

REGIONAL COUNCIL REPORT ON INTENSIVE WINTER GRAZING

1 AUGUST 2021

Executive Summary

This report sets out the actions taken by Regional Councils and Primary Sector organisations to support improvements to intensive winter grazing on crop (IWG) practices in 2021. Overall it can be seen that there has been strong collaboration across Regional Councils and primary sector organisations to provide education, support and tools for farmers. This has resulted in a significant uptake of IWG planning and good management practice (GMP), increased farmer engagement on IWG, and planning for expanded compliance and monitoring programmes.

This report presents a preliminary view of the activities to 30 June 2021. A complete review of activities will be included in the next quarterly report due 1 November 2021. While it is acknowledged that there is still more to do it is considered that this report presents a positive response to improving IWG practices.

Background

In response to a number of recommendations made by the Southland Intensive Winter Grazing NES Advisory Group (SAG) the Minister for the Environment deferred the implementation date for most of the IWG regulations in the National Environmental Standards for Freshwater (NES-FW) from 1 May 2021 until 1 May 2022. The NES-FW regulations that control further expansion of IWG are now in force.

In a letter to Southland Regional Council and other SAG members dated 16 March 2021 the Minister for the Environment advised the deferment of IWG rules was on the basis that Regional Councils (RCs) and the farming sector, as represented by industry-good organisations, commit to:

- Improve IWG practice during the 2021 year and beyond by rapidly deploying an IWG module that will be a prototype for inclusion in the certified Freshwater Farm Plans (FW-FP) currently under development; and
- Undertake increased monitoring and reporting to ensure there are measurable improvements in IWG practice during the year.

The letter further outlined that the Minister for the Environment expected to see:

1. Farmers putting in place better practices such as providing appropriate buffers that are uncultivated and ungrazed around waterways and critical source areas; and retiring steeper slopes that are unsuitable for IWG;
2. RCs undertaking increased monitoring of IWG practices, and taking compliance action against breaches of the law;
3. More effective monitoring by councils of receiving environments such as rivers and estuaries to show if their health is improving;
4. Council monitoring of the total hectares in IWG, and enforcement of the rule against the area in IWG increasing on any one farm; and
5. Quarterly progress reports to the Minister commencing 1 August 2021.

This report is the first of the quarterly reports and provides an overview of the activities undertaken up to 30 June 2021 to meet the requirements listed above.

This report is a collaborative undertaking between RCs and primary sector organisations. It was recognised by all parties that this collaborative approach provided the best chance of achieving positive change quickly.

Discussion

A summary of the key activities carried out in the three months to 30 June 2021 includes the following actions:

- Collaborative primary sector effort to develop and distribute the IWG checklist to 21,000 properties.
- Development of industry IWG modules and plans that informed, and were informed by, MPI and MfE's IWG module.
- Appointment of an IWG Co-ordinator in collaboration with MPI and MfE to support the collection and sharing of best practice advice, relevant updates and extension events nationally.
- More extension events focussed on good IWG practices.
- Increased promotion of an existing IWG hotline to report poor practice.
- A large increase in IWG plan downloads.
- A proactive dairy farmer survey by Fonterra focussed on IWG planning.
- Aerial and on-ground monitoring by Regional Councils with extended programmes planned between 1 July and 30 September.

Proactive approach to wintering

There has been a proactive approach to wintering in 2021 with education and support offered before and during the winter grazing season. This proactive approach has focussed on identifying and addressing potential issues before winter. Examples of this proactive approach have been demonstrated by Environment Southland, with summer cultivation flights and followups with farmers; MPI, with education and support followups with cases from previous season; industry bodies, working collaboratively with each other and regional councils to provide pre-wintering information and support to farmers.

Regional sector

A short survey on current IWG knowledge and practices was circulated to all RCS in May 2021. The survey sought information relating specifically to IWG on: rural sector engagement, planning, consenting, farm plans, compliance monitoring and development of tools to assist compliance monitoring and reporting. The results, which were received from 16 RCs, showed a range of approaches to IWG depending on the extent of the practice within a region.

Most RCs indicated that additional resourcing for freshwater implementation will be added from 1 July 2021, when 2021-2031 Long Term Plans take effect. These additional resources will respond to expectations to monitor new rules contained in the NES-FW such as IWG. RCs noted that they will be balancing resourcing deployed to plan-making, compliance and enforcement and environmental monitoring as part of the package of work required under the NPS-FW and NES-FW.

