Bay of Plenty Regional Council Position Statement: Land Management Change in the Lake Rotorua Catchment

This position statement sets out Bay of Plenty Regional Council's strategic intent for land management change in the Lake Rotorua catchment. It provides a transparent rationale for how Council will approach land management change.

Background

Lake Rotorua has degraded water quality due to high nitrogen and phosphorous levels, and it suffers intermittently from algal blooms. A target Trophic Level Index (TLI) maximum of 4.2 has been set for the lake, in consultation with the community, through the Regional Water and Land Plan.

In order to achieve the lake's target TLI, a sustainable nitrogen load of approximately 435 tonnes of nitrogen per year (tN/yr) is required. This is a reduction of approximately 320 tN/yr from the current load of 755 tN/yr .

Pastoral land use is a significant source of nitrogen (about 70%) to the lake. Changes in land use and the way activities on that land are managed therefor have the potential to achieve the nitrogen load reductions required.

What is land management change

In this context of the Lake Rotorua catchment, the purpose of land management change is to modify land management practices to reduce nutrient losses, while retaining the same land use activities. Changes include actions such as wintering off stock, changing the way fertiliser is applied, reducing the amount of fertiliser used and reducing stocking rates.

Context of position statement

The purpose of this position is to clearly identify the role and direction Council intends to take on land management change in achieving Lake Rotorua's sustainable nitrogen load of 435 tN/yr.

This proposed position does not identify the methods or actions that will be undertaken to realise the position; it is a statement of intent. The ways in which this position can be implemented will be addressed as a next step.

Council's positions on land management change in the Lake Rotorua catchment are:

Recognise that land management change alone will not achieve the nitrogen load reductions required to reach the sustainable nitrogen load of 435 tN/yr in Lake Rotorua

The intent of this position is to make it clear that, as an intervention, land management change is not going to get us where we need to with reducing nitrogen load to Lake Rotorua.

At best, changing land management practices of dairy and drystock farms across the catchment could meet up to 30% of the nitrogen load reduction required to achieve the sustainable nitrogen

load. There is also a significant amount of variability in what can be achieved on any individual farm, so estimates of nitrogen load reductions are uncertain.

Prioritise Bay of Plenty Regional Council resource towards affecting land use change in the Lake Rotorua catchment over actions to affect land management change

The intent of this position is to ensure that Council's limited resources are directed towards the most effective suite of interventions available for reducing nitrogen load to Lake Rotorua.

Land use changes, not land management changes, are the most likely to produce the largest reductions in nitrogen load in the Lake Rotorua catchment. Interventions aimed at changing land use will be the most effective for achieving the lake's sustainable nitrogen load of 435 tN/yr. In fact it is unlikely that the sustainable nitrogen load could be achieved without significant land use change across the catchment.

Support and encourage the efforts of landowners in the Lake Rotorua catchment to change their land management practices

The intent of this position is to recognise that the responsibility for changing land management practices in the Lake Rotorua catchment lies with landowners.

Improvements in land management that can be made to reduce nitrogen loads are changes that should be put in place to achieve industry best practice and performance. The costs of achieving best practice and performance lie with landowners themselves.

It is recognised that not all landowners in the catchment have the knowledge or capacity to affect changes in land management. Council will provide support and encouragement to landowners who are willing to change. Support will include provision of advice, development of education material, and pointing landowners in the right direction.

Actively affect land management change in the Lake Rotorua catchment through Bay of Plenty Regional Council's primary role as a regulator

The intent of this position is to clarify that Council's primary role in land management change in the Lake Rotorua catchment will be as a regulator.

The Proposed Regional Policy Statement sets out a clear policy direction for the management of all of the Rotorua Te Arawa lakes, including Lake Rotorua. Council are currently considering options for the delivery of rules, through the Regional Water and Land Plan, to give effect to this policy direction. Land management change may be one of the tools used to ensure managed reduction of nutrient discharges takes place.

Council may look at incentives to entice change, or to help stage and phase out certain land management practices in the catchment. Council may also look at providing funding for certain actions if they are required, recognising that farmers may not be able to absorb all costs of land management change immediately.