

NITROGEN REFERENCE POINTS

Q. WHAT'S A NITROGEN REFERENCE POINT AND WHO NEEDS ONE?

A. 'Nitrogen Reference Points' refer to information on a property's nitrogen leaching losses, calculated using OVERSEER® or another approved model. Under the proposed plan change, people undertaking farming activities on the following property types must calculate a Nitrogen Reference Point to provide to the regional council:

NITROGEN REFERENCE POINT INFORMATION

All commercial vegetable production properties	Average nitrogen leaching losses from 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2016 and associated data, including the OVERSEER® output file
All other farming activities on properties greater than 20ha	Highest annual nitrogen leaching loss in either the 2014/15 or 2015/16 financial year for the property and associated data, including the OVERSEER® output file. Records will need to be kept and produced on request.

These people have until 31 March 2019 to provide Waikato Regional Council with their Nitrogen Reference Point

Q. HOW WILL WAIKATO REGIONAL COUNCIL USE THE NITROGEN REFERENCE POINT INFORMATION PROVIDED?

A. Waikato Regional Council will use Nitrogen Reference Point information to work out the 75th percentile nitrogen leaching value for dairy farms, in terms of kilograms of nitrogen leached per hectare/per year in each Freshwater Management Unit (FMU). The rules will then apply to not just dairy, but to any pastoral farm operating above the 75th percentile value.

The dischargers above this value will be required to reduce their discharges to the 75th percentile, by July 2026. All other properties will be required to hold their discharge levels.

Waikato Regional Council will also use Nitrogen Reference Point information:

- as a baseline from which to evaluate actions or mitigations that should be required in Farm Environment Plans
- to complement the land use change rule, by ensuring there are no increases in nitrogen discharges from existing land uses
- in future plan changes (such as establishing catchment nitrogen loads in order to allocate property-level limits identified in this plan change).

Q. HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT TO 'GRANDPARENTING'?

A. The Collaborative Stakeholder Group (CSG) recommended Nitrogen Reference Points as an interim measure to transition from current activity to a new allocation approach that will be established in the future.

The CSG didn't want people locked into their current use based on historical choices or factors, and didn't want to reward those who had pursued land development with a high level of discharges by giving those properties a higher discharge allocation based on current use. They have signalled in the proposed plan change principles including land suitability as a starting point for allocation in any future plan changes where property level limits are set. In the meantime, to meet short term targets for nitrogen in the water, it was important to the CSG that current nitrogen discharges are held and reduced. The Nitrogen Reference Point is a tool to do this.