Report 99.652
9 November 1999
File No: Y/12/2/5

Report to the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee
from Stephen Thawley, Resource Advisor, Planning and Resources

Draft Water Allocation Plan for Upper Ruamahanga River (November 1999)

1. Purpose

To seek approval from the Committee for the proposed minimum flows and allocation levels in the draft water allocation plan for the Upper Ruamahanga River (November 1999), and to distribute the draft plan to interested parties, consent holders, and the general public for comment.

2. How the Plan has Developed

The plan has been developed as the cumulative effects of water abstractions in the Upper Ruamahanga River have not been thoroughly assessed and there are a number of resource consents currently due for renewal. The allocation plan recommends minimum flows and allocation levels for water use in the Upper Ruamahanga River only, although issues regarding water allocation in the various tributaries that join the river are considered in making recommendations.

The review and recommendations made have been prepared by:

- Assessing legislation and Regional Council planning documents;
- Completing consultation with key interest groups and resource users;
- Analysing water quantity and quality in the river;
- Undertaking field studies and modelling of instream habitat requirements;
- Assessing other minimum flow setting techniques.

Initial consultation provided varied opinion in how the water resource in the Upper Ruamahanga River should be managed. As a result of assessing statutory requirements and initial consultation, the Regional Council believes that any water use in the river should avoid as far as practicable any potential adverse effects on water quality, particularly for contact recreation, and instream habitat.

3. Proposed Minimum Flows and Allocation Levels

It is recommended in the draft water allocation plan that a core allocation (amount of water that can be abstracted from the river) of 800 litres/sec be applied to the Upper Ruamahanga River. This allows for some additional abstraction but only downstream of the Waingawa River confluence. This is because the majority of abstractions (93%) are upstream of the Waingawa River and adequate water quantity is required to effectively dilute the Masterton sewage discharge during low flow periods. A supplementary allocation flow level of 5000 litres/sec will mean that abstraction of water can be achieved upstream of the Waingawa River at higher flows. This will provided ample opportunities to harvest and store water for water use during low flow periods.

The draft water allocation plan also recommends that two minimum flows be implemented:

1. At 2700 litres/sec, all abstractions will be required to be reduced by 50%, based on flows at the Wardells Bridge gauging site. (Note: The mean annual low flow is 2962 litres/sec.)
2. At 2400 litres/sec, all abstractions are to cease.

Abstractions for the two water races and Henley Lake will be considered on their own merit when those consents are renewed. The minimum flows will control abstractions more effectively to avoid as far as practicable potential adverse effects of abstractions on water quality, particularly for contact recreation, and instream habitat during low flow periods.

Analysis of bacteriological water quality monitoring showed that periphyton cover at a number of sites in the Upper Ruamahanga River exceeded Ministry for the Environment guidelines last summer at a flow level around the mean annual low flow. No breaches were recorded in the previous two summers when summer flows were higher. Last year the Upper Ruamahanga River fell to a 1 day in 10 year low flow at the Wardells Bridge gauging site. Also assessment of minimum water requirements for various recreational activities showed that minimum water requirements for boating were met just below the mean annual low flow. It is clear from this analysis that water quality and quantity for contact recreation purposes is compromised at a flow level around or below the mean annual low flow.

Field studies and subsequent modelling (using WAIORA) showed that the river could possibly sustain more abstraction and low minimum flows without adversely affecting instream habitat requirements. This was also confirmed with assessment of another minimum flow setting technique called IFIM (Instream Flow Incremental Modelling).

4. Proposed Good Practice Guidelines

There are good practice guidelines that are included in the draft water allocation plan that will give assistance to resource users and Council staff in processing consent applications.

5. Key Implications

The key implications of the proposed minimum flows and allocation levels in the draft water allocation plan are:

1. That water resources in the Upper Ruamahanga River will be fully allocated upstream of the Waingawa River confluence during low flow periods, however water will still be available at the supplementary allocation flow level.
2. That there will be a new minimum flow where abstractions will be required to cease.
3. That a minimum flow for applying restrictions on water use will be slightly higher than a level specified on current resource consents.

The draft water allocation plan will not have statutory backing as a regional plan under the Resource Management Act 1991. The minimum flows and allocation levels will be incorporated into the Regional Freshwater Plan in the future as a variation of the Freshwater Plan.

Attached is a copy of Part 1 of the draft water allocation plan (Appendix 1). A full copy of the plan (including supporting information) is available on request.

6. Communications

No additional publicity is proposed.

7 Recommendation

(1) That the proposed minimum flows and allocation levels be adopted.

(2) That the draft Upper Ruamahanga River water allocation plan (November 1999) be made available for public consultation and comment sought.

Report prepared by:

Stephen Thawley
Resource Advisor

Approved for submission by:

Steve Blakemore
Manager, Planning and Resources