

# Summary of feedback to Draft Tarawera Lakes Restoration Plan

Discussion from working group on 4 August 2015 included in blue text

59 submissions in total

57 in support (ranged from outright support to conditional support)

2 in opposition

## Main themes

There was a natural split between urban and rural feedback – the farmers are concerned with the agricultural actions while those in the community gave feedback on the sewage reticulation.

### Urban sewage reticulation – Action 1

The feedback shows widespread support for sewage reticulation of the lakeside community. This action is not only supported but seen as urgent, and should not wait until the groundwater model is built.

The biggest concern regarding reticulation is the cost and this is where the community is divided. There are those that believe residents should pay for the system themselves, and others that want regional and national support.

One argument for government support is that the lakes are a regional and national treasure therefore the wider community should also contribute to its improvement. However, most of the rationale for external funding is based on fairness – that this community should receive financial support to the same or similar extent as other lakes communities have received.

In opposition was that private benefits of having a property at Lake Tarawera were significant and these reflected property values. Those who own these high value properties should therefore pay to improve their wastewater, not expect the wider community to subsidise. Council's role in this scenario is to investigate innovative funding options to assist those who will face financial difficulties.

There was also feedback in opposition to the buried village septic tank not being included in actions. The reason for this opposition was that everyone has to do their part to fix the lake.

The two feedback forms in direct opposition to the plan were specifically focussed on sewage reticulation. The main reasons were that it is an expensive action for little gain to the lake. Alternative sewage plans were suggested, such as installing ozone purification units at the outlet of every septic tank which will achieve the same result for fraction of the cost.

## Comments from working group

- Discharge of sewage into lake and then taking water from same source has health issues.
- Sewage reticulation may increase property values around lake – reason for why cost should be shared – other lakes had deals such as some level of subsidy. Precedent from subsidy set at other lakes.
- However, no subsidy earmarked for this lake in either council LTP. Councils have been lucky so far that central government has had funds available. It is getting harder to get funding for these things both from central government and local government.
- We can estimate costs but largely unknown until system decided and job goes up for tender.
- Sewage treatment no longer about just getting rid of waste, but stripping nutrients for water quality so cost increases. If no support from central government then it falls on ratepayers.
- Has water quality improved around lakes with sewage reticulation – another question is what would have happened if they didn't get reticulation – University of Waikato is looking at this. Anecdotal evidence is that property values have improved from having sewage reticulation.

- But if we're spending lots of money on scheme for little nutrients out, it's a waste of money – can we get these out a better way. Cost of reducing phosphorus from other method comparison. This question comes up all the time is it worth it. Discussion was, yes it's expensive, but a modern society should have sewage reticulation. In general people know it's expensive but believe they should have reticulation, and having some financial support makes it more palatable.
- Is an issue of fairness, other lakes have had the support. Paying high rates and don't have a number of amenities that others have (eg. footpaths, water, lighting, wastewater etc).

*Outcome of discussion – support sewage reticulation but concern with cost. This is a matter that will be discussed in the steering group set up for this purpose.*

## **Agriculture – whole catchment – Actions 2 and 4**

Voluntary farm nutrient plans are supported but as a voluntary measure until groundwater studies are complete. Opinions are divided once again on where costs should fall, and the timing for when they should be completed.

Some feedback is that farmers should pay for their own farm nutrient plans. Others believe that while land owners should pay their share, because the lakes are a regional and national treasure, council and government need to contribute financially.

There is concern regarding the short timeframes for developing the plans. This could result in a rush to meet the deadline with substandard plans. It would be better to give sufficient time for farmers to develop high quality nutrient plans that would benefit the lake. Opposing opinion is that the timeframes are too long and should be shortened.

There was also considerable concern about recognition for the work that has already been done. Infrastructure is expensive and a lot of restoration and environment work has already carried out. There are few options remaining for further work.

## **Comments from working group**

- Rerewhakaaitu farmers have just been through this process and set up a farm nutrient plan – it takes a while to everyone's buy in. Involved someone in the field talking to all farmers and went through options for farms and farmer agreed what they could do and farmer signed off.
- Currently we're unsure of what the adverse effect is from outer catchment – farm nutrient plans what problem are they solving.
- Prior to Tarawera plan, farmers were aware of runoff to Tarawera from outer catchment – just didn't know how much – farm nutrient plans were intended to fix Rerewhakaaitu without regard to Tarawera
- Tripling of P leaching from outer – not enough pasture to retire –until we have science we don't know what that means.
- Farm nutrient plans are a part of the future, farmers need to get up to speed and get FNPs.
- Equity issue – asking for residential people to pay for reducing load, so want to know that everybody else is doing their fair share of reductions
- Reductions made can be undone by new operator coming in at high intensity
- Best to have one agency doing the process
- It is feasible – reflection of what has already been done
- Need example – who's going to see and audit it, on the table before we can decide what is needed and how long it will take. The information in the FNPs shouldn't be open to the public
- Why have a timeframe at all if voluntary?

*Outcome of discussion - support for voluntary FNPs but not for timeframes – this support is conditional on what is required, example FNP, who will see it (not public), who audits (eg third party), what exactly is required.*

## **Agriculture – outer catchment – Action 4**

There was additional feedback from the agricultural sector specific to the outer catchment.

