

Freshwater farm plans



June 2024 Update

Kia ora,

Welcome to the June issue of ORC's Freshwater farm plans newsletter.

Freshwater farm plan changes – where are things at?

Regulations for freshwater farm plans are currently live in parts of New Zealand. However, the roll out across other regions is currently on hold while central Government considers changes to the freshwater farm plan system to make it more cost effective and practical for farmers and growers.

Councils are collectively engaging with Government and industry on what improvements to the system could look like, keeping communities and outcomes at the heart of our efforts.

Once this engagement is complete later this year, central Government will provide information on the shape of the changes to the freshwater plan system and what Council will then implement.

This Government backs farm plans as a useful tool in the toolkit and we are continuing to work with them on the design and implementation of an improved system.

A meaningful freshwater farm plan system with consistency across the country and some regional influence will benefit freshwater outcomes and our reputation as world-class food producers.

With the roll out of freshwater farm plans on hold we understand this is a time of uncertainty for rural communities. We hope the information below helps to answer some of your questions at this time.

If you require any further 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



When will decisions be made?

The consideration of changes to the freshwater farm plan system will take a bit of time as central Government works through options.

Final decisions on changes to the system aren't expected until early 2025, however we expect an update on timing for areas with regulations in effect before this.

Rest assured; we will give plenty of notice before you are required to do anything.

What is likely to change?

While we are yet to see detail on how improvements will impact the system, the timeframes for farmers and growers to comply with regulations are likely to be extended.

The Government announced in a [media release](#) in April their view that current regulations are too costly and too broadly applied and that they wanted a fit-for-purpose system that enabled farmers and growers to find the right solutions for their farm and catchment.

They have signalled that:

- The time and cost of completing a plan should line up with the level of risk to freshwater from the farming operation
- The system should be flexible enough to enable farmers and growers to find the right solutions for their farm and catchment
- They will review the certification and auditing requirements of the system, to ensure they are justifiable on the basis of cost and environmental benefit
- They want to reduce duplication with other farm plans and some comprehensive plans may be able to be recognised as equivalent; and
- Importantly, they want a robust system where plans can stand in the place of local rules and consents for a range of common farming activities.

Are freshwater farm plans still required by Government?

While the Government intends to make improvements to the current system, they have confirmed their support for freshwater farm plans as a key tool to improve freshwater outcomes.

The implementation of current regulations began in September 2023, with a location-based, phased approach.

Currently, Freshwater farm plans regulations are active in parts of Southland, Otago (North and East Otago areas), the West Coast, Manawatu, and Waikato but affected farmers and growers still have plenty of time before they are required by legislation to have submitted a freshwater farm plan for certification.

It is unlikely that the regulations will be applied in other regions until after the freshwater farm plan system has been reviewed by the Government.

I live in North Otago/East Otago - do I need to keep working on my freshwater farm plan?

Once regulations are in effect in an area, farmers, and growers with operations over a certain size have 18 months to submit their freshwater farm plans for certification.

However, the Government is considering whether current requirements to complete a freshwater farm plan could be paused while these improvements take place.

It also wants to ensure any improvements won't result in sudden changes to plans already being developed so that any work that's already gone into your freshwater farm plan should still be relevant.

We are still available to support you in your freshwater farm plan journey and have lots of great resources that can help.

We are expecting an update on this question before the end of the year.

Next steps

In the meantime, Government has advised we continue with work as per the current system, taking a light touch approach to implementation given change is coming.

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.

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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