At the time of the survey, many RCs were still developing their response to the new regulations, including IWG in the 2021 winter. For example, those RCs where IWG is a more significant activity

such as Southland, Otago, Canterbury and Horizons, are already undertaking compliance monitoring, investing in industry-sector engagement and exploring different technologies to assist with identification and monitoring of IWG in the future. RCs have begun exploring opportunities to utilise technology to achieve improved and more consistent monitoring and reporting on IWG. These projects include the development of an app to support IWG planning and the use of satellite imagery to identify the extent of IWG.

All RCs that responded continue to engage with their rural sector (industry groups, farming consultants, farmers, catchment groups) on IWG requirements, often as part of engagement on the Essential Freshwater changes. The intensity of engagement tends to reflect the extent of primary production in a region.

Increased compliance monitoring and Extension Services

As very few consents have been issued, and there were limited rules in place prior to the NES-FW there is little compliance monitoring or complaint/incident data to meaningfully report as a baseline or comparison for the 2021 year. RCs that have existing rules to manage IWG continue to monitor this activity.

Monitoring activities will occur in 2021 through fly-overs and on-ground checks. These activities have been undertaken in previous years however a number of RCs are now increasing their activities.

The IWG activity reported to 30 June 2021 is attached. Much of the compliance and monitoring activity will occur between 1 July 2021 and 30 September 2021. Updated compliance data will be provided with the next quarterly report.

Many RCs offer extension services in order to promote good practice on-farm. These services are often undertaken in collaboration with primary sector organisations or catchment groups. Extension services can range from public meetings, topic-based or area-specific workshops as well as 1:1 on-farm visits. All RCs were also encouraged to promote and share the key messages and supporting material contained within the IWG module released by MPI in 2021.

Environmental monitoring of receiving environments

Existing water quality monitoring continues and is expected to significantly increase in all regions. RCs anticipate that the increased monitoring of receiving environments will be undertaken as part of the broader suite of freshwater monitoring required under the new NPS-FW. Monitoring currently underway will support the identification of high risk areas for IWG activity and will also inform compliance and monitoring programmes.

Total Area in IWG

At present are a range of methods being used to assess the extent of winter grazing being undertaken. RCs use a range/variety of satellite imagery and mapping tools to identify grazing and assess risk. There is an opportunity for RCs to pool expertise and funding to develop a more standardised approach to enable an assessment of scale, risk categorisation and identify high-risk sites. This will help with compliance monitoring and consenting prioritisation as well as providing consistent data on IWG at a national scale. RCs currently working with Manaaki Whenua to develop this project and hope to have it confirmed during the 2021 IWG year for inclusion in the 1 November report.

The following table provides an estimate from Regional Councils of the number of farms undertaking IWG activity. Through the delivery of the project with Manaaki Whenua we hope to provide a more accurate picture of the scale of the activity on a national scale.

Council	Estimated Farms with IWG?	Comments
Auckland	Unknown	Winter grazing is not thought to be a common practice in Auckland. Auckland Council does dairy farm compliance monitoring but there is no monitoring under the IWG regulations.
Bay of Plenty	>30	Estimated using field staff's corporate knowledge and Nutrient Management Plans to develop a spreadsheet of known areas. More work to do to develop the list.
Environment Canterbury	2,600	Estimated based on information from a machine learning model and GIS tool that uses satellite imagery to identify 'potential wintering crops'. This is 2021 data and has not been ground-truthed. This method is likely to overestimate IWG area.
Gisborne	20	Estimate included in the s32 report for the Proposed Freshwater Plan for Gisborne Region 2015.
Greater Wellington	800	Indicative number given by Beef + Lamb New Zealand (B+LNZ).
Hawkes Bay	700	Up to 700 farms based on aerial imagery.
Horizons	Unknown	
Marlborough	Unknown	Project initiated to identify IWG areas, and there would appear to be more than thought, but to date not a high priority environmental concern. Marlborough only has 46 dairy farms and its main primary production areas are viticulture and aquaculture.
Nelson	0	
Northland	Unknown	Winter grazing is not thought to be a common practice in Northland. A full stock take of winter grazing activities on dairy platforms will be conducted from July 2021 along with the farms' annual inspections.
Otago	Unknown	Expect to receive a baseline of hectares of dairy forage crops from regulation 36 NES-F information provision.
Southland	3,500	Extent to IWG per farm varies considerably.
Taranaki	Unknown	Inspect most farms annually, but do not currently focus on IWG.
Tasman	Unknown	Inspect 143 dairy farms, but do not currently focus on IWG.
Waikato	2,000	Estimate.

Table 1: Regional Council Estimate of the total number of farms with IWG by Region (Source: Regional Sector Survey 2021)

Primary industry sector events and activities

Primary sector organisations have responded to the expectations in the Minister's 16 March letter by increasing the already significant activity being undertaken to promote better IWG practices nationally.

