

# Farmers reject critical report

By LISA DAVIDSON

WAIRARAPA Federated Farmers has slammed a damning environmental report that claims increased intensive farming and increased nitrogen fertiliser use has resulted in our waterways and lakes becoming nutrient-enriched and degraded from nitrogen, animal faecal matter, and eroded sediment.

Federated Farmers Wairarapa president Jim Weston said the report was mostly "bullshit and fallacies".

"High usage of nitrogen is economically beneficial for farmers because of higher milk production and more money in the bank.

"In the 1920s it was shown that the biomass on the land equals the biomass under the ground, which means healthier soil.

"There have been reports that New Zealand rivers are cleaner now than they were 20 years ago," he said.

However, crown-owned enterprise Environmental and Scientific Research has previously said that rapid expansion of intensive livestock farming, particularly dairying, in some regions has increased the potential for some animal bacteria to trigger public health problems.

Increased stock numbers lead to increased effluent and increased nitrogen run-off into waterways, which in turn causes an increase in algal blooms, and increased E.coli concentrations. The latter result in diarrhoea-causing illnesses, as recently seen in the Masterton cryptosporidium scare.

The report, written by the Commissioner for the Environment, Morgan Williams, noted that when the water supply for 19,000 Masterton residents was confirmed infected with cryptosporidium from animal or human fae-

ces, "they got off lightly in having to boil water for nearly three months".

West Coast Community and Public Health officer Vem Newcombe said on average cows produce the same amount of effluent as 14 people daily.

"The West Coast's Grey Valley catchment area alone produced a volume of agricultural effluent equivalent to the sewerage produced by Auckland city.

"As the stocking rates have increased, effluent has washed off paddocks or else washed through the found into the water table, and was making increasing numbers of farmers and their children sick.

Statistics New Zealand figures show total cattle figures in Wairarapa to be 233,225 (166,444 beef and 66,781 milk). That means effluent equivalent to 3,265,150 people or not much less the New Zealand's population daily.

Much research has been completed in Hawke's Bay, Waikato and the West Coast, but data for possible increases and effects of nitrogen run-off and faecal matter in the Wairarapa is still not available.

Greater Wellington Regional Council resource investigations section leader Ted Taylor said this was because regional councils did not all run on the same timetables.

"Every six years we produce a 'state of the environment' report. Our last was in 1999 and we are tabulating and analysing the data for the one due out next year.

"We monitor 58 ground water sites quarterly and 26 surface water sites monthly. In the past two years we have increased the parameters we measure to include a greater number of nutrients and coliforms."