

# Farm animal effluent

There are approximately 4,100 dairy farms in the Waikato region that require a farm effluent management system to collect and store farm animal effluent for land disposal, usually via irrigation. Concentrated volumes of farm animal effluent are generally generated at dairy sheds, feed pads, and at stockholding areas such as stand-off pads and herd homes.

The use of stockholding and standing-off areas is less commonly practised by dry stock farmers; however, they may be used by some farm operations that graze dairy replacements or have intensive beef production.

Improvements in farm animal effluent storage and management across the Waikato region have been made by many farmers, with support from industry and Waikato Regional Council education and extension activities. The council also has a significant monitoring and enforcement programme to support compliance with the rules for managing effluent storage and disposal. Industry support includes a wealth of technical and design guidelines and information for dairy effluent infrastructure (including accredited effluent system designers, a pond storage calculator and accredited dairy effluent warrant of fitness providers).

Despite the current rules for managing effluent in the Waikato region having been in place for many years, there are still some non-complaint dairy effluent systems and poor dairy effluent management practices. There are, for example, around 10–15% of farms in the region that have insufficient effluent storage facilities including no storage pond or insufficient storage capacity.

The existing Waikato Regional Plan rules permit most farm effluent systems and discharges, subject to some basic standards. It is important to remember that even activities that are permitted (i.e. does not require consent), still must comply with standards and conditions. The standards focus on outcomes that are to be achieved. Practical challenges exist to determine compliance with these standards, and they lack a 'hook' to require people to demonstrate that the standards have been achieved or that the infrastructure can achieve the outcomes. This can create challenges for practically determining compliance and does not manage the risk of effects to waterbodies well. The existing rules have fallen behind best practice nationally and are not well aligned with more recent industry standards.

There is a clear need for improved guidance in the regional plan to ensure farms are operating at best practice, that they have adequate storage and manage the timing of land application appropriately.



## Feedlots and other stockholding areas

Landowners need to comply with new national rules (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) for some higher risk farming activities. These include minimum standards for feedlots and other stockholding areas. Stockholding areas include feed pads, standoff pads, loafing pads and wintering pads. If these standards cannot be met, landowners need to apply for a resource consent. These new regulations supersede any corresponding, less stringent, regional rules but defer to any regional rules which are more stringent. The existing Waikato Regional Plan also contains rules managing the discharges from and disposal of effluent collected on systems for holding cattle.

The Freshwater Policy Review will consider how to better align regional and national rules and if, in the Waikato, additional controls on these activities are needed. While there is some overlap with the new national rules there could, for example, be some effluent source areas that we may need to manage in the regional plan to help achieve environmental outcomes. This may include a broader range of livestock types, and wintering barns.

## What next

The council is currently in the process of reviewing its regional plan requirements in a project called the Freshwater Policy Review.

The review will need to consider:

- how to build on the council, industry and farmer efforts to date
- consistency in approach with other regions while enabling an appropriate response to local conditions
- meeting community and industry expectations about effluent management and compliance,
- changes in farming activities in the region including the increasing use of indoor feeding or animal housing systems
- changes in effluent management approaches and technologies including more precise land application and new treatment technologies
- intensification, increased seasonal variation and less predictable climate impacts on effluent storage capacity and land application
- duplication and inconsistency between the regional plan provisions and the National Environmental Standards for Freshwater
- what additional requirements may be needed for feedlots and other stock holding areas to help manage environmental risk and help achieve our environmental outcomes.

The council will engage with our communities through the Freshwater Policy Review to test options before any proposed changes are decided upon.

## Mō te puna kōrero Where can I find more information?

Check out [waikatoregion.govt.nz/freshwater-policy-review](https://waikatoregion.govt.nz/freshwater-policy-review) to find:

- information sheets breaking down the Freshwater Policy Review
- how to share your views
- a summary of key milestones
- update on our progress.

You can also email us at [policy@waikatoregion.govt.nz](mailto:policy@waikatoregion.govt.nz) or call 0800 800 401 to speak to a member of our Freshwater Policy Review team.

