

**Proposed Waikato Regional Plan Change 1 – Waikato and Waipa River
Catchments Hearing**

Statement of Jenene McGrath on behalf of the McGrath Family.

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Contact for service:

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Introductions

Jenene McGrath

I am a deer, sheep and beef cattle farmer, in the Ohaaki sub-catchment. I have a Bachelor of Management Studies, and I am an Accountant.

The McGrath family own 3 properties in the Ohaaki sub-catchment.

- 1281 Mapara Road, Taupo a 186.7 ha property. This property has 62.8ha in the Lake Taupo catchment. According to the Waikato Regional Council website map this property is in the Ohaaki sub-catchment. We are already subject to the rules of the Lake Taupo catchment. Are we going to be unfairly subjected to further rules under the Waikato Regional Plan?
- 259 Tuhingamata Road, Taupo a 27.5ha property.
- 753 Oruanui Road, Taupo a 23.5ha property.

Scope of Statement

- Commentary on the inappropriate use of the Nitrogen Reference Point for low input farms
- I support the use of Farm Environment Plans as the primary tool for farmers to identify and implement mitigation measures to reduce contaminant losses to water bodies.
- I strongly oppose the requirement to employ Consultants.

Nitrogen Reference Point

The Nitrogen Reference Point based on the 2014/2015 year or the 2015/2016 year will have a major impact on the future farming profitability of our farming activity. The calculation based on either of those years will give us a result that will not allow us to farm to the capability of the land.

The reasons for this are as follows:

- The impact of the series of droughts prior to and including the 2014/2015 year. In-fact from the 2009/2010 year through to the 2015/2016 year we had 4 years out of 6 years with droughts. The 2011/2012 year and the 2015/2016 year did not have droughts. Both of these years were affected by the droughts in the previous year. These droughts adversely affected

our lambing and fawning in the 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 years resulting in lower stock numbers.

- The impact of drench failure. We were having issues with low fawning percentages from our rising 2 year old hinds, probably due to slow growth rates. Hinds not holding condition. Slow growth rates in the young deer, taking longer to get to target slaughter weights. Thanks to deer industry funded research, a new drench combination and dosage rates were recommend. We adopted this drench policy and our animal health in the deer herd has improved significantly. For the 2014/2015 year we weaned 267 fawns, 2015/2016 year 241 fawns. After the change in drenching policy 2017/18 year we weaned 355 fawns and 2018/19 year 347 fawns. A huge improvement. In the 2014/2015 year we had 58 yearlings which had to be carried until late October 2015 and early November 2015 to get to slaughter weights. This year we have 10 yearlings to be carried for slaughter in the spring. The change in our production has been significant.

I oppose establishing a nitrogen reference point property by property.

- Farmers who have proactively put good farming systems in place – selected low nitrogen leaching livestock options such as deer – so they farm to a low nitrogen leaching level and a low environmental footprint – find themselves penalised for doing the right thing. Meanwhile, high-emitting land users are effectively rewarded, and will continue to be rewarded.
- Our Mapara Road property has been farmed below the original benchmarking for the Lake Taupo catchment. If we are required to establish a new nitrogen reference point; this will be below the current Lake Taupo level, which will be severely restrict our future farming activities on this property.
- Due to the Lake Taupo catchment rules we changed from sheep and dairy grazing to sheep and deer. This allowed the farming activity to operate at a significantly lower nitrogen leaching rate. It looks like we are going to be penalised for making good environmental decisions.

I oppose the need to use qualified consultants to prepare the nitrogen reference point, using the overseer model.

- Farmers have to prepare the historical data, complete livestock reconciliations, detail cropping areas, and itemise fertiliser applications.
- I think from my experience preparing the data for the Lake Taupo monitoring that this is the hard part.

- Entering the data into the Overseer model is the easy part. Training will be necessary.
- The cost of paying a consultant to enter the data into the Overseer model will mean less funds available to spend on projects that will have an environmental benefit.

I believe the potential impact of a nitrogen reference point has stopped farmers from using less nitrogen leaching options. I have been told about a farmer being advised not to change the method of application of urea to a liquid application which would have less leaching. The reason given was the potential impact of the future environmental rules.

Farm Environment Plans

Farm Environment plans have been supported by many parties in the dry stock sector including, Beef and Lamb, and New Zealand Deer Farmers association.

These plans will be valuable for identification of waterbodies, and management of the farming activities adjacent to these water bodies.

I wonder if there are any value in these plans for properties without water ways.

We have no waterbodies on any of our properties. We do have a few deer wallows.

All we could put into a plan would be our current policies with regard to grazing management of crops and steep slopes.

We have 500 ewes which are grazed on the steeper slopes. These slopes are steep enough that you need to be careful when walking up or down when mustering the sheep. There is no erosion on these slopes. See photos.

Cultivation of slopes greater than 15 degrees. I believe that some of the paddocks we have been cropping have slopes greater than 15 degrees. We have had no issues with cultivation of these slopes, which may be due to our pumice soils, or our cultivation procedures.

The grazing management of our crops. The deer have a run-off paddock. The natural deer behaviour is they eat when they want, then they go and sit on a hill and sleep. They are feed Lucerne bailage every night in the run-off paddock. We do not end up with a crop paddock turning to a mud paddock. The deer are often sitting in their run-off paddock in the middle of the day. See photos.

We need the extra feed the winter crops generate to feed the young deer. Otherwise, we are going to be feeding them for longer to get to slaughter weights, and mating weights for the replacement hinds.

The pumice soil type is prone to reverting to brown top pasture. This is another reason for the use of crops as a part of pasture renewal. We also use summer crops for the lambs to reduce the risk of droughts impacting on the lamb finishing side of the farming activity.

We have tried direct drilling for pasture renewal and have had poor results, due to brown top coming back quickly.

Once again, I oppose the need to use qualified consultants to prepare the farm environment plans. Farmers have a detailed understanding of their farm property and most will have existing systems to minimise undesirable outcomes. These systems probably have not been put in writing before.

Summary

The use of a nitrogen reference point calculation as proposed in the plan will impact on our ability to farm our properties to their capability.

We need to be focusing on ways to farm smarter and farm better; rather than farm within controls.

We need to focus on achieving positive environmental results; rather than paying consultants to produce reports.

The overseer model is a tool that is still being developed, it is not accurate. I do not believe that it can ever reflect the complex and different farm management policies that are used.

At some stage science will catch up and farmers will have more tools to assist in reducing nitrogen leaching. Examples will include new grasses, better fertilisers and application systems.

Farm environment plans are a flexible tool that can be used to identify and implement mitigation measures to reduce contaminant losses to water bodies.

Surface water should be easy to monitor with water sampling.

Nitrogen leaching into ground water is hard to monitor. Is nitrogen a major issue in the river?

The Mapara Road Property is already subject to the rules of the Lake Taupo catchment. Are we going to be unfairly subjected to further rules under the Waikato Regional Plan?

I am happy to answer any questions.

Thank you.