in your area, and would like help, phone us on 0800 474 082. We can help by:

- Providing information about: water use in your catchment; river flows; and instream values;
- Putting you in touch with groups already forming in your area;
- Briefing your group about what needs to be done and how to do it under the updated water quantity provisions in the new plan, and;
- Talking through the likely costs you'll need to meet, and the other people and groups you'll need to consult.

