

MEDIA RELEASE

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One Plan intensive farming rules continue to be reviewed

Following the Environmental Court's decision on Environmental Defence Society (EDS) and Wellington Fish and Game's declaratory proceedings against Horizons Regional Council, the Council suspended any new intensive land use consent applications for a 12 week period.

As this period draws to a close Horizons strategy and policy group manager Dr Nic Peet says good progress is being made.

"We are preparing new application forms and guidance material for applicants seeking intensive land use consents under the One Plan. It is expected that this revised material, designed to give effect to the Court's decisions will be available in late July or early August," says Dr Peet.

"Working through the implications of the declarations has raised some really complex issues around things such as assessing the impact of individual farming operations on overall water quality. Put simply, the challenge is translating legal decisions into a practical consenting process.

"Our priority is to provide the best guidance that we are able to for consent applicants.

"In the meantime, Council notes that there is no formal moratorium on consenting intensive land uses so if a farmer applies for a consent Horizons would need to process it. However our suggestion is that farmers will benefit from the guidance material that Council is producing in preparing an application.

"We will continue to monitor consents already granted under the intensive land use rules. At the same time Council has progressed work on planning advice about whether consents can be granted above the table in the Plan, the type of information required to support applications, the implications for businesses if farmers are required to meet the table, and the levels of uncertainty in the science models and predicted in river outcomes.

"Officers will be reporting to Council in August on these matters."

Horizons chief executive Michael McCartney says evaluation of the One Plan and the Court process have revealed a number of weaknesses in the current Plan which Council will need to address when considering the implementation of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management.

"This is unsurprising for a Plan that started its development back in 2005. Knowledge, policy and scientific approaches have progressed in the intervening years," says Mr McCartney.

"From the outset, we have been keen to work with all parties on finding a solution for moving forward. This includes subsequent invitations to EDS and Fish & Game to come and meet with us, of which they are yet to accept.

“We recognise that the proceedings have caused disruption to a number of farmers looking to get consents in place and we appreciate their patience as we work to get this right for the betterment of our Region’s environment, economy, and social wellbeing.

“In the meantime, we encourage farmers to continue to reduce the environmental impact of their practices. The huge amount of effort that has gone on across catchments and the water quality trends that show over the past decade 58 per cent of 36 monitored sites for total oxidised nitrogen (TON) show improvement and none are in decline is testament to people's willingness to act whether or not it is in the face of regulation.

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