Policy and advocacy uncovered - where are things at and what can you do?

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Introduction
This session explored what is happening in the policy and advocacy space and to provide a better understanding of where the water and greenhouse gas policies are at and the implications of these for farmers and the sector. The workshop also explored what farmers can do to become more involved and influence better policy outcomes for farming, the environment and community.

Essential Freshwater

What is the Essential Freshwater Package?
The Package proposes some major changes to the management of New Zealand’s freshwater. The proposals have two main objectives:

- to stop further degradation of waterways and start making immediate improvements so that water quality is improving within five years
- to reverse past damage and bring waterways and ecosystems to a healthy state within a generation.

The dairy sector supports these objectives and believes that many dairy farmers have been actively working already to make significant water quality improvements. As an example, 98.2% of significant dairy waterways are fenced off, so no dairy cow can get in waterways.

What could it mean for dairy farmers?
For dairy, the aspects of the proposal likely to have the largest impact include:

- changes to the way in which councils implement their management plans to simplify and speed up the process
- an increased focus on ecosystem health, including new nutrient limits, interim controls on intensification, and new practice standards for agriculture. This includes new regulations for stock exclusion, winter grazing, limiting nitrogen use, stock holding areas and feedlots, and a requirement for farmers to have a Farm Environment Plan.

Within the Essential Freshwater proposal there are policies DairyNZ does and doesn’t support. Those we don’t support are due to a lack of robust supporting science linking the proposed policy to actual water quality improvements. DairyNZ’s economic analysis indicates these proposals would come with significant cost, and we believe there are better ways to achieve the desired results than those proposed. Our proposed solution framework is outlined in Figure 1.

Dairy farmers had valuable input into the DairyNZ submission—thousands attended meetings, asked questions and made submissions in a short timeframe. Thank you to all farmers who contributed to the DairyNZ submission or put their own submission to the Ministry of Environment.

Next steps
Over 17,000 submissions were made and these are now being reviewed by an Independent Advisory Panel. Recommendations from the Panel as well as the Freshwater Leader groups, technical advisory groups and government officials will be provided to Ministers by the end of...
March. A decision by Cabinet on the final form and content of the policies is expected after this.

**Zero Carbon Bill and He Waka Eke Noa**

The Government’s Zero Carbon Bill (2019) puts into place targets to reduce greenhouse gases:

- carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide have to reduce to net zero by 2050
- methane has a 2030 target to reduce by 10%, and a provisional target of 24-47% reduction by 2050

In late 2019 the Government also accepted a farming sector proposal – He waka eke noa (HWEN). This is to build an enduring farm-level emission reduction framework in a partnership approach between the sector and government. DairyNZ and the primary sector are now working towards an implementation plan to meet our commitments under HWEN.

**What does this mean for farmers?**

Each farm will need to estimate its current emissions and, over time, develop a farm-specific plan to manage and reduce these emissions through farm management improvements. Although any level of emissions reduction represents a challenge for our sector, we think it needs to be managed alongside the broader environmental issues, like water quality, biodiversity and erosion control. Changes won’t come into effect immediately, but there are steps farmers can start taking now to prepare.

1. Know your numbers – calculate your on-farm emissions. Overseer can do this.
2. Think about what farm management changes you could make to reduce your emissions.

DairyNZ is launching a Project called “Step Change” with the ambition to help farmers simultaneously increase profit and reduce nitrogen leaching and greenhouse gas emissions.

**Getting involved - how can you help influence better policy outcomes?**

**Your voice is essential:**
- Farmer submissions are important and can make a difference.
- Tell your personal story and the impact on your business, family and community.
- Every story is individual – make it your own.
- Focus on solutions.

**Get engaged in the conversation:**
- Community voice drives catchment limit setting – get involved in local catchment limit setting processes and join a catchment group in your area.
- Start a conversation – who are the key influencers in your community?
- It’s election year, have a conversation with all political parties on the issues that matter to you and what you would like the government to address.
- Get to know your local councillors – many regional councillors are new to the job, let them know your views and the views of your communities.

**Change is here - embrace it:**
• You can make a difference
• Don’t look inwards, learn from other farmers around you.
• The sector is well-placed to achieve this – build on the existing knowledge and tools.
• It’s about a journey of continuous change.

For more information:


Project Step Change – talk to your local CO
Figure 1: DairyNZ submission on Essential Freshater – proposed solutions framework.