

CONSENTS FOR FARMING: REGULATING NUTRIENT LOSS IN THE LAKE TAUPO CATCHMENT

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Environment Waikato has released a draft variation to the Waikato Regional Plan, which outlines a framework for controlling the amount of nitrogen getting into Lake Taupo. The framework has two key goals, firstly to cap existing nitrogen loss at 2001- 2004 levels, and secondly to achieve a 20% reduction in nitrogen input to the lake by spending a fund of money to permanently buy nitrogen out of the catchment.

The implementation of a practical yet enforceable system to cap nutrient losses from land is extremely challenging. Consideration was given either to controlling inputs (such as fertilizer application or stocking rates) or controlling outputs (such as measured or calculated N in drainage or groundwater) as the mechanism for regulating nitrogen loss.

Output controls were considered to be unworkable for a number of reasons. Directly measuring nitrogen loss was not considered practical at a farm scale. Output control approaches led to problems with regard to the enforceability of model outputs. The translation of targets between catchment and paddock scales were also problematic.

Input controls were considered to provide a more practical and enforceable way of managing nitrogen outputs. Farmers are familiar with making management decisions around inputs, and current models such as Overseer already use farm inputs as parameters for predicting long term average nitrogen loss.

This paper will discuss how Environment Waikato intends to use farm management plans and input controls for regulating long term nitrogen losses in the Taupo Catchment.