One concern was that the outer catchment has not been consulted on early enough and while farmers in this area are committed to decreasing environmental impact they are now overwhelmed by this new plan. The Regional Council needs to ensure they are actively involved from now on.

There is also concern about the science used, first to allocate P reduction to the outer catchment, then to allocate the bulk of that reduction to three lakes. The science needs to be robust.

Some feedback was that the outer catchment should be the main priority. The reason for this is that sewage reticulation has not improved water quality in Lake Ōkāreka and this is felt to be because there is insufficient rural land management. Lake Tarawera has two outer lakes with declining water quality and dairying intensification. This will exacerbate the water quality degradation.

### **Comments from working group**

- If numbers left in put in caveat clearly that they are conditional and subject to change
- Because of late notification to outer timeframe for delivery should be reassessed.
- See as frequently as possible progress of science – communication as often as information available and technical reports translated to layman's terms
- Add another action to keep community informed on science as often as possible and understandable in layman's terms.

## **Nutrient capping – Action 5**

There are conflicting opinions on capping rules. Some believe that rules are not conducive to cooperation between council and landowners unless the council has already tried collaboration. However, others see rules as necessary to ensure all landowners cooperate.

Again, there was concern with consultation, particularly with landowners in the outer catchment. Consultation on any capping rules is key and needs to be started early.

There is concern with constraining future land use with capping rules as drystock farming relies on dynamic mix of farming different livestock classes and crops. The cap needs to be science based or farm values could erode.

### **Comments from working group**

- This is urgent – won't take many hectares converted to dairying to undo everything - hard work of number of years
- Some initial investigations done by council staff – based on high level activity – eg dairying can go down to dry stock or dry stock to forest but not the other way – not an Overseer benchmark
- Needs a clear explanation of what capping means – can be a fearful word
- Difficult to come up with solution across all land uses, and equitable, some who have been polluting for years, those who haven't can't change their use and improve business even though they haven't been polluting
- Limit on land use change – maybe a better way to describe
- Concern with more intensive farming on land classed as 6 and 7 land where not ideal
- Forestry land has to stay as forestry but no recognition for intensification of current land use
- What is fairer is no change – which means benchmarking
- Fear is when science comes back, will it mean reductions, not just caps
- Consultation important with all landowners – land values drop and rent values drop

## Other actions

There was general support for groundwater work, the cultural impact assessment, and for the reassessment of all action plans.

There was also a request for gorse control/eradication, however another comment concerned the action to control nitrogen fixing plants. As the main issue identified in the plan was phosphorus, the query was whether this was an aesthetic action.

Feedback suggests using alum dosing as a short-term fix while long-term solutions are put in place.

There was some feedback concerned with the high cost and minimal benefit from actions.

## Comments from working group

- Geothermal is a big contributor – unsure of how much though
- Climate this year Lake Rotorua – very settled weather and high temperatures. Lake Rotorua stratified and was anoxic for one month. Unusual summer with high temperatures causing blooms. Lake Tarawera isn't anoxic during stratification
- Unusual blip in P could possibly be drought related. The theory is that water level drops and changes soil then during winter highs so more flushing of P because of dry summers.
- At this stage not appropriate for alum dosing and it would take a really good case to dose Lake Tarawera – partners in the lakes strategy group may be okay with Lake Rotorua but not Lake Tarawera
- We would need to look at science of geothermal inputs and consider whether we would dose it, is it emotional that stops us doing this type of thing – we need to wait and see what the science is and have discussions.
- Dosing is temporary and may not be appropriate for Lake Tarawera which is a deep.

## Other concerns

There were several concerns that fall outside the scope of the restoration plan. These include:

- Urbanisation of the lake edge – should we cap the number of houses?
- Recreational use of the lake – Tarawera Trail and boating which contributes uncontrolled sewage. Are any of the algal blooms associated with high number of boats?
- Public toilets are smelly and not working properly
- Claims that the Whakarewarewa disposal field from RLC wastewater treatment plant is contributing to the nutrient load to the lake
- Pollen from exotic forests contributes nutrients
- High swan population contributes to nutrients

## Comments from working group

- Extra actions - Further consolidation of science around these issues – how much do we know
- Timeline of actions – diagram to link community groups, councils, strategy groups etc

## General comments

There were a number of general comments and questions not related to specific actions as follows:

- Water quality is of importance to Maori but also many non-Maori
- No mention of health risk of swimming and drinking lake side water contaminated with septic tank discharge
- Discussion of climate change and how it may be affecting thermocline needed
- Clearer explanation of why phosphorus and not nitrogen.
- Define the inner and outer catchments more accurately
- A better understanding of all causes.
- Funding for investigation of geothermal inputs
- Is there a measurable improvement in lake quality in the lakes which have implemented sewage system
- How confident are we that these actions will achieve TLI of 2.6
- Are the P reduction targets attainable and realistic
- Lack of in depth information in plan – no one really knows what they are signing up for
- Once groundwater studies completed the nutrient limits need to be updated
- We need a non-technical explanation of phosphorus cycle – many don't understand that it can dissolve into lake water and move from lake to lake. Also, when the groundwater modelling comes out, a non-technical explanation alongside would be really helpful

## Comments from working group

- Maintenance of septic tanks – if it's going to take a while to reticulate then this should be followed up