

REGIONAL PLAN: FARM DAIRY DISCHARGES

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SUMMARY

The Auckland region's 600-odd farm dairies milk around 100,000 cows in the peak milking season, generating nearly 5 million litres of washwater every day of the season.

Farmers must safely dispose of these daily volumes of washwater, which contain effluent, sediment, detergents and milk, and periodically volumes of sludge removed from settling systems or oxidation ponds.

These discharges can have significant adverse environmental effects because the wastes are concentrated onto small areas. Together with the small size of Auckland's rural streams and the many other demands made on them, cumulative adverse effects in many catchments are of concern.

The adverse environmental effects of farm dairy discharges are summarised in Section 3.0 and Appendix A of this Plan.

Appendix A also demonstrates that well-managed land application of farm dairy washwaters and sludges can be environmentally beneficial.

In the past, the Auckland Regional Council (the ARC) has not required farmers to apply for resource consents for farm dairy discharges. However this pragmatic approach has led to a high percentage of farmers to employ inappropriate waste disposal systems. Recent information about adverse effects of dairy washwater, in particular nitrogen, including its toxic form, ammonia on waterways, soils and underground water quality has shown that these discharges do need regulation if we are to avoid unacceptable environmental effects.

The ARC nevertheless wishes to streamline its management of farm dairy discharges, and has devised the Rules in this Plan to ensure that disposal methods which minimise adverse effects in ways set out in the Plan are permitted activities. These do not require a resource consent.

Section 6.0 is the key section for finding out if your farm dairy discharge needs a resource consent or not. It:

- outlines the categories that describe whether various farm dairy discharges require a resource consent or not, and if so, which process will be followed, and
- sets a timetable of different dates when farmers in different river catchments throughout the region must have either applied for a resource consent or complied with the conditions that enable them to be a permitted activity.

A summary of types of activities and whether or not they require a resource consent is also given in Section 2.5.

The maps in this Plan also show the timetable for compliance with this Plan, while Appendix B describes the process of applying for a resource consent.