

Federated Farmers agrees that special landscapes like national parks should be protected. However working farms should not have the same level of protection, especially if this interferes with land owners' ability to farm.

Protecting Amenity

The RPS wants areas of high amenity to be identified, and the special values need to stay the same or be enhanced. Farmers should be particularly worried as industrial, urban and commercial land is not likely to be identified as being "beautiful and scenic" but farm land will.

There is a risk that farms will be identified as being amenity landscape and there may be rules that prevent change of land use because the new

land use isn't as nice to look at, or rules that limit building or subdivision. Many district councils are already doing this and the RPS could make this worse.

Federated Farmers thinks that the RPS needs to remember that farms are working landscapes, and contribute to the economy. There should be no extra rules for farms that happen to look more scenic than others as this will harm individual farmers and their contribution to the local economy.

Submissions on the Waikato RPS close on 28 February 2011. Anyone can make a submission; you can print the submission form off the Environment Waikato website, or you can ring the Council and ask for a copy of the form to be posted to you.

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WAIKATO

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WAIKATO REGIONAL POLICY STATEMENT

The Regional Policy Statement (RPS) is a very important document for farmers in the entire Waikato Region because it may direct councils to have rules and control certain farming activities.

The RPS states what the issues are in the region, and sets targets and aims as to how these issues will be tackled. Natural resources like soil, landscape, water quality and water allocation are the types of topics that are in the RPS.

Federated Farmers is currently working on a submission to Environment Waikato on the proposed Waikato Regional Policy Statement making sure that farming is not unfairly regulated.

Indigenous Biodiversity

The Regional Policy Statement is giving strong direction that native plants and wildlife need to be protected.

Biodiversity means the variety of plants, insects and animals that all live in an eco-system. The more different species that are there, the more diverse the eco-system is.

Indigenous means species that are native to New Zealand, rather than species that are introduced to the country by people.

The farms that are potentially affected are those that have native bush blocks, or are next to rivers, lakes or the coast where native plants and species can be found. It's not just bush on Department of Conservation estates that Environment Waikato is concerned about.

Off-setting effects of clearing bush

The RPS says that positive indigenous biodiversity outcomes will be promoted. Following on from this the RPS says that when native bush is cleared or degraded, then councils should have rules that require people to off-set adverse effects of clearance. The types of rules should require like-for-like ecosystems to be created where another is removed, legal protection of any native bush that is left (like a QEII covenant) or a new habitat to be created.

Significant Natural Areas

The RPS states that areas of significant native bush and habitat will be protected, and that Environment Waikato will identify these areas. The RPS then says that the district councils will have to protect all of the Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) that have been identified by Environment Waikato.

This will mean that district councils like Waitomo and Waikato will have to re-do all their rules around native bush. Waitomo developed an innovative rule that allows land owners to ask the Council to pay for an ecologists' report if they are planning on removing native bush, this rule was developed during a Federated Farmers appeal to the Environment Court. The Waikato District Council indigenous vegetation clearance rule is still being finalised during the Federated Farmers appeal, and could have to be over-hauled according to the RPS even before the ink is dry.

Because Environment Waikato will be identifying SNAs, this will mean that the district councils and their ratepayers will have no contribution to the identification of SNAs through the district plan process.

Federated Farmers thinks that it should be up to the district councils in consultation with their ratepayers and stakeholders how to manage their own areas of special native bush in a way that suits the district.

Riparian Areas and Wetlands

The RPS has stated that riparian areas (margins of lakes, rivers and coasts) and wetlands shall be increased in the Waikato Region. It then goes on to say that values such as public access and biodiversity shall be maintained or enhanced. This could mean that councils will require more esplanade reserves when subdivision occurs, or that more fencing and planting of waterways and wetlands will be required.

The RPS says that to achieve this aim, the regional plan shall control activities in riparian areas like tracking, earthworks and access to beds and banks of waterbodies by livestock or vehicles. This could mean more rules in the future.

Federated Farmers thinks that aiming to increase wetlands may be a hard ask, and that councils should only ask for esplanade reserves over and above what the Resource Management Act requires if they are prepared to pay for the land value. Methods like funding assistance for land owners and rates relief for protected areas on private land should be in the RPS, so regulation and rules are not the only option.

WATER QUALITY

Water quality is a significant issue in the RPS. The water quality topic starts off with a list of the values that are aimed at protecting:

- How natural it looks,
- Health of native plants and wildlife and their habitat,
- The relationship of Tangata Whenua with fresh water,
- Drinking water,
- Safe fishing and food gathering
- Recreation like swimming and boating.

Water Quality Standards

The RPS says a catchment-based management of water quality in streams, rivers, lakes and groundwater will be used, and that the way land affects water quality will also be managed.

Water quality standards will be set, with different water bodies having different levels of standards

they need to meet. These standards will be based around the values that are listed above.

