Waikawa River Catchment Group

The Waikawa catchment group is located in the South East corner of the Catlins. With a total area of over 18,000ha we are a unique catchment as we only have 1 dairy farm, the rest of the catchment is made up of sheep and beef and forestry.

Our river is 28km long and feeds directly into the sea so the water is all owned by the catchment and therefore is in our best interest to keep the water quality the best we can. Every year thousands of dollars from each farmers potential profits within the group are spent on fencing of water ways and riparian planting, this all being done voluntarily as the whole of the catchment supports better water quality.

A blanket approach to try and meet fresh water targets proposed by the Government would simply not work in New Zealand as every catchment is different, just like every farmer is different. The cost of enforcing these proposals would be better spent in each individual catchment on workshops, trees, fencing, monitoring and coaching each farmer on ways to continue to create better water quality throughout the catchment and ultimately New Zealand. Carefully and patiently water quality in New Zealand has the potential to be of a very high standard, to create this the government needs to have every region on board and therefore the blanket approach on each catchment will not create this.

We support a fair approach where each farmer is expected to do their bit in proportion to their impacts, in an effective and workable manner. We request that the government re-think its approach to restrictions on land-use change and to the grandparenting provisions in the freshwater module and hill country cropping. In particular, we request that there is recognition of low N leaching farms and some flexibility provided for them.

We don’t agree on the need for an approved Farm Environment Planner and believe it is more important for people to do their own Farm Environment Plans (FEP). In the last two years over 200 FEP’s have already done in our catchment on Sheep, Beef and Dairy properties to the standard of Environment Southland Proposed Land and Water Plan. These have all been done with the help Beef and Lamb, Dairy NZ or Milk Companies or Environment Southland. Since our Catchment group have hosted several FEP workshops, we have noticed a greater uptake in environmental knowledge and greater awareness of Critical Source Areas (CSA); the benefits of fencing of water ways, Better winter grazing techniques etc, etc, through farmers actively doing their own plan with the help of the above organizations.

We do agree with the need for an Overseer Nutrient Budget, on the basis that it only needs to be updated on a 3 to 5 year basis or if a change in Farming practice accrues. This is important as farmers need to know their effect/ footprint that they are having on their environment.

We don’t agree with Grandparenting as it is not a fair regulatory tool for low leaching operations, it favours the high leaching operations. If nutrients need to be reduced to achieve these standards then the high emitters should be the ones to reduce their nutrient losses to get down to these limits.

In conclusion the Waikawa Catchment support better water quality and healthier eco systems but are concerned in which the manner the government is trying to achieve them so therefore hope our submission helps to bring changes in the proposal.