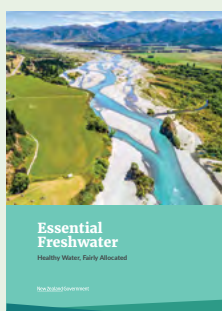


Essential freshwater: What does it mean for stock exclusion in Canterbury?



On September 3, 2020, the Government released the Essential Freshwater Package (EFW). A key component of the EFW was the Stock Exclusion Regulations 2020, which can be found on the Ministry for the Environment's website.

The Regulations set out specific dates by which different stock classes must be excluded from all lakes and wetlands, as well as all rivers greater

than one metre wide. They also introduce a distinction between new pastoral operations and existing operations, while providing guidance on what constitutes stock exclusion.

Regional councils are not required to update plans to reflect the new stock exclusion rules, but landowners are still required to understand them, and if they apply, implement the new rules by dates specified in the regulation.

Additionally, any relevant activity will also still need to be assessed under the Canterbury Land and Water Regional Plan (LWRP) rules.

Below are some guidelines on when Canterbury dairy and dairy support farmers will need to apply the new stock exclusion regulations set out in the Essential Freshwater Package.

- Effective September 2020, stock exclusion regulations will apply to all new pastoral operations.
- From 1 July 2023, stock exclusion regulations will apply to dairy cattle operations for rivers, lakes, and for natural wetlands that are identified in an operative regional plan, district plan, or regional policy statement as at 3 September 2020. Wetlands rules will also apply to dairy support operations from this date.
- From 1 July 2025, stock exclusion regulations for stock exclusion in rivers and lakes will also apply to dairy

support operations. Additionally, dairy and dairy support cattle are required to be excluded from natural wetlands that support a population of threatened species and must also be excluded from natural wetlands greater than 500 square metres in area on low slope land.

How do these regulations differ from current LWRP rules?

The LWRP requires that landowners exclude stock from rivers, lakes or wetlands unless they have a resource consent, in most circumstances. As the new stock exclusion rules come into effect, they will effectively prevent stock access to rivers, lakes and wetlands more than one metre wide, even in the case that the landowner has resource consent.

The three-metre setback requirement for lakes and wide rivers will not apply if there was existing permanent fencing or riparian vegetation on 3 September 2020.

What else are we doing to prepare for Essential Freshwater?

We continue to work to review the regulations contained in the package, and how they will affect Canterbury farmers.

Please check our website www.ecan.govt.nz, where we are publishing updated advice and information as it comes to hand.

If you have any further questions, send them to ecinfo@ecan.govt.nz or contact your industry group.

Consent to farm: Stu's journey



Stu Stokes has around 700 velveted stags and 1,000 hinds on his Canterbury farm

It's fair to say Stu Stokes knows his stuff. The Springfield farmer has cultivated his 380-hectare plot for decades and knows his land like the back of his hand.

After a lifetime living in the foothills of the Southern Alps, Stu knows to expect the unexpected, manage risks and plan for adverse conditions. He knows which parts of his farm drain well and which are best suited for different farming operations.

Over the years, he's adapted his operation. Stu's gone from running 800 cows and cereal cropping to around 700 velveted stags, 1000 breeding hinds and 80 cattle – or as he calls it: “a simplified operation”.

There's no doubt that – when it comes to his farm – he's in his element.

So when Stu found out he was expected to write a farm environment plan and apply for consent to do what he's been doing for so long, it's fair to say he was sceptical.

He works with agronomists, fertilizer people and all sorts of experts – so why should he have to justify the practices they use to get the best out his land?

But with a bit of guidance from his local land management advisor and a lot of help from a local industry group, Stu received his land use consent to farm earlier this year – and maybe even learned a couple of new tricks on how to best take care of his land.

Why does the land use consent to farm exist?

Canterbury farmers are some of the most productive and efficient in the country. Our consenting process helps ensure that environmental, economic and cultural values are balanced on farm.

Stu's land is intersected by the streams that form the start of the Hawkins River, which winds around the Malvern hills close to the Waimakariri before joining the Waikirikiri / Selwyn River.

That means the water that drains this land ends up in Te Waihora / Lake Ellesmere, some 70 km downstream. Te Waihora is a taonga (treasure) to Ngāi Tahu, and subject to strict land management rules.

Phosphorus sediment risk area rules set out in the Land and Water Regional Plan mean land use consent to farm is required to help protect lake health and ecology.

