

PNRP community water supply, category A groundwater and water races

The purpose of this note is to provide the Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee with a summary of Greater Wellington Regional Council's (GWRC) response to Proposed Natural Resources Plan (PNRP) submissions on what happens to community water supply, category A groundwater and water race takes at minimum flows.

Background

The PNRP requires community water supplies, category A groundwater and water races to reduce at minimum flows. Community water supplies reduce to an amount for the health needs of people, category A groundwater takes must reduce by 50%, and water races must cease take at minimum flows.

Community water supply

Limiting the taking of water by community water suppliers to the health needs of people at minimum flows is not opposed in submissions by Wairarapa district councils. The approach in the proposed Plan is supported in the response of GWRC staff to submissions through the s42A report.

Category A groundwater takes

Submitters on the PNRP have requested a lag time of 10 days before the 50% reduction in category A water takes effect. One submitter seeks a 10 year transition period for requiring the 50% take reduction. These submissions on the PNRP are not rejecting the 50% reduction but are seeking to amend how it is implemented. Other submitters supported the approach in the PNRP or wanted it to be stronger by further reducing the amount of groundwater allowed to be taken at minimum flows.

The staff response to these submitters refers to evidence given by a groundwater expert that the depletion effects of a category A groundwater take on a surface water body are similar to a direct surface water take. The expert evidence (Brydon, 2017) describes that 'due to the immediacy of impact, groundwater abstracted from category A aquifers can be considered as being analogous to direct surface water abstraction in terms of the magnitude and temporal response in effects on surface water flows'.

In response to submissions on the PNRP GWRC staff do not seek to change the 50% reduction for category A groundwater takes at minimum flows.

The Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee (RWC) is interested in what reduction is appropriate for category A groundwater at minimum flows. As mentioned above, Greater Wellington's groundwater expert considers category A groundwater takes are analogous to direct surface water abstraction. Greater Wellington has also carried out two economic assessments of taking groundwater directly connected to surface water. The first (Harris, 2015) looked at economic implications of requiring directly connected groundwater takes to cease at minimum flow. It concluded that irrigators in the Waipoua, Mangatarere, Papawai and Waingawa were likely to suffer considerable financial loss as a result of cease take minimum flow restrictions.

The second assessment (Harris, 2017) looked at the economic effects of requiring category A groundwater takes to reduce to 50% at minimum flows. Harris states, 'In general there are only

minor effects of the PNRP in all catchments apart from the Papawai and Waingawa which are moderately affected, and the effects are much less severe than the dNRP effects across all catchments’.

It should be noted that there will be a number of consents who currently have no minimum flow specified who will be more severely affected than the aggregate suggests for the catchment. However the ability to continue irrigating under the PNRP even when the minimum flow is reached will provide significant benefits for those with arable and horticultural crops which have high potential for significant damage with complete restriction on irrigation takes.

Water races

There are no specific submissions on the provisions relating to water races requiring abstractions to cease at minimum flows in the PNRP. However, South Wairarapa District Council and Masterton District Council submitted on another water race provision requesting:

‘The ongoing use of the water race network within the Wairarapa be provided for as a permitted activity (where the quantity of water taken into the water race network is not increased over that rate existing at the time of notification of the proposed Plan), until such time as the outcomes of a Water Race working group (Method 18) are confirmed and a Plan Change process initiated.’

The staff response to the submission considers it necessary for the provisions of the proposed Plan to allow for the takes to supply the water races to continue below minimum flow. The change proposed to the PNRP would allow water races to take and use water below minimum flow only for the purpose of supplying water for the health needs of people and animal drinking water.

References

Brydon H. 2017. *Technical – Water Allocation: The form and content of the proposed conjunctive management framework*

<http://pnrp.gw.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Technical-Water-Allocation-The-Form-and-Content-Proposed-Conjunctive-Management-Framework-Brydon-Hughes.pdf>

Harris S. 2015. *Wairarapa Flow Regimes: Economic impact assessment of draft Plan changes*

<http://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/Plans--Publications/Regional-Plan-Review/Proposed-Plan/WairarapaFlowRegimesEconomicimpactassessmentofdraftPlanchanges.PDF>

Harris S. 2017. *Wairarapa Flow Regimes: Economic impact assessment of Proposed Plan changes*

<http://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/Proposed-Natural-Resources-Plan/Web-update-docs/Economic-Impact-of-proposed-Plan-changes-for-Water-allocation-in-the-Wairarapa-1.pdf>