

Draft Nelson Plan – Frequently asked questions

Land and freshwater

In August 2020 central government released its ‘Action for healthy waterways’ package of national direction and new environmental standards relating to freshwater management. While many of the directions from the new package have been anticipated and included in the Draft Nelson Plan, some of the details of it have yet to be worked through. While significant changes are not anticipated, it should be noted that the content of the Draft Nelson Plan and these FAQ’s may change. Further community consultation on Freshwater changes is planned in 2021.

Does the Draft Nelson Plan allow me to continue to take water from a stream to water my stock and supply my house on a lifestyle block?

Yes – as is provided for under the current rules of the Nelson Resource Management Plan, water takes for reasonable domestic use and animal drinking water are proposed to be permitted activities provided the rate of take doesn’t exceed 0.5 litres per second, no water is allowed to run to waste and there is no reticulated community water supply available within 500m of the property (in which case, water should be from the community supply).

The stream water would be only for reasonable domestic use (drinking, hygiene and health needs) and not for garden watering. For domestic supply, the house would need to have a rainwater harvesting tank. As currently applies, when streamflow drops below the minimum flow (specified in the Plan) the water take must stop.

What is a stream’s minimum flow and who determines it?

The minimum flow is the flow necessary to sustain the ecological health of the stream. When the flow drops below this level, low flow rates and higher water temperature can adversely affect fish and promote undesirable algae growth, which compromises ecological and other values. Water takes that cause the stream’s flow to drop below the minimum flow require consent and may be declined. The minimum flow has been established on the advice of freshwater ecologists and through a process of discussion with community stakeholders.

What is the allocation limit for a stream and who decides it?

The allocation limit is the volume of water considered to be available for use without compromising the values of the stream. The values include ecological values, recreational values and cultural values and were determined on the advice of freshwater ecologists and through discussion with community stakeholders.

I have a lifestyle block with an on-site septic tank system – would I need to upgrade that?

On-site domestic wastewater systems, and the discharge of domestic wastewater to an effluent field, would continue to be permitted (as is provided for in the Nelson Resource Management Plan) provided the system meets some basic requirements, is maintained and functions as intended without polluting water bodies or neighbouring land.

What could I dispose of into streams?

Only pure water. Consent is required to discharge any contaminant or substance into any river, stream or wetland (other than pure water). Rainfall run-off and stormwater from individual sites must be disposed of onto land or into the Council’s reticulated stormwater network.

What are the proposed requirements for treatment of stormwater through a detention pond?

In urban areas, the specifications for stormwater detention ponds are set out in the Nelson Tasman Land Development Manual. The standards and approach to treatment will depend on the volume of water and nature of the activity generating the discharge and the standards to be met before discharge to land or water.

The current NRMP rules for water takes and discharges are based on water classifications – will they be the same in the Draft Nelson Plan?

No. The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management ('NPS-FM') sets new (and generally higher) standards of water quality for some key water quality indicators. The NPS-FM also requires that water quality limits be set based on values identified individually for rivers and streams within freshwater management units. The Plan is required to at least meet the NPS-FM 'bottom lines' and may set higher standards where justified locally. Local stakeholder feedback has confirmed that, for some water quality indicators, the minimum standards should be higher than the NPS-FM 'bottom lines' to restore stream values. For many streams, a step-change in water quality will be required to meet the NPS-FM standards. When this step-change improvement is achieved, it is expected that it will result in improvement for all water quality indicators, to levels better than the NPS-FM bottom lines.

What is a 'freshwater management unit'?

These are the natural catchments for surface water (rivers, streams and wetlands) and groundwater. In Nelson, there are five 'freshwater management units' (Stoke, Whangamoā, Wakapuaka, Maitai/Mahitahi/Maitahi and Roding), comprising the smaller sub-catchments within those wider catchments, which includes the systems of groundwater aquifers that are hydrologically connected to those water bodies. There are also groundwater aquifers that are unconnected to surface water streams.

Links to the Draft Nelson Plan

This 'frequently asked questions' sheet addresses a few of the key provisions in the Draft Nelson Plan. It should not be used as a definitive representation of content. To view actual Draft Nelson Plan content, please go to shape.nelson.govt.nz.