Federated Farmers is particularly concerned that the RPS says that the regional plan shall manage activities to meet the water quality standards, and says that some activities may need resource consent depending on the quality of the waterbody.

High Value Waterbodies

The RPS says that waterbodies that have high values will need to be protected. The regional plan will then manage discharges, takes and uses of the water, any damming, changes of land use around the waterbody and existing land uses.

Federated Farmers is worried that this points right to more rules and regulation, especially around farming. Not only does this mean that there will be more rules around what farmers can do on their own land now, but it could also limit what farmers can do if they want to convert to a different type of production.

Thirteen rivers and fifteen lakes have been listed in the RPS as being high value waterbodies that are in need of protection. Seven of the high value rivers flow into Lake Taupo, and four of the high value lakes are located around Kawhia on the west coast. The Waikato River catchment and the Lake Taupo catchment are listed as priority catchments for intervention.

All waterbodies

Not only will high value water bodies be looked at, so will all other waterbodies. The RPS says that activities will be managed with the aim of reducing sediment in the water, as well as bacteria and nutrient levels. Habitats for native plants and wildlife in the water and alongside the banks and in wetlands shall be protected or restored.

Some of the ways that these aims will be met will be rules on direct discharges to water. The RPS also says that discharges from non-point sources, like fertiliser or livestock on pasture, will be looked at. Federated Farmers is very concerned that the RPS says that controls on primary production intensification will be introduced.

Waikato River

The Waikato River has been earmarked in the RPS for special treatment because of the Waitangi Treaty Settlement and the document Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River.

Joint management of the river with Environment Waikato and Waikato-Tainui, Ngati Tuwhaertoa, Te Arawa River Iwi, Maniapoto and Ruakawa will happen.

The RPS directs regional and district plans to have rules for activities that could cause bank erosion or collapse, discharge pollution, have a bad effect on native plants, wildlife and fisheries, limit public access or have bad effects on cultural values of the iwi with the river.

WATER ALLOCATION

Water allocation has been an issue that Federated Farmers has been battling since 2006 when Variation 6 to the Waikato Regional Plan first came out, and we have taken it all the way to Environment Court with the appeal still going.

Prioritising water uses and takes

One of the topics in Variation 6 that is giving Federated Farmers grief was the prioritising of water uses, with municipal water for houses and businesses in towns being listed as most important, and least important was water for industry like farming. The problem was that as town water use grows and gets more allocated to it, other uses dropped off the bottom of the list because there was no water left.

The RPS makes this problem bigger by saying that takes and uses of water will be prioritised, with domestic and town use at the top, replacement of exiting consents next, and all other uses at the bottom. Federated Farmers doesn't want to see new methods and ideas for water use on farms to be left high and dry, particularly because farmers can turn water into money and contribute to the economy. Federated Farmers wants to see water available for livestock drinking in the RPS as well.

Minimum flows of rivers

The RPS wants to ensure that any water taken from waterbodies does not reduce the water quality values. To do this minimum flows will be set for rivers, lakes and streams.

Federated Farmers has been dealing with this topic in Variation 6. The different ways of measuring minimum flows have pros and cons, and Federated Farmers wants to see a way that will mean that water will be available when it is needed most during long dry summers.

Efficient use of water

The RPS aims to ensure that water is used efficiently. It wants to do this by making sure that resource consent applications for water are not asking for so much that the amount can't be justified for the intended use. This will prevent applications asking for more water than they need "just in case," which will reduce the amount of water available for others. Resource consent applications for domestic or town water supply will need a water management plan.

Ways of conserving water like water recycling, rain harvesting, metering and new technology will be encouraged. Federated Farmers supports moves that aim for efficient water use, with everyone doing their part then water should be available for all uses.

LANDSCAPE AND AMENITY

The RPS is very concerned about scenic landscapes and pleasant outlook over the countryside. This could lead to rules that limit what can be done on the land to protect scenery at the expense of farming.

Outstanding Natural Landscapes are areas that have special scenic and natural qualities, and the RPS says that they need to be protected from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.

Identifying outstanding natural landscapes

The RPS says that outstanding natural landscapes need to be identified and protected, and have even already listed some landscapes that are special to the Region that have to be protected by the district councils. These include Tongariro National Park, Lake Taupo, Mount Pirongia, the Kaimai Ranges and Cathedral Cove.

The RPS says that Environment Waikato will encourage district councils to identify their own outstanding natural landscapes. These are not limited to only Crown-owned land, but could be identified on private land as well. Farms that have ranges, large bush areas or are next to rivers or the coast may be affected, as these areas may be identified as being special and in need of protection.

Once outstanding natural landscapes are identified and shown on maps, there will likely be rules that limit subdivision, buildings or land use to keep the landscape looking the same.