Summary of DairyNZ submissions

Please note: DairyNZ is still going through the process of refining our submission and testing it with our dairy and primary sector partners, and we will consider your feedback. These positions are indicative only.

You can access the MfE consultation webpage, including the form for submitting feedback, by clicking here. You can access the Freshwater consultation discussion document by clicking here.

Principles informing DairyNZ's submission

The following principles underpin our submission, informed by levy payer feedback. We are looking for:

- A clear and enduring, outcomes-based framework
- A balance across the four wellbeings (environment, economic, social and cultural), fair transition and sustainable use of resources
- Locally-led and pragmatic implementation
- Science-informed decision making and adaptive management
- A partnership, solutions-focused approach
- Shared responsibility and collective action

The table below summarises our positions on the key freshwater issues

Note: these summarise our responses to the specific questions outlined in the consultation document link above.

Topic	DairyNZ position	Explanation
Objective of the NPS-FM	• Support a revised single objective that maintains water quality for compulsory values and enables sustainable use. • Objective requires supportive policies that place greater weight on feasibility of regulation, allow regional discretion,	The current objective is too rigid and limits councils' ability to work with communities on realistic, regionally tailored outcomes. A recrafted objective would still require maintaining or improving water quality but would also consider feasibility, costs, and community wellbeing, as well as ensuring environmental goals are practical, achievable, and support primary sector viability.

	encourage non-regulatory approaches, and ensure targets are achievable and fair.	One objective would reduce complexity in implementation.
National Objectives Framework (NOF)	• Introduce Freshwater Action Plans (new tool) which are spatially defined, community-led tools to coordinate action that regional councils need to consider, and integrate with regulatory and non-regulatory responses. • Reduce regulatory reliance where effective community action occurs. • Retain four compulsory values of human health, ecosystem health, threatened species, mahinga kai. • Introduce an attribute hierarchy: distinguish **outcome attributes** from **driver attributes** to guide action. • Outcome attributes will align with national values and minimum standards, while driver attributes (covering both contaminants and non-contaminants) will serve as risk indicators. These will guide targeted, catchment-specific actions in collaboration with landowners. • Clarify driver attribute thresholds are for risk assessment, not strict enforcement. • Update E. coli attributes for broader recreation uses. • Define National Bottom Lines only where thresholds are nationally critical (e.g. nitrate, ammoniacal-N). • Acknowledge current sediment NBLs are unsuitable; propose alternatives.	An outcomes-based freshwater management approach prioritises ecological and community outcomes over rigid contaminant limits, enabling flexibility, innovation, and regionally tailored actions. Contaminants are weak predictors of ecosystem health, so a framework that focuses on outcome attributes first, then manages the most relevant contaminant and non-contaminant drivers through targeted action plans, is both more effective and scientifically supported. Critical to our approach is distinguishing between outcome attributes from driver attributes to guide action. Outcome attributes measure the key values communities want from freshwater, like ecosystem and human health, with clear numeric targets that apply nationally. When these targets aren't met, regulators should focus on the main factors or driver attributes, that influence these outcomes, including both contaminants and other non-contaminant factors like planting, habitat, or temperature. Driver attributes are manageable factors that vary by catchment, and councils should have flexibility in how they address them. While contaminant control remains important, relying only on contaminants ignores other key drivers limiting freshwater health. The framework prioritises managing the most relevant drivers to improve outcomes effectively.

	• Emphasise flexibility for councils to tailor responses. • Support from government through funding and technical input.	Driver attributes need flexibility. The national approach needs to include a focus on both reducing contaminants where required, but also encouraging the positive mitigations at the catchment and farm levels, including riparian planting, critical source management and wetland management or construction. An outcomes-based approach is better because it is scientifically founded and can encompass these positive actions and connect best with what matters – on the ground actions.
Te Mana o te Wai	• Retain as a preamble, not as part of the objective. • Remove hierarchy; instead, recognise freshwater's intrinsic value and Māori rights, while enabling sustainable use.	Te Mana o te Wai has been included in the NPS-FM since 2014. It became an issue in the 2020 version of the NPS-FM when it was translated as a hierarchy and began to be considered in some consenting processes. Retaining Te Mana o te Wai in the NPS-FM but amending will remove the key issues with the current 2020 hierarchy. This has led to confusion and costly challenges. Instead, positioning it as a guiding preamble will enable meaningful implementation while allowing flexible, regionally tailored planning, and sustainable resource use. It is important to retain the concept to recognise the intrinsic value of freshwater and uphold Te Tiriti obligations. However, translating it into a rigid hierarchy has undermined balanced decision-making and community discussions on trade-offs.
Commercial Vegetable Growing	• Improve recognition of food production and existing land use in the NPS-FM.	All food production is important, as is managing the effects of all food production.

Water Security & Storage	• Support national standards and long-term consents for off-stream water storage.	Access to water, including for stock drinking water and dairy shed washdown, is critical for dairy farming. Making off-stream storage easier will take the pressure off in-stream flows and aquifers.
Wetlands	• Support wetland protection, restoration, and construction. • Enable practical, risk-based rules. • Permitted pathways for constructed wetlands. • Focus on mapping/managing significant wetlands. • Clarify definitions and avoid over-regulation of low-value/pastoral wetlands. • Incentivise protection and maintain regional mapping.	Wetlands offer important environmental benefits. We want clearer, simpler rules that focus on mapping and protecting significant wetlands first, while encouraging restoration and construction of new wetlands through practical, nationally consistent pathways. Farming activities near wetlands should have risk-based rules to reduce confusion and compliance costs. Farmers need greater support and recognition, including incentives like rates relief, funding for construction costs, and expert advice, alongside recognising wetlands' wider benefits.
Fish Passage	• Reduce NES-F compliance burden. • Allow permissive rules for low-risk culverts. • Promote practical tools (e.g., FPAT, BART) and streamline reporting.	Simpler, risk-based rules make it easier and more affordable for farmers to improve fish passage by removing barriers like culverts. Reduce reporting burdens and promote practical tools to encourage positive on-farm actions.
190kg Cap on Synthetic N Fertiliser	• Retain 190 kg/ha/year cap as an average across the farm for greater flexibility. • Remove receipt submission requirement; align reporting with farming calendar.	Retaining the 190kg/ha synthetic nitrogen cap while reducing reporting and compliance burdens, by aligning reporting timelines with farm calendars and removing unnecessary receipt requirements, will maintain a national backstop and make compliance cheaper and easier for farmers. Applying the cap as an average across the entire farm will provide greater flexibility.

Drinking Water Source Mapping	• Identify source sites during planning—not fixed zones. • Let councils set protection zones based on local risk.	Drinking water zones require a degree of protection but this can be achieved more efficiently by mapping key drinking water sources with a tailored, risk-based approach developed through regional planning and community input to ensure practical and effective safeguards.
Relationship to RMA Reform	• Support progressing with national policy consultation • Suggest deferring components reliant on spatial planning until Phase 3 of RMA reform is complete.	Updating national direction before Phase 3 (full replacement of the RMA) will provide a degree of certainty and maintain momentum. Deferring those policies reliant on spatial planning will mean those tools are in place first.