



Healthy Rivers
PLAN FOR CHANGE

Wai ora
HE RAUTAKI WHAKAPAIPAI

Summary of discussion on Freshwater Management Units

Collaborative Stakeholder Group Healthy Rivers: Wai Ora Project

3 February 2015

For discussion at CSG workshop 9

Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by Waikato Regional Council policy advisors for the use of Collaborative Stakeholder Group Healthy Rivers: Wai Ora Project as a reference document and as such does not constitute Council's policy.

1 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to summarise the discussion the Collaborative Stakeholder Group (CSG) has had on freshwater management units (FMUs) to date, and provide some initial thoughts from the emerging guidance material on FMUs being produced by Ministry for the Environment.

At CSG workshop 10 the group is due to decide content of public engagement, including letting people know what spatial scale the CSG propose to set freshwater objectives and limits, and then track progress towards their achievement.

2 Background

In August 2014 the Ministry for the Environment released the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2014 (NPS-FM 2014). When managing freshwater, Regional Councils must identify FMUs, which are defined as:

“Freshwater management unit is the water body, multiple water bodies or any part of a water body determined by regional council as the appropriate spatial scale for setting freshwater objectives and limits and for freshwater accounting and management purposes.”

(Ministry for the Environment 2014, pg 7)

The NPS-FW in Policy CA1 and CA2 sets out requirements and process in relation to establishing FMUs, including:

- identify values for each FMU (must include compulsory values but appropriateness of other national and regional values to be determined);
- describe each FMU in terms of its current state and anticipated future state on the basis of past and current resource use;
- set objectives and limits for each FMU;
- be accountable for monitoring purposes i.e. measure, model or estimate contaminant loads and sources.

It is notable that the process of establishing FMUs does not require decisions about how land and activities should be managed to achieve objectives and limits. There is no requirement in the NPS-FM 2014 to have different policy provisions for each FMU.

CSG’s progress in working through the NPS-FM process is set out below.

3 Progress to date

The CSG has had three previous sessions discussing FMUs:

Workshop 5 – August 2014

A report was presented to the group by Dr Tony Petch from the Technical Leaders Group (TLG). This report covered principles for FMU delineation and some criteria to consider. Four possible options were examined in detail and evaluated against the criteria (Waikato Regional Council 2014a).

CSG discussed the report and the possible options outlined. Members were asked to show which of the four options was their preference. The largest number of members (11 members) preferred Option 3: Huka Falls to Karapiro, Karapiro to Ngaruawahia, Ngaruawahia to mouth and Waipa River, with lowland lakes overlay. (Workshop notes CSG workshop 5).

Workshop 6 – September 2014

A report outlining where CSG had got to at workshop 5 was included in the approvals session. This report suggested a holding pattern in terms of recommendation for option 3, further information at a later date would be considered and CSG may choose another option (Workshop notes CSG workshop 6).

Workshop 7 – October 2014

A report containing points from the TLG Chair was included in the agreement and approvals session. This outlined that TLG work would not be delayed if CSG chose to postpone a decision on FMU boundaries. It also noted that further work is happening at a national scale on producing guidance documents, with other regional councils around the country doing work to understand the process of selecting FMU boundaries under the NPS-FW 2014 (Waikato Regional Council 2014c).

CSG deferred consideration of FMU boundaries until further information is received (Workshop notes CSG workshop 7).

At workshop 7 CSG also heard from Dr John Quinn and Sean Newland on the Waikato River Restoration Report Cards project, funded by the Waikato River Authority. One of the next steps for the project is identifying reporting units, noting the link between reporting units and FMUs (Quinn 2014).

4 National guidance on establishing FMUs

As part of Ministry for the Environment's programme of developing guidance on the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2014, Regional Council staff have attended workshops with other regional councils and Ministry for the Environment. A co-produced MfE-Council guidance product on FMUs is due at the end of 2015. Below are some key points from initial discussions for CSG to consider:

Not much has changed.

- The concept of managing in spatial units is not new. Freshwater Management Unit was a term coined in the drafting of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM). A FMU is simply a spatial unit within which freshwater objectives and limits are attached.
- Many Regional Councils, including Waikato, already group water bodies according to water management objective setting and monitoring purposes. The FMU concept was not intended to change council behaviour, but perhaps to encourage practices that many were using already.

What has to happen to establish FMUs?

- Identify values in that FMU, formulate freshwater objectives for that FMU, set limits/targets to achieve those objectives
- Establish and operate fresh water quality and quantity accounting systems. To do this, think about the largest spatial scale where a council can ensure that progress toward achieving objectives can be shown. This will include identifying representative monitoring site/s for each FMU. If a council does not have a suitable existing monitoring site, it is possible to use modelling to estimate whether objectives and limits are being met for that FMU.

How to decide the scale of the FMU?

- Make them as big as you can, within an area that has similar values and a common freshwater objective. In choosing the spatial scale there is likely to be a tension between making smaller and smaller distinctions of biophysical difference, and having a simple regional breakdown of freshwater management objectives and limits that will show the community that progress towards implementing the NPS-FM is being made.
- Remember that FMUs are about spatial scale for objectives, limits and monitoring/modelling progress towards achievement of these. There are likely to be other spatial scales for appropriate management response/regulatory packages.

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References

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