We are a group of farmers from the Waituna West, Rewa and the Pakihikura districts, in the northern Manawatu. We are a mix of hill country sheep, beef and dairy farmers. We have four primary streams feeding into the Rangitikei river, Waituna Stream, Pakihikura Stream, Mangatutu Stream and the Mangapipi Stream caught from our farmland.

We recently joined as a group to formally establish a sub catchment group under the Rangitikei Rivers Community Collective Inc. We are all motivated to work together as farmers for our streams with the intention of thus positive impact flow into the Rangitikei Rivers Community Collective Inc. This will be ongoing and is paid for by the farmers, our objectives are:

- to maintain or reduce current levels of Nitrogen and Phosphates in the water
- to reduce sediment runoff
- to encourage thriving biodiversity within our waterways
- to OWN a pristine waterway, we are proud of

Our catchment is within the Horizons region and currently 70% of our farmers have a SLUI plan (a farm environment plan).

Our goal is to have all farmers within the catchment to have a SLUI plan by 2020.

Our group is gaining momentum.
We all agree that healthy, swimmable waterways and thriving diversity are important to us.

We support the general intention of the proposals however we do have some concerns and many things lack clarity:

1. Because our streams are subject to high rainfall in the headwaters, erosion that causes turbidity is part of the natural process. Some of the turbidity and sedimentation issues are beyond our control. To put legislation around issues we can’t control is unworkable and unreasonable. We believe the new proposals need flexibility. Please recognise that every catchment and region is different, and we need a regional or district approach rather than (a blanket) national legislation.

2. We appreciate that, being hill country, we will not be expected to fence off our waterways and wetlands but have concerns about Clause 8.5 Excluding Stock from Waterways on pg 74—“at paddock scale, the land has a carrying capacity equal to or greater than 18 stock units per hectare”. This will prohibit rotational grazing if we need to fence off waterways in our hill country. Periodically we need to ‘mob’ cattle up to clean up rough summer pasture, particularly after a dry spell, in order to maintain and promote quality grass growth later in the season. This is not a constant practice. It is seasonal and for a short time.

Weaning time in the autumn is another time we need to have options to ‘mob’ stock together. We need clarity around this clause and prefer it to be removed if it will mean fencing on hill country.

3. We are concerned about the limitations imposed by the ‘grand parenting’ clause. We feel in an ever-changing world we will be locked into existing farming practices that will in time be considered draconian. Such a clause will take away flexibility and productivity that won’t meet changing consumer trends and a growing world population. Being more extensive, the farming systems in our catchment are being penalised and limited. Those leaching at the higher end of the scale will be allowed to remain at these high rates while adjusting to the new regulations, while low input systems such as ours will be restricted. It is inherently unfair to our existing extensive systems. While hill country headwaters would be ecologically healthy, further downstream the same problems would persist with no meaningful improvement to freshwater health. Fix the problem where the problem is.
4. We are concerned about the uncertainty our businesses are facing nationwide—the social and economic implications that these new proposals may mean to many farmers in New Zealand. We are concerned about the short time frame to implement these proposals and the cost of this new compliance. There is currently not the professional capacity to oversee the development of these environment plans and fresh water modules or the subsequent auditing. Reduced profitability and uncertainty will have a domino effect on our small rural communities with less people being employed, less expenditure in our towns, loss of services and schools etc. We are concerned about our farmers’ mental health including stress, depression and suicide. We feel we are losing our licence to run viable, profitable businesses.

To conclude, please take particular attention to this. We are motivated to build working partnerships with Horizons Regional Council, local iwi, Fish and Game, Landcare Trust, Massey University Ecology Department and others to better our environment which is in our best interest long term. We believe as a farmer driven initiative, we alongside these organisations will have the ability to build on what is already being done and have a sustainable fresh water plan. We work as a team. Side by side.

As a catchment group we are already committed to continuing to improve the standard of our waterways and land. We believe our industry-led farm assurance schemes; our Beef and Lamb Land and Environment Plans and the growing catchment group initiatives will achieve the desired outcomes wanted by the “2019. Action for healthy waterways – A discussion document on national direction for our essential freshwater”. These schemes/plans/initiatives will continue to enable and encourage farmers to set and achieve environmental goals that will give us our “healthy swimmable rivers and thriving biodiversity” while still allowing farmers to have viable businesses.