

Recommendations on managing community water supply, Category A groundwater and water races at minimum flows

The purpose of this note is to recommend to the Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee what happens to community water supply, Category A groundwater and water race water takes at minimum flows.

Community water supply

The approach in the Proposed Natural Resources Plan (the PNRP) to taking of water by community water suppliers is to restrict these takes to volumes sufficient for the health needs of people at minimum flows. The PNRP applies an exception (or transition period) for seven years from the date of notification of the pNRP so that community water supplies can continue taking water for supply to industry during that period. The approach to addressing minimum flows in the PNRP is not opposed in submissions by Wairarapa district councils.

Recommendation

Restrict taking water by community water suppliers to the health needs of people at minimum flows, except that community water suppliers can take water for industry (at minimum flow) for a period of seven years from the date of public notification of the pNRP (31.07.2015).

Category A groundwater

The approach of the PNRP is to require 50% reduction in Category A water takes at minimum flows. This position has been supported by GWRC staff in response to submissions on the PNRP. By comparison, a surface water take in the adjacent river is required to cease at minimum flow.

The GWRC staff response to submissions on this point refers to evidence by a groundwater expert (Hughes, 2017) that the depletion effects of a Category A groundwater take on a surface water body are similar to a direct surface water take. Hughes (2017) describes that 'due to the immediacy of impact, groundwater abstracted from Category A aquifers can be considered as being analogous to direct surface water abstraction in terms of the magnitude and temporal response in effects on surface water flows'.

The 50% reduction at minimum flows in the PNRP was informed by an economic analysis (Harris, 2015) that irrigators in some catchments would suffer considerable financial loss as a result of ceasing take at minimum flow.

The PNRP has a 10 year life and requiring Category A groundwater users to cease take at minimum flow would have immediate financial implications. The Whaitua Committee is able to look at longer timeframes. Moving progressively over time towards a more equitable regime of restrictions at low flows for surface water and groundwater users is an option available to the Committee. For example, the Committee could recommend progressive reduction over a 20 year timeframe for Category A groundwater takes so they eventually cease completely at minimum flows.

Recommendation

Decide on one of the two options below for restricting Category A groundwater users at minimum flow:

- (i) Require Category A groundwater users to reduce water takes by 50% at minimum flows (as required in the pNRP); or
- (ii) Progressively stepdown (reduce) Category A groundwater takes at minimum flows so that in 20 years these users are required to cease completely at minimum flows.

Water races

The GWRC staff response to the submission on the PNRP considers it necessary for the provisions of the proposed Plan to allow for water takes supplying water races to continue below minimum flow. District Councils (MDC and SWDC) both supported water races being able to continue taking water. The change proposed to the PNRP would allow water races to take and use water below minimum flow for the purpose of supplying water for the health needs of people and animal drinking water.

Recommendation

As per the staff response to submissions on the PNRP, require water races to reduce their water takes at minimum flow to the amount of water needed in water races to provide water for the health needs of people and animal drinking water.

References

Hughes B. 2017. Statement of primary evidence of Brydon Nicholas Huges on behalf of the Wellington Regional Council: Technical – Water Allocation: The form and content of the proposed conjunctive management framework, 7 August 2017.

<http://pnrp.gw.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Technical-Water-Allocation-The-Form-and-Content-Proposed-Conjunctive-Management-Framework-Brydon-Hughes.pdf>

Harris S. 2015. Wairarapa Flow Regimes: Economic impact assessment of draft Plan changes. Prepared by Land Water People for the Wellington Regional Council, July 2015.

<http://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/Plans--Publications/Regional-Plan-Review/Proposed-Plan/WairarapaFlowRegimesEconomicimpactassessmentofdraftPlanchanges.PDF>