Ministry for the Environment
Manatū Mō Te Taiao

Introduction to the intensive winter grazing guidance package

In March 2023, the Ministry for the Environment published a series of guidance documents on intensive winter grazing (IWG). The series covers:

- pugging
- groundcovers
- critical source areas.

Each document provides evidence-based recommendations on practical actions that can help to reduce the environmental impacts of IWG practices and support understanding of what is required under the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) Regulations 2020 (NES-F).

Case studies and examples are used throughout to provide additional context across various farm systems, regions, and conditions. This introduction explains how to apply the guidance and gives an overview of IWG practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. It also outlines the policy context from which these guides are derived.

In developing the guidance package, the Ministry for the Environment collaborated with AgResearch, Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research, and Plant and Food Research, and consulted with a targeted group of councils, industry representatives, and farmers.

How to use the guidance documents

The guidance documents are aimed at people and organisations who provide technical oversight and monitoring of IWG activities, such as councils, planners, and farm advisors. They may also be of interest to farmers and land managers.

Readers can use this guidance in conjunction with the Intensive Winter Grazing Module which provides a 'plan, do, check, review' framework to support good IWG practices as well as an overview of regulatory requirements.

The Intensive Winter Grazing Module and template are available on the Ministry for Primary Industries' website.

The guidance on pugging, groundcovers, and critical source areas provides comprehensive information and recommendations, while the Module is a farmer planning tool.

Intensive winter grazing practices

What is intensive winter grazing?

IIWG refers to grazing livestock on an annual forage crop at any time in the period from 1 May to 30 September of the same year. IWG is commonly used to address livestock feed requirements in winter when pasture growth slows.

Forage crops such as kale, fodder beet and swedes are used as the main component of winter feed requirements for livestock (cattle, sheep, deer). These crops are grazed in the place where they are grown, with a higher stocking density.

Impacts of intensive winter grazing

Higher grazing intensities result in concentrated animal treading and effluent. In addition, soil conditions are usually wet, and landscapes are more vulnerable to soil treading damage and contaminant transport in surface runoff and/or drainage.

IWG results in increased grazing pressure and greater landscape vulnerability, which means the practice has a higher likelihood of damaging soil and increasing contaminant transport to water. Although IWG makes up a small portion of the overall farmed landscape, the potential for these effects to occur are much greater than in pasture areas grazed outside winter months.

Features of intensive winter grazing that lead to increased environmental risk

- **Increased grazing pressure**. This can be described in simple terms as 'more hooves, dung and urine patches', per unit area grazed by livestock.
- **Increased landscape vulnerability:**
  - soils are wetter and thus more prone to structural breakdown due to animal treading
  - soils often remain bare following grazing and are thus exposed to the erosive energy of rainfall and surface runoff flows
  - surplus rainfall leads to an increase in drainage and surface runoff pathways, increasing contaminant pathways
- **Less plant growth**. Cooler conditions throughout winter reduce plant uptake of nutrients and slow the re-establishment of protective groundcover.

Policy context

The NES-F addresses the negative environmental effects of IWG with specific provisions. The regulations ensure IWG is actively managed to reduce sediment loss into waterways, to stop the degradation of waterways and make material improvements over the next five years.

The regulations apply to the following activities and associated discharges:

- the use of land on a farm for IWG
- the discharge of a contaminant into or onto land, including in circumstances that may result in the contaminant (or any other contaminant emanating because of natural processes from the contaminant) entering water, if the discharge is associated with the use of land on a farm for IWG.

Three pathway options exist for IWG:

- **Pathway 1**: IWG activities are permitted if a farmer complies with the default conditions set out in the NES-F regulating slope, area, setback from waterways, and management of critical source areas, or
- **Pathway 2:** IWG activities are permitted if a farmer obtains a certified freshwater farm plan (FW-FP) (under which any adverse effects in relation to the IWG are no greater than would be allowed for by the default conditions set out in Pathway 1), or
- **Pathway 3**: Otherwise, a farmer needs to obtain a resource consent (restricted discretionary) for IWG activities.

Additional standards regulate the management of pugging and groundcover. These are discussed in further detail in the pugging and groundcovers guidance.

Temporary intensification regulations

Temporary intensification standards apply if you are looking to do more grazing than what you did in the reference period (1 July 2014 and 30 June 2019) or to start up a new grazing operation, these circumstances would require you to obtain a resource consent.

The IWG intensification standards are temporary and last until notification of the relevant regional plan or regional policy statement giving effect to the NES-F, or 1 January 2025, whichever is sooner.

More information on each of the pathways and standards is available in the IWG factsheet on the Ministry for the Environment website.

Te Mana o te Wai hierarchy: Water comes first

Te mana o te Wai

E tohu ana te Mana o te Wai i te hira waiwai (te mana) o te wai. Koia te ariā matua, te korowai rānei, o te mōkī Wai Māori Waiwai, e noho ana hei tūāpapa ki ngā āhuatanga katoa o te whakahaere wai māori. Mā ana mahi whakahaere i te wai māori, ka whakarite ka tiakina te hauora me te toiora o te wai, mā reira e whakaratohia ai ngā hiahia a te tangata, i mua i te tuku i ētahi atu momo whakamahi i te wai.

Te Mana o te Wai refers to the vital importance of water and is the central concept, or korowai, of the Essential Freshwater package. It underpins all aspects of freshwater management. When managing freshwater, it ensures the health and well-being of the water is protected, then human health needs are provided for, before enabling other uses of water.

Te Mana o te Wai is the fundamental concept which underpins the new freshwater management system that all councils must implement by 2024.

The hierarchy of obligations in Te Mana o te Wai prioritises:

1. the health and wellbeing of water bodies and freshwater ecosystems
2. the health needs of people (such as drinking water)
3. the ability of people and communities to provide for their social, economic, and cultural wellbeing, now and in the future.

The hierarchy requires a fundamental change to the way in which some resource managers have managed freshwater. It requires us to identify what is needed to give effect to Te Mana o te Wai, before deciding what other values can be accommodated in the catchment.

Te Mana o te Wai means that it is **no longer appropriate to 'balance' water priorities by making trade-offs** that favour human use of water at the expense of maintaining the health and wellbeing of waterbodies and freshwater ecosystems.

Te Mana o te Wai provides an opportunity to think about what the future health of our water looks like and for communities to consider what changes need to happen to achieve this.

The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 requires councils to give effect to Te Mana o te Wai. Councils, through active involvement with tangata whenua, and engagement and discussion with communities, will identify a local approach to give effect to Te Mana o te Wai. As key land users in catchments, farmers and growers must manage land and waterways in a way that aligns with the local definition of Te Mana o te Wai.

This package of guidance documents supports understanding of the impacts that IWG activities can have on water quality and how to reduce or avoid them through practice improvements.

Contact

If you have any feedback on the guidance package, please contact the Ministry at freshwater@mfe.govt.nz.

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