



Dairy farming in the Waituna Catchment:

Protecting Lagoon Health

Update October 2012



Last year dairy farmers in the Waituna Lagoon catchment worked together with DairyNZ, Fonterra and Environment Southland to identify practical on-farm actions that would reduce the effects of farming on the Lagoon. Their collective effort was described in a Catchment Action Plan which was released in December 2011. Individual farm action plans were drawn up as part of this catchment plan. The plan promised to regularly update the Southland community on progress—and this is the first for 2012.

This catchment Action Plan was produced by dairy farmers in the Waituna Lagoon catchment with the support of DairyNZ. We are faced with the challenge of ensuring a sustainable future for the Waituna Lagoon and our community. As local dairy farmers we are proud of the initiatives we are taking to secure this future.

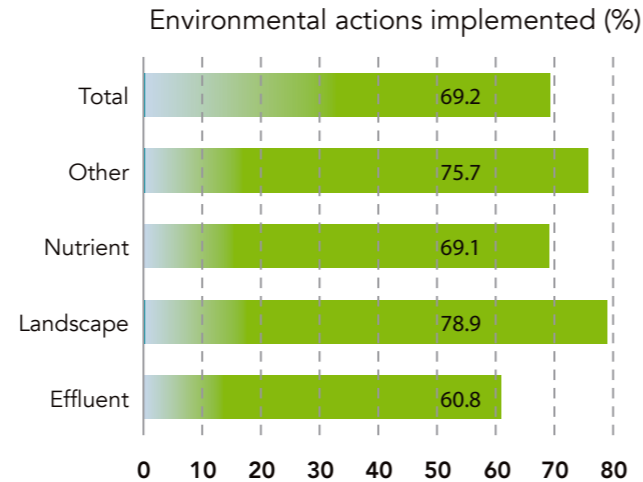
How are we going?

There are 40 dairy farms in the Waituna Lagoon, which is around 35-45% of the land area of the catchment. Farmers have been implementing a wide range of practical actions to protect the health of the Waituna Lagoon, the catchment and wider Southland environment, for today and the future.



In the first half of 2012, farms were assessed to gauge the level of progress:

- A total of 584 farm management recommendations have been identified.
- Overall, 70% of the farm management recommendations identified in the Catchment Action Plan in 2011 have been implemented.
- This represents an investment of just over \$1 million made by farmers to protect the health of the Lagoon and catchment.
- The farms are making strong progress across all key areas of environmental performance (graph at right).
- Large financial investments have been made over the last six months, particularly regarding effluent management.
- All dairy farmers in the Waituna catchment now have a nutrient budget and are using the information to manage nutrients more efficiently.
- With improved awareness and skills, farmers have independently added 189 new action items to the farm plans developed in 2011.



What actions have been implemented so far?

33% of the implemented activities relate to effluent management. Some highlights include:

- New effluent systems costing between \$100,000 -150,000 each. These increase the capacity to store dairy effluent lowering risks of discharge that could subsequently enter waterways and the Lagoon.
- Improving the drainage from laneways around milking platforms to ensure that run-off doesn't enter waterways.
- Trialling the use of k-line irrigation for low-rate effluent application to reduce the risk of leaching and run-off entering waterways.

A further 34% of implemented activities relate directly to nutrient management, including:

- Mapping and replacing tile drains to further reduce the risk of nutrient leachate finding its way into waterways.
- Permanently fencing off part of a paddock which was identified as a nutrient leaching 'hotspot'.
- Using less urea as a part of an overall nutrient management plan.

A range of other actions have been carried out including landscape, stream bank stability and waste management improvements such as:

- Fencing off waterways on farms where this was identified as an area to improve in 2011.
- Increasing the area of riparian planting.
- Improving rubbish management.
- Fencing off native bush blocks.



Looking toward the future

Farmers have made a significant commitment by responding to some of the environmental challenges facing Waituna Lagoon. It is recognised by those living in the catchment that there is still more to do. For the 178 action items that need to be implemented farmers have estimated a total future investment of \$3 Million to make them a reality. The largest investment comes with upgrading or replacing farm dairy effluent systems, and this type of activity requires careful planning.

Together with actions carried out by other parties including Environment Southland and the Department of Conservation, there are a number of other initiatives that farmers are carrying out that will strengthen the Catchment Action Plan including:

- Setting realistic nutrient targets which reflect the need for environmental improvement while maintaining productivity.
- Developing Sustainable Milk Plans to replace the 2011/12 plans. These link on-farm actions to catchment wide outcomes for the Lagoon.
- In partnership with the dairy sector and fertiliser industry farmers are making nutrient management improvements. There is a lift in the amount of training that is available to fine-tune day-to-day decisions to achieve the best environment and production outcomes.
- Environment Southland has built an improved water quality monitoring system to better understand the drivers of the Lagoon's health.

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Waituna farmers concerns are:

- Policy certainty for farming in the catchment is needed to satisfy lenders and investors about security.

The farmers are eager to report their progress to the Southland community, so more is known about what they are doing, how they are going and plans for the future. Waituna farmers share a passion for the country, and take stewardship of the land seriously.

It is going to take a sustained effort to continue to manage the risks to the Lagoon from sediment and nutrients. Farmers welcome these initiatives as it will improve the amount of information and confirm what influence the changes they are making are having on the Lagoon's health. We look forward to developing another progress update early in 2013.

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The process we are following:

Farm assessments

Individual action plans 2011/12
Short-term actions

Science update

Sustainable milk plans—
Long-term plans for viable
and sustainable businesses

Implementation review 2013



DairyNZ is proud to support the efforts of farmers in the Waituna catchment.
For more information on DairyNZ, visit www.dairynz.co.nz
or call our farmer information line: 0800 4 DAIRYNZ (0800 4 324 7969)