

Progressive implementation of changes in water allocation policy in resource consent conditions

Background

Changes in water allocation policy including changes in minimum flows and restrictions at minimum flows need to be implemented through the regional plan and in resource consent conditions. In some cases changes to existing consents need to be updated to implement new policies.

Implementation of changes to minimum flows

The Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee (the Committee) is considering increasing minimum flows in the Kopuaranga, Waipoua, and Upper Ruamāhanga rivers in order to better protect in-stream values. Changes to minimum flows and timing for them will be set out in the Whaitua Implementation Programme and subsequently in the Ruamāhanga Whaitua chapter of the Natural Resources Plan.

The changes in minimum flows are:

- Kopuaranga River: from 270 to 280 L/sec
- Waipoua River: from 250 to 340 L/sec
- Upper Ruamāhanga River: from 2 400 to 3 250 L/sec

The increase to minimum flows in the Kopuaranga River is a small adjustment (approx. 4%) and can be implemented from the time a plan change is notified. The changes to minimum flows are larger in the Waipoua River (approx. 36%) and Upper Ruamāhanga River (approx. 35%) and could be implemented progressively over time.

At its 26 June 2012 workshop the Committee raised the possibility of progressive implementation of these minimum flows to ease the impact of changes in reliability as a result of increased minimum flows.

Waipoua River

Amending the minimum flow from 250 to 340 L/sec in the Waipoua will reduce the reliability of supply to water users in an average year from 90 to 85%. Such a 5% change in reliability could be introduced over a 10 year period.

Upper Ruamāhanga River

A similar approach could be used in the Upper Ruamāhanga by changing minimum flows over timeframes relative to changes in reliability. Amending the minimum flow from 2,400 to 3,250 L/sec in the Upper Ruamāhanga will reduce the reliability of supply to water users in an average year by 10% from 95 to 85%. The 10% change in reliability could be introduced by two equally stepped changes in minimum flow (2 825 L/sec and 3 250 L/sec) over a 20 year timeframe.

These steps in increasing minimum flows could be implemented in the conditions of the relevant resource consents. This would provide clarity and certainty over the life of the resource consent. The changes will affect users when existing resource consents are renewed or when new applications are made to take water. The duration of the consent would ideally be in excess of the period over which the changes in minimum flows would be implemented.

General changes to resource consent conditions

There are a number of older resource consents that do not reflect current water allocation policy, particularly in relation to restrictions at minimum flow. These may be in addition to the changes described above. Good planning practice would be to align all resource consents with current policy over an appropriate timeframe. Most consents in the Whaitua expire within the next 5 years. Expiry of consents and the granting of new ones is the best opportunity to change consent conditions. Those that don't expire in this timeframe could be reviewed and changed within a similar timeframe.

Recommendations

- 1 Adopt the minimum flows, when they come into force, and timing for implementing them in resource consents, as set out in Table 1.
- 2 Note that new resource consents and existing consents that expire and are renewed within 5 years of the Whaitua plan change being notified will be implemented according to Table 1 as a result of adopting recommendation 1.
- 3 For any resource consents that do not expire within 5 years of the Ruamāhanga Whaitua plan change, require review of these consents five years after the Whaitua plan change is notified. The review shall apply to consents for the taking and use of water with the purpose of implementing Table 1 minimum flows within the duration of the consent.
- 4 All resource consent conditions should be updated, in addition to the changes recommended above, to the current policy settings either at consent expiry and subsequent renewal where these occur within 5 years. Consents that expire after 5 years of the Whaitua plan change should be reviewed and changes made to their conditions at this point.

Table 1: Amended minimum flows and implementation times in regional plan and in resource consents

River	Amended minimum flow (L/sec)	Implementing minimum flow in regional plan	Implementing minimum flow in resource consents		
			New consents	Existing consents	
				Expire within 5 years of Whaitua plan change	Expire more than 5 years after Whaitua plan change
Kopuaranga	270	At Whaitua plan change	At consent application	At consent renewal	At consent review, 5 years after Whaitua plan change
Waipoua	340	10 years after Whaitua plan change			
Upper Ruamāhanga	2,825	10 years after Whaitua plan change			
	3,250	20 years after Whaitua plan change			

