

Nutrient budgets for Canterbury

In the next couple of years, under the Canterbury Land & Water Regional Plan, many farmers will need to apply for a farming activity resource consent. Part of this application will include preparing a Nitrogen Baseline and Nitrogen Loss Calculation for the property.

What is a nitrogen baseline?

A nitrogen baseline is the average annual loss of nitrogen from a property modelled using the latest version of Overseer for the period **1 July 2009 – 30 June 2013**.

What is nitrogen loss calculation?

Nitrogen loss calculation is the average nitrogen loss from your property over the last four consecutive years modelled in the latest version of Overseer. This will be compared to your nitrogen baseline and indicates whether your nitrogen losses have changed. Specific Environment Canterbury (ECan) rules state if or what scale of change is allowable

Is your Overseer file fit for regulatory purpose?

Here are six quick questions to help you identify if your Overseer file is suitable for making a consent application.

| Questions to check | Yes | No | Reasons |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Is your Overseer file for the property representative of each year from 2009 to now? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | These years are required to produce your nitrogen baseline and nitrogen loss calculation. |
| Do these Overseer files cover all the land you currently use? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | If other land had been bought, leased or sold that is not included in the Overseer file, this would need to be added or removed as necessary. |
| Were the Overseer files calculated at the end of the season using the actual total amounts of inputs and outputs from your property? <i>(E.g. supplement feed, animals, fertiliser, milk production).</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Many Overseer files are prepared at the start of the season for the purpose of predicting fertiliser requirements. These are not suitable to use for a consent application. You will likely need a 'Year-end' file. |
| Have all the Overseer files been prepared using the 'Overseer Best Practice Data Input Standards'? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | This ensures the files are prepared consistently and to the standard which ECan will be checking against. |
| Have all the Overseer files been updated to the latest version of Overseer? <i>(Version 6.2.1 since 30 November 2015; 6.2.2 since 23 May 2016).</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ECan will only accept a consent application with files in the latest version of Overseer. Overseer releases a new version approximately every six months. |
| Have you confirmed with the person that produced your nutrient budget, that the file you have meets the regulatory requirements? <i>(And the legal responsibility that use of the nutrient budget in regulation brings).</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Nutrient budgets are produced for multiple purposes (not just to meet regulations). It's critical that you're using one that is suitable for meeting your regulatory requirements, and that the person or company who produced it will be prepared to legally defend it if necessary. |

If you answered NO to ANY of the questions you will need to ensure you get your Overseer files prepared or updated so you can answer yes to all the questions.

If you were able to answer YES to ALL the questions that's great; you have Overseer files which are ready to use for your consent application.

Ensuring your Overseer files are prepared in the correct detail to apply for a resource consent is very important.

If you require help with preparing these Overseer files for your consent we recommend you use a qualified professional.

Here is some information to help you find the right professionals:

- **Certified nutrient management advisors**

Certified Nutrient Management Advisors have undertaken training in nutrient management and the use of Overseer including ongoing assessment of their technical capability. Find a list of certified advisors in Canterbury by following the link below. www.nmacertification.org.nz/Site/Nutrient_Management/Certified_Advisers/default.aspx

- **Milk company environmental staff**

If you have supplied your farm nitrogen information to your milk company they may be able to assist with the nutrient budgets you require or guide you towards other professionals who can.

- **Consultants**

Your usual farm consultant or resource consent consultant may be able to help. Be sure to ask what experience and training they have with Overseer. Advanced Sustainable Nutrient Management is preferable, but Intermediate Sustainable Nutrient Management training should be the very minimum criteria you accept to engage a consultant. Ask how many Overseer files they have prepared for resource consents.

- **Do-it-yourself**

The Overseer software tool is publically available and so an option is to prepare the Overseer files yourself. However, due to the complex nature of Overseer, unless you have previous experience using it, we don't recommend it. You will need to ensure you are doing everything to be able to answer 'Yes' to each of the six checklist questions. When you submit your Overseer files with your consent application, ECan staff are likely to go through the files in more detail to ensure they are prepared correctly; this may mean your consent takes longer to process. If you are considering this option, we recommend that you speak with ECan consenting staff first to understand their requirements.

Once the nutrient budget has been prepared by your chosen individual, make sure you double check the six questions listed above and ensure the nutrient budget does meet all of the criteria.

