

Four Key Elements to Make Farm Plans an Effective Tool

To make farm plans an effective tool for improving waterways, we propose a four-step approach based on catchment groups. Planning together is more efficient for everyone. Linking farm plans can enable landowners to identify solutions unique to their soils, land use practices and waterways, as well as pool resources to undertake shared works. For example, if restoring a wetland on one farm will make the biggest difference to a healthy waterway, other landowners could help with the work.

1

Focus on outcomes

Identify the main environmental objectives (such as swimming) and issues (such as E. coli) for the catchment. Then, identify local objectives and indicators for every sub-catchment. Objectives should be drawn from the regional council plan. Specifying objectives for each sub-catchment may require further discussion between council staff, farmers, communities and tangata whenua.

2

Develop sub-catchment plans

Identify and prioritise the actions that will most help achieve sub-catchment objectives. Neighbouring landowners then work together to develop sub-catchment plans, showing where actions will be taken. Farmers and farm planners will then know what good management practices are appropriate on a particular farm, and where a farmer needs to apply mitigation strategies to achieve local objectives.

3

Partner with tangata whenua

Tangata whenua are important long-term partners for catchment groups. Te Mana o te Wai – a key part of government freshwater policy – requires councils to work with iwi and hapū. Catchment groups that empower and work successfully with tangata whenua will be in a strong position to demonstrate that they take their responsibilities seriously and are implementing a plan of action.

4

Monitor and adapt

To diagnose problems when and where they occur, catchment groups could play a greater role in monitoring in their own catchments. Tangata whenua should be involved to track progress and indicators based on mātauranga. Farm plans should be audited and reviewed based on progress towards the agreed sub-catchment outcomes. If indicators are not tracking as expected, the sub-catchment plan and associated farm plans would need to be reviewed and updated.