

Submission to the Chief Executive, Waikato Regional Council

Submission by: Sonia Fursdon – Hamilton resident and rate payer.

Declaration: I could not gain an advantage in trade competition through this submission.

Request to be heard: I do not wish to speak at the hearing.

I strongly support the creation of a plan to urgently address the poor quality of Waikato's freshwater, and make the Waipa and Waikato Rivers swimmable and suitable for gathering food.

I urge WRC to create more urgency towards achieving this vision, by setting shorter timeframes for reductions in discharges, and setting stronger targets – for example, e-coli levels that match the Ministry of Health's recommendations for safety (rather than the proposed level which is double it).

I support the intention to continue to lower discharge levels over time – but encourage a shorter timeframe.

I ask that Farm Environment Plans be required to be in place sooner than 2026, and that stock be kept out of waterways in the same timeframe.

I do not believe the potential social disruption of change is sufficient to warrant an 80 year timeframe – what about the social disruption of degrading water quality for the next 80 years that will result from insufficiently tougher standards and slow implementation?

I ask that more weight be given in the Plan to the potential economic opportunities associated with land use changes and changes in farming and production practices, which can offset costs and reduce land owners' and society as a whole's risk by diversifying industry and income streams. There are also society-wide economic benefits associated with increased recreational and tourism opportunities, reduced costs of water treatment, and reduced health risks (and health treatment costs), for example.

Support (education and economic incentives) needs to be given to dischargers to improve their practices, and reduce their impacts. Those who currently have lower impact practices should be rewarded rather than disincentivised, such as what the historic discharge benchmark system would do.

I ask that monitoring of the new provisions be undertaken by truly independent parties – the idea of fertiliser company representatives acting as farming professionals being able to certify and audit compliance with the rules seems a clear conflict of interest. I believe WRC should be the monitoring body.

There also do not appear to be clear consequences for non-compliance included in the Plan. I ask that these be added, and that sufficient resources be allocated to ensure effective monitoring and enforcement takes place. Fines collected should be allocated directly to mitigating and remedying freshwater pollution.

Submitted by:

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