It is important that farmers needing a consent to farm have the tools to do so. Information on the Farmers' Hub helps guide the process. The consent requirements have been around for some time, and Environment Canterbury staff in your zone are available to help.

Getting a helping hand

Looking for the first time at the Consent to Farm procedure Environment Canterbury had set up was daunting, Stu said. The seemingly mammoth task wasn't made any easier by Stu's dyslexia.

“The actual process of consent to farm looked very hard from the outset, for me. I'm dyslexic, so writing stuff down was incredibly hard. I think most farmers carry the knowledge around in their heads and don't necessarily put pen to paper.”

Stu had worked Deer NZ on his Farm Environment Plan (FEP) and leaned on a good working relationship with land management advisor Sylvia McAslan to kick start his consent to farm process.



Stu has fenced off waterways and removed willows across his land.



A FEP is a tool that can help recognise on-farm environmental risks and set out a programme to manage those risks. They are unique to a property and reflect the local challenges of a farming operation.

“A lot of (the FEP process) is the obvious stuff,” Stu said.

“I thought I knew where my issues were, but the FEP helped me to see which issues are most important, and rank my responses to prioritise the most serious.

Sylvia travelled out to Stu’s farm to discuss what a consent to farm might look like and how it would fit into the day-to-day running of the farm.

“I was probably trying to pass the buck (to Environment Canterbury) a bit,” Stu laughed.

Making changes on farm

The tricky geography of the farm means there were a list of tasks that needed to be ranked in terms of priority.

“This farm has a huge number of challenges,” Stu said. “I have natural springs, I have a river that runs right through the middle of it, as well as several drains. I knew all of that would eventually have to be protected.

“So, at the time I said I could budget for \$20,000 a year on protecting all those things, because that’s what I could afford then. But I wanted to spend it in the right place.

“I didn’t want someone to come along later and tell me ‘well, you should’ve spent it all over there.’ So that’s where I got ECan involved and how it all started. I tell people now; the hardest part is taking the first step, and the biggest fear is the unknown,” Stu said.

Getting the balance right

Farmers receive advice every day – from their industry group, neighbours, family, regional council and irrigation schemes.

Stu said although advice is intended to come across as just that, it can be taken to heart by farmers who are often under huge financial and other pressures.

“The pressure of getting things right and using money effectively is huge and it can ramp up so quickly,” Stu said.

Stu decided to go through the Consent to Farm process with others in the deer industry, working as a team to get the best result for their individual farms. It’s an approach he’d recommend to anyone in the same scenario.

“I know the deer industry has been really proactive and have several groups going through it together and I’d suggest that’s an environment that’s probably the best to be going through it. You’ll learn a lot and it’ll be a hell of a lot easier than doing it yourself. And you’ll have a few laughs along the way.

“Get with your industry group. Having a second pair of eyes is invaluable. We all seem to have tunnel vision when it comes to our own farms.

And even the greatest expert can learn something new about their land – and even make economic gains.

“For mine, what we know now and what we knew 10 years ago about farming is light years apart,” Stu said. “I’m looking forward to what we’ll learn in the next 10 years.”

“I can say I’m doing my bit to reduce pollution, but if at the end of the day I’m using less fertiliser, it’s also an economic thing – I’m losing less money.”



Stu talks to biodiversity officer Ellen Williamson about bank stabilisation.



Stu Stokes and Sylvia McAston with the deer grazing on Stu's farm.

Land Management Advisors: your local touch point

Environment Canterbury Land Management Advisor Sylvia McAslan speaks of her experience working with Stu Stokes on his journey to farming land use consent.

"I first met Stu at one of our monthly Darfield drop-in sessions, where we are available for farmers to pop in and ask any questions regarding consents, compliance, rules and more.

"I explained that the process is not a plea to be able to stay in business – but a document where you identify the potential risks to the environment on your farm, and outline strategies to avoid them.

"Stu was well informed, and he had some interesting ideas and suggestions which he was happy to discuss. Following our chat, I visited his farm with a biodiversity expert from our team.

"Stu worked with Landcare Trust to create a Farm Environment Plan template for deer farming, which was a big job, and went above and beyond. It's a great tool that other deer farmers can use to get started.

"Other industry groups like Dairy NZ, Beef + Lamb, Foundation for Arable Research and Horticulture NZ have developed their own Farm Environment Plan templates, so farmers don't have to start from scratch."

If you have any questions about obtaining land use consent to farm, visit our Farmers' Hub at ecan.govt.nz/farmershubs or call Environment Canterbury customer services on 0800 324 636 and ask to talk to your local land management advisor. We're here to help.