Extension Events

Primary sector organisations have undertaken over 150 events across New Zealand focused on IWG over 2020 and 2021. In 2020, there were 96 B+LNZ and DairyNZ events focussed on IWG. To date in 2021, these organisations have undertaken 63 IWG-related events focussed on implementing good practice.

Often extension events are collaborative and include multiple primary sector organisations (e.g. Federated Farmers, Deer Industry NZ (DINZ), DairyNZ and B+LNZ), RCs and can include collaborative efforts with not-for-profit groups, for example Thriving Southland.

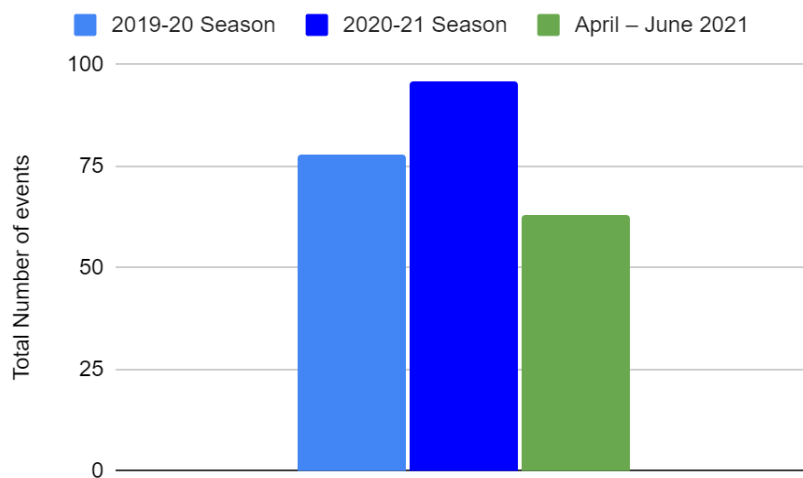


Figure 1: Total number of extension events hosted by DairyNZ and Beef + Lamb New Zealand. (Note the bar in green is only for three months of this season)

There has been a range of extension activities focussed on winter grazing, with much of the effort going into face-to-face field days and discussion groups. Farmers have also been directly contacted through phone calls with primary sector staff or in person on farm to discuss the resources and tools available and answer any specific questions about IWG.

The total number of farmers attending events is measured in the thousands, with 1,771 attending IWG events in 2019, 2,867 attending in 2020 and to June 2021 there have been 1,264 attendees at IWG events with more planned during the winter months.

Improved farming practice

Fonterra Cooperative Group has been active in contacting farmers undertaking IWG in Southland. The firm's sustainability staff have undertaken 103 phone interviews, with questions focussed on IWG planning. The results of which can be summarised as:

- Farms that have an IWG Plan in Place or are in the process of completing one = 62%
- Farms without an IWG Plan = 29%
- Farms that were no longer undertaking IWG on their farm or moving out of dairy = 9%

The results show that two thirds of farmers interviewed have taken action to prepare an IWG plan for winter. An update on these numbers will be included in the next quarterly report.

Fonterra has one of the largest farm environment plan (FEP) programmes in the country, which collects data from all Fonterra suppliers who have an FEP. The FEP programme focusses on the Good farming practice principles as set out in the Action Plan for Water Quality 2018. Principles 14, 'use appropriate paddocks for intensive grazing' and 15, 'manage grazing to minimise nutrient loss from risk areas' relate specifically to mitigating the risk associated with IWG. The below table demonstrates that of the 430 Southland farms with a Fonterra FEP 84% are meeting GFP 20 and 79% are meeting GFP21.

Good Farming Practice Principle	Farms with Fonterra FEP	% Farm Meeting All IWG GFP
14	419	84%
15	419	79%

Table 2 – Percentage of Fonterra FEP’s delivered in Southland that meet Principles 14 and 15 from the Action Plan for Water Quality 2018.

IWG module

Many primary sector groups and RCs have invested in the development of farm plans to support improved farm practices. In April, an IWG module was developed by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and Ministry for the Environment (MfE) with input from Regional Councils. The module was developed to help kick start IWG planning and provide a set of IWG practice expectations.

B+LNZ and Dairy NZ updated their existing IWG plans to reflect this module, so farmers were able to access consistent information from either MPI, B+LNZ or DairyNZ.

The sector generally supports the national IWG module that has been developed and intends to continue the incorporation of this material within their templates and practice. It is anticipated that further uptake of the new IWG module will be seen in the 2022 season as much of the planning for 2021 had already been completed. Additionally, the inclusion of IWG into Freshwater Farm Plans will also provide greater clarity for all parties on the role of farm planning in achieving good management practice on all farms that undertake IWG.

