

Q&A: Next steps for freshwater

1. What opportunities are there for public input into these freshwater policy proposals?

Public submissions are open until 22 April. A series of nine public meetings and six hui are planned throughout March for people to participate and provide comment. There will also be further opportunities for input into the specific changes to the National Policy Statement (NPS) and National Regulations on Stock Exclusion.

2. How does the National Policy Statement influence Council decisions on freshwater plans and consents?

Councils must give effect to National Policy Statements and the Supreme Court has recently reinforced their importance. Significant weight must be given to the NPS in developing plans and in considering consents.

3. How will the proposed new stock exclusion national regulations interact with existing council rules?

The national regulations will over time supersede Council rules to move to a consistent national system. Where council plans already requiring stock exclusion, these will remain but where councils have no rules, the national regulations will apply. The instant fine regime of \$100 per animal up to a maximum of \$2000 is intended to apply to the national regulations and to existing council rules.

4. Has the Government yet made provision for the additional \$100 million Next Steps Clean-up Fund?

No. This is a matter being considered in the Budget 2016 process. The reason for the consultation is to refine the criteria for the new Fund.

5. Do the proposals on iwi rights and interests in water full address all the issues raised by the Freshwater Iwi Leaders Group?

No. The specific proposals are the product of ongoing discussions but there is more work to do with both iwi leaders and others on how allocation can be improved.

6. How consistent are these proposals with the recommendations of the Land and Water Forum?

Most of the 23 proposals are based on the recommendations of the Land and Water Forum, particularly the improvements to the NPS, the national regulations on stock exclusion and the measures to enhance economic use of water. The proposals on Maori involvement in freshwater have come about from discussion with iwi leaders and the proposed new fund was a policy commitment by National for the 2014 General Election.

7. Why does the NPS not simply require all water bodies to be swimmable?

Requiring all water bodies to be swimmable all of the time is not realistic. Almost all rivers during peak flows will have contaminants that exceed safe swimming levels. Nor would all water bodies have been swimmable prior to settlement and development.

There are 425,000 kilometres of waterways but only about 10 per cent are large enough to swim in. The costs of achieving the high standard of water quality required for swimming in some water bodies in both urban and rural areas would be prohibitive.

The NPS enables communities to have an open and well informed discussion about which rivers and lakes need to be swimmable while also setting a bottom line that water quality should not decline.

8. Will this generate unmanageable cost burdens for farmers?

Some farmers may need to change farm practices, but the intention is to provide a system that enables more efficient water use and therefore greater opportunities for business growth. The time frames for compliance have also been phased to spread costs over reasonable periods.

9. Why are regional councils best placed to manage water?

Councils best understand the water resource and the community. Central government does not have the local presence or knowledge to effectively manage water at a local scale, but is providing better direction, guidance, tools and resources.

10. How will improving water management support economic growth?

Better freshwater management will avoid long delays in planning, which creates cost in time, money, and lost opportunities. Better certainty and tighter regulation is important for investment in infrastructure.

It will also promote more efficient use of water, better productivity and incentivise innovation in management practices, which could free up water for new uses.

11. Who is responsible for implementing these changes?

Delivering the components to make the water management system work will require a combined effort; central government will provide direction and support to enable councils, iwi/Maori, water users, and the public to play their part. A collaborative effort is essential – we are all in this together.