

# Cracking down on water

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**STRICT** new rules on how much water may be allocated for dairy farming and for kiwi-fruit orchard irrigation in the Rangitaiki River catchment and in its tributaries are on the way.

The rules are an effort by Bay of Plenty Regional Council to clean-up the Rangitaiki River so it complies with requirements of the Ngati Whare and Ngati Manawa claims settlement acts.

Dairy farms in the Rangitaiki's Galatea basin catchment are heavily reliant on irrigation.

Also suggested are a clampdown on the unauthorised abstraction of water, limits on how much water may be used, improved methods for water use accounting, and "enhancing water availability".

The council, through its regional direction and delivery committee, has started the process of amending its regional policy statement so the river quality can be improved.

According to a document considered by the committee recently, the iwi, hapu and whanau of the river consider the river's health and wellbeing and its resources to be woven into the health and wellbeing of people.

As part of their Treaty of Waitangi settlements in 2012, Ngati Whare and Ngati Manawa, of Te Whaiti and Murupara respectively, sought mechanisms to restore and protect the river's mauri – its life force.

The council has already established the Rangitaiki River Forum as the key stakeholder group in planning for the change, and it has prepared a river document, Te Ara Whanui o Rangitaiki, outlining the objective and desired outcomes of the change.

The regional council expects to notify the changes to its regional policy statement in May or June next year and, following that, will call for submissions.

A draft plan change has already been prepared and points to increasing restrictions on using water for dairying.

A background paper on the draft says, historically, neither the dairy industry nor the council have limited the amount of water used for dairy shed milk cooling, or for dairy shed wash-down purposes.

As a consequence few dairy farmers hold

resource consent for these purposes.

The draft plan, considered at a council workshop in April, will provide for controlled-activity status for all water takes of less than 50 cubic metres a day, irrespective of the intended use of the water.

This means all applications for water use within 50 cubic metres a day must be granted on condition that certain criteria are met.

Since the workshop, the council has considered other options for those dairy farmers with about 700 cows or more, who require more than 50 cubic metres a day.

A revised draft provides that all dairy farms taking water for milk cooling or wash-down purposes should be authorised as a controlled activity, but this excludes water takes for other purposes.

The background paper says the second key group of unauthorised water users are orchard irrigators, but determining how to deal with them is difficult due to their potential to use high volumes.

"We don't know the extent of unauthorised irrigation, except that industry representatives have come forward seeking special consideration."

The paper says since April a new restricted discretionary activity rule for existing unauthorised irrigation and orchard frost protection takes has been drafted.

Under this rule, applications for consents could be declined if they failed to meet provisions of relevant council policies.

"Consideration would be given to the economic benefits and value of water-dependent investment."

The paper suggests that in areas where water abstraction already exceeds limits, applicants for water use consents will be required to provide information to support a more generous allocation.

They will also need to be aware that their water allocation will be subject to "more frequent restrictions" and they may be required to look for alternative resources, such as deep groundwater.

The draft plan changes reduces the amount of ground water a farmer may take from 35 cubic metres a day to 15 cubic metres, and prevents a farmer from combining his ground water take with the surface water take.

All permitted water takes will need to be registered, and farmers will need to report and meter their water takes on the council's request.