

# Bay of Plenty Regional Council Position Statement: Land Use Change in the Lake Rotorua Catchment

This position statement sets out Bay of Plenty Regional Council's strategic intent for land management change in the Lake Rotorua catchment. It provides a transparent rationale for how Council will approach land use change.

## Background

Lake Rotorua has degraded water quality due to high nitrogen and phosphorous levels, and it suffers intermittently from algal blooms. A target Trophic Level Index (TLI) maximum of 4.2 has been set for the lake, in consultation with the community, through the Regional Water and Land Plan.

In order to achieve the lake's target TLI, a sustainable nitrogen load of approximately 435 tonnes of nitrogen per year (tN/yr) is required. This is a reduction of approximately 320 tN/yr from the current load of 755 tN/yr .

Pastoral land use is a significant source of nitrogen (about 70%) to the lake. Changes in land use and the way activities on that land are managed therefor have the potential to achieve the nitrogen load reductions required.

## What is land use change

In this context of the Lake Rotorua catchment, the purpose of land use change is to change the way land is currently used, from a high nitrogen loss activity to a low nitrogen loss activity.

## Context of position statement

The purpose of this position is to clearly identify the role and direction Council intends to take on land use change in achieving Lake Rotorua's sustainable nitrogen load of 435 tN/yr.

This proposed position does not identify the methods or actions that will be undertaken to realise the position; it is a statement of intent. The ways in which this position can be implemented will be addressed as a next step.

## Council's positions on land management use in the Lake Rotorua catchment are:

**Accept that Council has an obligation to consider land use change in order to achieve the sustainable nitrogen load of 435 tN/yr in Lake Rotorua**

*The intent of this position is to make it clear that the Council has a responsibility to ensure land use change is undertaken in the Lake Rotorua catchment for the purpose of achieving the sustainable nitrogen load for the lake.*

This position also recognises that the Government, and the community, have clear expectations that Council will deliver on water quality outcomes in Lake Rotorua. The Deed of Funding with Government has agreements for action in place already. The community have also been engaged for

some time in water quality discussions through the Strategy for the Lakes of the Rotorua District, as well as the Action Plan for Lake Rotorua and Rotoiti.

We will carry out a suite of roles to meet this obligation, including:

- Setting the strategic direction, outcomes and targets to be delivered
- Making rules where necessary
- Providing incentives and support to communities and individuals
- Supporting the actions of, and coordinating with, central government and local authorities
- Undertaking actions and operational activities.

### **Prioritise Bay of Plenty Regional Council resource towards land use change as a key tool for achieving the sustainable nitrogen load of 435 tN/yr in Lake Rotorua**

*The intent of this position is to ensure that Council's limited resources are used in the most efficient and effective way for reducing nutrient load to Lake Rotorua.*

We will not achieve the sustainable nitrogen load for the lake unless current land use in the catchment is changed. Our investment decisions must reflect this and resources will need to be prioritised towards land use change over other interventions, such as land management change, which do not have the same reach or impact in the catchment.

### **Recognise that there is a local, regional and national willingness to pay for water quality outcomes**

*The intent of this position is to recognise the value that New Zealanders place on the aquatic environment, and that they are willing to pay to ensure these values are protected.*

Achieving water quality outcomes in Lake Rotorua will take considerable investment, in both time and resources. The beneficiaries of this investment will not just be the local Lake Rotorua community. The Bay of Plenty region as well as New Zealand in general, will benefit from improved water quality in the lake.

### **Take action on land use change quickly in the Lake Rotorua catchment to ensure that opportunities are not lost.**

*The intent of this position is to be clear that Council intends to move as quickly as possible on land use change interventions in the Lake Rotorua catchment. The position also recognises that water quality is not improving and the longer action is delayed, the higher costs will escalate.*

Water quality and land use change is a complex issue in the Lake Rotorua catchment. Different stakeholders have different views of the problem; the science is continually evolving; problems and solutions require action at every level. Importantly, interventions to change land use in the catchment have the potential to negatively impact on individuals and communities.

These factors make moving forward challenging, and have meant progress to date has been slow. It is now time to act, set clear targets, and ensure we can take advantage of all opportunities as they arise in the catchment. Water quality at Lake Rotorua will not improve by tinkering at the edges.