

Freshwater farm plans



April 2024 Update

Kia ora,
Welcome to the April issue of ORC's Freshwater farm plans (FWFP) newsletter.

Freshwater farm plan changes are coming

The Government has announced it intends to improve the freshwater farm plan system to make it more cost effective and practical for councils, farmers, and growers.

The changes are intended to enable farmers and growers to find the right solution/s for their farm and catchment, and to make sure the time and cost of completing a farm plan matches the level of risk.

Farm plans can be used to identify environmental risks and plan actions to manage those risks, considering property and catchment factors.

Work is already underway to integrate existing farm environment or industry assurance plans into the freshwater farm plan system, as well as certification and auditing requirements.

There are obligations to implement freshwater farm plans under the current legislation in areas where the freshwater farm plan rollout has started, including in Otago. However, the Government is looking at timeframe options in these areas.

Until further announcements are made on any official pause and changes to the regulations, a 'light touch' approach has been advised by the Ministry for the Environment (MFE). We are expecting an update from the Government on this before June.

We will continue to provide regular updates from central government, advocate for the needs of our region, work through what any changes mean for farmers and growers locally, and keep you informed.

Keep an eye on the [freshwater farm plan web page](#) on our website or watch for our next newsletter for updates.

What does this mean for the rollout in Otago?

For Otago, the farm plan rollout is happening one [Freshwater Water Management Unit \(FMU\)](#) at a time, which is written into the legislation itself. The rollout began with the North Otago FMU on 1 February 2024 and the Lower Clutha Rohe was to be next from 1 August 2024.

With the Government looking at the regulations, and potential changes to timing, ORC has decided to briefly pause our implementation work on freshwater farm plans. We are fully committed to implementing the regulations, but it is important that any work we do with our rollout is consistent with regulations, adds value to the system and provides certainty for when people need to do things by.

This brief pause in implementation means that the in-person day for certifiers will not be held in April and certifiers will not be able to progress beyond the online regional training module. We acknowledge that people have invested time into their applications, and we are grateful for this. We have had an excellent number of applicants as well as a high quality of people seeking to be certifiers in Otago, and we will be touch with people once we know more.

It also means we will be pausing the writing of the next Catchment Context, Challenges and Values for the [Lower Clutha Rohe](#) to go live with farm plans. We are confident we can pick our implementation programme back up when we have clarity from the Government and will again be there to help farmers and growers with farm plans.

During this time, ORC will focus on wider freshwater work and initiatives with rural communities while looking forward to details about what changes might be coming for freshwater farm plans and what that might mean for Otago. We are also happy to come and speak about farm plans as a general tool for people to use as part of their farming and growing operations.

ORC is also actively working with other regional councils on proposed changes for central government consideration that would support communities' aspirations for improved freshwater, while making the current system more cost effective and realistic Part of this

is making sure that the implications for farmers and growers in Otago are understood and that timelines are clear.

If you require any help or guidance in the meantime, please reach out to us at Otago Regional Council by calling **0800 474 082** or emailing farmplans@orc.govt.nz



Farm plans and Intensive Winter Grazing (IWG)

The farm plan pathway will not be available in North Otago for IWG for winter 2024 due to the upcoming changes to the farm plan regulations and the brief pause in our farm plan programme. We encourage anyone who was going to use this pathway to contact us on: otagofarmplans@orc.govt.nz

We will also be providing an update soon on plans for IWG for winter 2024 after the Government's announcement on upcoming changes to the legislation.

Farm plan events

We know catchment groups and businesses are keen to talk about farm plans or hold events within their communities. ORC is happy to support these and know that a number of events may be in the planning stages.

If you are looking to run a farm plan event. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you are looking to run a farm plan event — we can work on a plan for this together.

Just joined?

If you've just signed up since our last newsletter and want to check what you've missed on this journey so far, you can view past newsletters [here](#).

Contact us

If you have any questions about freshwater farm plans, the timeline or process, what support is available or can't find an answer in the [FAQ section](#) on our website, please don't hesitate to email us at farmplans@orc.govt.nz

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