

Submission on Fees and Charges Policy

TO: Bay of Plenty Regional Council Toi Moana

SUBMISSION ON: Fees associated with changes to water consent conditions

NAME: NZ Kiwifruit Growers Inc.
NZ Avocado Growers Association Inc.

NZ Kiwifruit Growers, NZ Avocado Growers Association and the Bay of Plenty Regional Council have previously collaborated to streamline a process to remove seasonal restrictions from old style groundwater consents to provide flexibility for growers, reduce unnecessary compliance and improve data collection for the Regional Council. This project related to those growers who had a consent to take water that has irrigation and/or frost seasons specified in consent conditions. Consents currently issued do not have these seasonal restrictions.

The current and proposed deposit and fees required to lodge an application to **vary consent conditions** is a significant barrier to growers who are striving to remain compliant within unpredictable seasonal conditions. Specific water volumes listed against months or arbitrary weekly/monthly limits on historic consents are challenging and is why new consents do not include these conditions. Throughout 2019-2020 the Bay of Plenty Regional Council agreed to waive the deposit fee for growers who applied for a variation as a group. The group of applications were then processed as a bundle by the Regional Council to reduce overall costs, with actual and reasonable costs invoiced following completion of the process. Council agreed to this streamlined process where the change was simple, resulted in either a reduction in allocation and/or the introduction of telemetry and other modern consent requirements was agreed to.

Many of the old style consents, that are less than 5L/s, don't have any sort of recording or reporting requirement. Therefore, apart from a 3 or 5 yearly visit, there is little compliance oversight in the interim. However, those with newer consents supplying frequent water use records have (at least) monthly scrutiny of their data so there is administrative staff time required every month. The Regional Council is rapidly moving to more automated systems to capture water use data. Reducing hurdles and providing a low cost pathway for growers to update their consents will ensure both consistency in consents and a compelling case for growers to engage in timely water use data submission.

Likewise, industry also believes that the proposed **annual charges** for those with telemetry who supply good records will end up paying more than those who don't supply any records and are a higher risk. This is contrary to what the Regional Council and Industry have collectively been promoting for some time regarding water meters and telemetry. The Council are currently investigating new ways to automate the assessment of telemetered water records against their consent limits meaning it will become more efficient to manage telemetered data in the near future.

There are significant benefits of receiving good quality water use data, it creates an even playing field for growers and enables industry and the Regional Council to maintain consistent messaging whilst creating a uniform system to support the automated processing of data. The national water policies being introduced will likely result in telemetry becoming a requirement for all growers over the next few years. Therefore, industry remains in step with the Regional Councils view of promoting online reporting of water use and more automated and timely data handling to manage water allocation and compliance.

The risk to the Regional Council of users not being early adopters of telemetry, is that the Council won't have accurate water accounts, which are essential when developing robust policy and compliance with the NPSFM

In summary, the Regional Council has proposed that individual growers will be required to pay the full \$1875 deposit for any changes to consent conditions and this is seen as an unnecessary hurdle when all parties would like to see consents updated. Industry strongly believes that changes to the conditions on groundwater consents should include a fixed admin fee of ~\$200 to remove seasonal volume limits or remove monthly/weekly caps, where the applicant has telemetry, or agrees to install it. Likewise, proposed annual charges should be reviewed so they reflect and reward those growers who are supporting regular/online water reporting.

I look forward to a response and I am happy to speak to this submission if there is further clarity needed.

Kind regards,

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