

CHOOSING TO SUCCEED: HOW FARM ENVIRONMENT PLANS CAN INCREASE GOOD MANAGEMENT PRACTICE IN OTAGO

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Otago Dairy Farmers are currently facing an increased focus on their environmental practices from upcoming regional rules and proposed new government policies. Farming under an effects-based plan has provided limited guidance around specific environmental requirements. However, increased pressure from the Otago Regional Council (ORC), Government and the wider public to improve environmental performance, means meeting environmental bottom lines will need to become a focus for many dairy farmers in the next few years.

Farm Environment Plans (FEP) provide a framework for farmers to assess their current environmental performance and identify risks and tailor actions to minimise or eliminate those risks. Having a FEP can also act as proof that a farm operation has a focus on environmental sustainability and, if reviewed regularly provides a record and plan for past and future activities. As the ORC Regional Plan does not currently require an FEP, there is a greater challenge around uptake of FEPs in the region but the benefits of having a FEP will likely future proof the farm for any changes to plans or policies.

DairyNZ in conjunction with Fonterra have implemented a case study project across six dairy farms in the Otago region to create FEPs for each property. These FEPs will identify key actions for each farm to enhance good management practice (GMP) and support will be provided to implement the identified actions. It is intended that there will be a variety of actions across the farms which will give an indication of the different GMP required within the farming operation. Field days and media articles relating to the case study farmers will be used to increase awareness of GMP around Otago and encourage more farmers to be aware of their environmental footprint and the practices they can use to improve it as well as promoting the positive change being made in the dairy industry to the wider public.

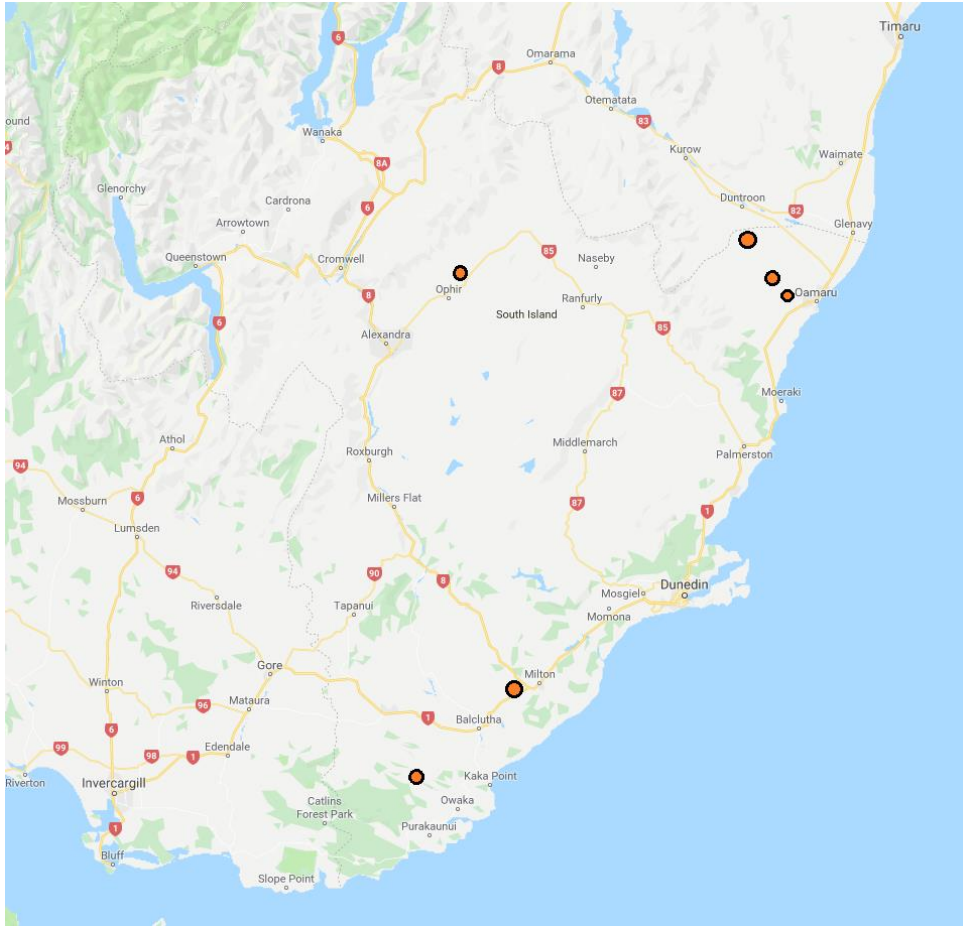


Figure 1- Location of case study farms

Example – Moneymore Dairies Ltd, Milton. FEP completed by Julie Morris and Bruce Allen (Fonterra Sustainable Dairy Advisors)



Key Actions:

1. Land:
Contain Silage leachate within the storage area – 1 Aug 2018
Minimise rainwater collected with silage leachate – 1 Aug 2018
2. Effluent:
Bucket test travelling irrigator to test effluent application rate – April 2018
Get a Pond Storage Calculation done to check you have sufficient effluent storage capacity – August 2018
3. Waterways:
Extend Riparian Width at critical source area entry points and tile drains – Dec 2020
4. Nutrient:
Reduce N applications to Effluent Blocks

Having key actions allows the operation to focus on a plan for each.

Some, like action 1, may require investment in infrastructure to meet GMP but others like actions 2,3 and 4 require only a management plan and may also require training of staff or contractors in how to implement GMP for these areas.

Conclusions

- The Otago Regional Council ‘effects-based plan’ provides limited guidance to farmers on changes required to meet the limits set.
- FEPs will help demonstrate the implementation of GMP but are currently only required in Otago via a voluntary industry strategy.
- FEPs are an excellent tool to allow farmers to look at their farm through a different lense and identify risks and management options consistent with their farm system and values.
- Follow up of FEPs is required to ensure accountability and progress for identified actions
- Increasing adoption of GMP will have a positive effect on water quality and enhance perceptions of the dairy sector to the NZ and global public