August 2017

Submission on *Action for Healthy Waterways*

**Introduction**

1. The NZ Rock Lobster Industry Council (NZ RLIC) appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the Government’s proposals to improve the management of freshwater. The NZ RLIC represents the interests of the rock lobster industry throughout New Zealand. We act as an umbrella organisation for regional fishing industry groups known as CRAMACs. CRAMAC members include rock lobster quota owners and commercial fishers in each management region.

2. Rock lobster is New Zealand’s most valuable inshore fishery in terms of export earnings, and it is also highly valued by customary and recreational fishers. The quality of freshwater entering the coastal environment has significant implications for coastal water quality and rock lobster fisheries habitat. In particular:
   - excessive nutrients in waterways, mainly nitrogen and phosphorus, can lead to eutrophication of coastal waters, precipitate damaging algal blooms, and damage to coastal ecosystems;
   - soil erosion from inadequately managed land use can increase levels of suspended sediment and rates of sedimentation in coastal waters, which can interfere with fish behaviour and smother and degrade important fish habitat; and
   - faecal contamination in waterways is a major constraint on safe food production from the coastal environment.

3. For these reasons, the rock lobster industry has a strong interest in improving the management of freshwater and we welcome the proposals in the discussion document. While we consider the policy and regulatory proposals to be generally positive, we are concerned about whether councils have the will and resources to implement them effectively.

**Changes to the National Policy Statement – Freshwater Management (NPS-FM)**

4. NZRLIC strongly supports the strengthened requirement to manage freshwater in an integrated and holistic way that supports the health and wellbeing of waters as a continuum from the mountains to the sea. We consider that this emphasis should result in improvements in coastal water quality, coastal ecosystems and fisheries habitat.
5. We also strongly support the inclusion of new attributes in the NPS-FM, in particular the long-overdue addition of indicators and associated requirements for councils to take action in relation to:

- nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus); and
- sediment (deposited and suspended).

6. In NZRLIC’s experience as a submitter on councils’ RMA plans, some councils have been extremely reluctant to ensure that sedimentation, nutrients and other terrestrial sources of runoff that have adverse effects on marine ecosystems, are effectively managed at source. We hope that the inclusion of these indicators and associated adaptive management thresholds and bottom-lines will improve council performance in this area.

7. We are also pleased to see the increased recognition in the NPS-FM of the importance of protecting habitat, including freshwater fisheries habitat – this is an issue that has been given insufficient attention in earlier versions of the NPS-FM.

8. NZRLIC’s main concern with the proposed changes to the NPS-FM is the suggestion in the discussion document that the National Environmental Standard for Plantation Forestry (NES-PF) would override the provisions in the NPS-FM. This seems illogical and unlikely to achieve integrated management of the effects of activities on freshwater quality. Plantation forestry – or any other single activity – should be held to the same standards as other activities that contribute to nutrient and sediment loadings or degradation of water bodies. We recommend that a review of the NES-PF should be undertaken to ensure that it is consistent with and fully aligned with the requirements of the new NPS-FM.

Resource Management Act Amendments

9. NZRLIC generally supports the proposed new planning process to implement the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM), as set out in the Resource Management Amendment Bill. We agree that the proposed changes to the NPS-FM need to be implemented urgently and effectively by councils (as do the provisions of the current NPS-FM), but we question whether setting a timeframe for councils to implement the NPS-FM is – by itself – realistic. Some of the questions that the proposed new planning approach raises for us include:

- What are the consequences if councils don’t comply with the timeframe?
- Will the emphasis on implementing the NPS-FW detract councils from other relevant RMA planning processes that are also important (e.g., coastal planning)?
- If a plan change deals with freshwater issues alongside other issues (e.g., coastal), how will the new planning process affect process and timing? And is it helpful for integrated resource management, if there are two separate planning processes?
- Are there sufficient un-conflicted freshwater ‘experts’ to populate the hearings panels in New Zealand? If not, we won’t get the higher quality planning decisions and improvements to freshwater management that the reforms anticipate.
10. While we don’t have any specific responses to these questions, we believe it is likely that effective implementation of the NPS-FM by councils will require a high level of very active central government support and technical advice.

Assessing costs and benefits

11. NZRLIC considers that when assessing the costs and benefits of the proposed reforms, it is essential to take into account the downstream impacts of poor freshwater quality on coastal ecosystems and sustainable fisheries production from marine ecosystems. The reforms need to take into account the dependence various economic activities have on access and use to freshwater. Improved water quality should not be achieved without taking into account extractive use. However, if these marine ecosystem and production impacts are not ‘counted’, then the true costs of freshwater management problems will be underestimated. This will distort the perceived costs and benefits of making specific management interventions and of prioritising potential interventions.

Yours sincerely

NZ Rock Lobster Industry Council

Personal details removed