Both DairyNZ and B+LNZ host many IWG resources, tools and factsheets on their websites. There has been a marked increase in traffic to B+LNZ’s IWG web content in 2021, with over twice as much traffic to this part of the website compared to previous years. DairyNZ’s website traffic has also been high and has been relatively consistent when compared with previous years.

The most noticeable increase in IWG digital activity, however, is in the number of downloads of IWG plans with an almost five-fold increase in IWG plans downloaded in 2021 compared to 2019. This number will continue to rise as 2021 farmers uptake the use of an IWG for planning crops for the 2022 season.

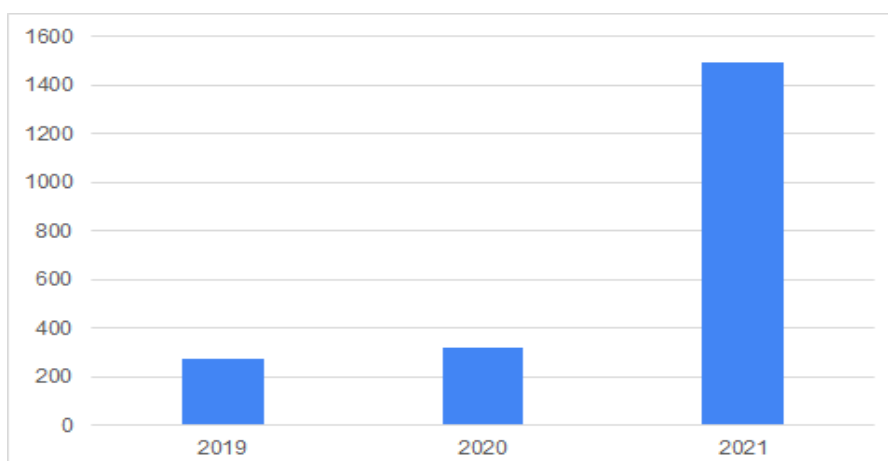


Figure 2 - Combined downloads for intensive winter grazing plans (Beef + Lamb New Zealand: forage cropping templates, forage cropping chapter, paddock plan template and DairyNZ: Winter Grazing Plan, Winter Grazing Checklist).

IWG checklist

Federated Farmers, DINZ, DairyNZ, B+LNZ and the Foundation for Arable Research (FAR), developed a winter grazing checklist to help achieve good management practices. The checklist was designed to help farmers with immediate decision making in early winter 2021 and focussed on an assessment of preparedness which highlighted any potential gaps that needed addressing.

The checklist was delivered to 21,000 rural addresses and was supported by a promotional campaign, which included NZME and MediaWorks promotions, radio interviews and paid advertisements. The campaign was designed to increase the uptake of the checklist and help farmers meet GFP. A copy of the checklist is included.

IWG incidents and enforcement

A hotline (0800 FARMING) was set up prior to winter 2021. This line, which is operated by Federated Farmers and supported by industry and RCs, was provided as an opportunity for the community to report concerning IWG practices for follow up.

From the start of 2021 until 30 June 2021, 14 cases were opened as a result of the hotline, with 12 in Southland, 1 on the West Coast and 1 in Otago.

Of these:

- nine were resolved with seven of those no having no issue found and two requiring minor action resolved on site;
- four remain under investigation; and
- one was unable to be found as not enough information was provided in order to locate the property concerned.

The 0800 line is a collaborative initiative to promote the reporting of poor practice by people who may be hesitant to call a council direct. It enables quick action and targeted interventions with significant cases being referred to Council's for investigation.

Conclusions

RCs and primary sector organisations have responded to the expectations of the Minister to see immediate improvements in IWG practices. While a significant amount of work was already underway, there has been a sustained and collaborative effort from all parties in 2021 to address those poor practices, which may have an adverse effect on the environment. While the data shows that there has been significant engagement in 2021, it is acknowledged that there is further work to do in some areas, including compliance and monitoring activities, the continued uptake of IWG Farm Plans and monitoring and evaluation of receiving environments.

We anticipate in the next quarterly report due in November to include greater details on regional council compliance and monitoring activities and results, an update on the project to identify the scale of IWG nationally and further updates on the extension and support activities being undertaken by primary sector organisations to deploy the IWG module.

As well as input from Regionals Council staff we would like to acknowledge the following groups for their contributions to this report:

- DairyNZ Ltd
- Beef + Lamb New Zealand Ltd
- Federated Farmers of New Zealand Inc.
- Deer Industry New Zealand
- Open Country Dairy Ltd
- Fonterra
- MPI