

Why do I get different Overseer numbers and why are they important?

Overseer is the software programme used to model nutrient cycling on-farm and one of the outputs is an estimate of nitrogen losses to water, reported as kg Nitrogen/hectare/year. A variety of farm information is collected from the farmer and then, along with accurate soil and climatic information, the farm system is modelled in the Overseer programme following a consistent process guided by the 'Best Practice Data Input Standards'. These standards outline a standardised method of modelling farm systems, to ensure the process is as robust as possible.

It can be immensely frustrating when you get Overseer nutrient reports from different sources for the same farm and they each show a different value for the farms estimated nitrogen losses. Sometimes the reported nitrogen losses can vary so much that the value of an Overseer nutrient budget is questioned by the farmer.

Different reports may give a different N loss value for the same farm, the reasons why are usually:

1. A different version of Overseer was used (versions change up to twice per year)
2. The farm information supplied to the person/company producing the nutrient budget was not identical or was not an accurate representation of the farming system
3. The person entering the farm information in Overseer did not follow the Best Practice Data Input Standards correctly
4. The Overseer files were completed for different purposes e.g. budgeting forward for next season 'Predictive' or reflecting back on last season 'Year-end' (see below for further explanation).

It is very important that if a nutrient budget is to be used to meet regulation or compliance, the nutrient budget needs to be prepared to the specified standard. Check with your regional council for details regarding their accepted nutrient budget standard.

Types of nutrient budgets

Like financial management, nutrient management has different report types to assess how nutrients have been or will be managed.

Financial management has 'Predictive' cash flow budgets, 'Year-end' financial reports, and 'Scenarios' assessing business or market change opportunities. Similarly, nutrient management has various Overseer nutrient reports e.g., 'Predictive' nutrient budgets, for looking at the year ahead; 'Year-end' reports on the year completed and 'Scenarios' looking at alternative management options or farm changes.

To be able to compare any nutrient management reports (Overseer files) it is important that the files have been calculated on the same set of 'base' farm data. We encourage you to attach a map to your reports, showing your nutrient management blocks and that you share the map and nutrient files with all the professionals helping with your farm nutrient management.

Two common types of Overseer nutrient reports

- 1 When you work with your fertiliser company to plan your fertiliser management for the year ahead, this is an example of a 'Predictive' nutrient budget
- 2 When you send your farm data to your milk company at the end of the season and they send you a nitrogen report, this is an example of a 'Year-end' report

For nutrient management advice we recommend you use a Certified Nutrient Management Advisor www.nmacertification.org.nz

