

Water management and allocation into the future

A strategy for Otago



Common vision

Water is recognised as being integral to Otago's social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being. A forward looking regulatory framework, along with appropriate educational and support mechanisms ensures future prosperity.

Sustainable and innovative ways of accessing, transferring and sharing water are developed. This helps to overcome the challenges presented by changing water demand and use patterns, increased climate variability, and the end of the mining privilege system.



Introduction

Management and allocation of water in Otago is based on decades of practical experience and knowledge, historical mining privilege allocation, and some good principles in the Regional Plan: Water for Otago (the Water Plan). However, since the development of the Water Plan in the mid 1990s there has been intense growth and associated demand for water. This development, along with the transition from mining privileges, and the increasing awareness among water users that changes may be needed, has prompted a new look at allocation and management issues by the Otago Regional Council (ORC).

The purpose of the strategy is to provide direction and a common focus for policy and decision making, as well as for on-the-ground projects and initiatives which will enable better management of water in Otago. This strategy draws on the outcomes of the 2006 Cromwell Water Forum and subsequent community meetings. Its general direction was embraced by water users and interested parties at the 2008 Cromwell Water Forum.

The strategy builds upon the principles in the current Water Plan, and provides momentum for the growing desire to work collaboratively. It identifies a common vision, as well as the goals and methods necessary for this vision to be achieved. The wider community must now decide if they accept the challenge to work towards this vision in their day-to-day management of water.



Why is this strategy needed?

The wellbeing of everything in Otago depends on how we manage our water. The region is fortunate to have some significant water resources, including the Clutha River/Mata-Au. People are becoming more aware of how this precious resource can be best utilised. However, we need a common community vision to ensure that our water resources are used to the best advantage for the whole region. We have the potential for increased economic, social and ecological benefit over large parts of Otago if we can use each source for the right use, and at the right place and time.

Most surface water in Otago, with the exception of the Clutha River/Mata-Au, is seriously over-allocated and demand for water continues to increase. This strategy creates a common vision that inspires and directs community action, and forward looking policies. This will enable the Otago community to take full advantage of the region's water resources, through both tried and true and innovative uses. The successful transition from the mining privilege system is an important issue that this strategy addresses. In particular, requiring a holistic, catchment-wide approach to sourcing water, and encouraging water use management that is based on greater co-operation between users will benefit this process.

Goals

To reach our vision for water management and allocation in Otago, there are several goals that need to be achieved. Achieving these goals may take some time, and will require understanding, co-operation and co-ordination within the community.

They can be broadly grouped into those relating to water use management, and those relating to water allocation.



Methods

A variety of methods will be required to achieve the goals and vision of this strategy. They include both regulatory methods and other methods that could be implemented by the ORC. The regulatory methods generally involve making additions or changes to the Water Plan to ensure certain things happen (or don't happen). The other methods are more likely to be used to keep water users informed, to encourage them to take particular actions, and to provide support and assistance.

Some of the methods and ideas listed are already being applied by water users, or are being promoted by the ORC. However, there are others which will require further progression through policy development or wider acceptance throughout the community.

The ORC has an important role in achieving the goals and vision of this strategy. However, it is Otago's water users who must continue and escalate their good work; they are crucial to ensuring that the common vision of future water management becomes a reality.

Water use management

Goal 1:

Water users working together, enabling a more flexible approach to accessing water.

Individuals working together at a number of levels, from a small group of neighbours to an entire catchment. Collaborative structures being formed through a variety of mechanisms, both formal and informal.

A more collaborative approach could benefit users. This may include getting the greatest benefit from the available water resource, through greater participation in a well organised rostering scheme.

There may be economies of scale benefits in terms of developing infrastructure, and reducing administrative costs. Collaborative operations may also result in reductions in environmental effects, enabling the grant of longer consent terms.

Regulatory methods:

- Ensuring collaborative opportunities are considered when a consent is applied for.
- Providing the opportunity for collaborative groups to manage their takes with authority delegated from Council.

Other methods:

- Promoting the benefits and advantages of taking a more collaborative approach.
- Assisting and supporting the setting up and management of collaborative water management entities.

Goal 2:

Skilful and effective management when water is in short supply.

Workable and considered rationing systems, formulated and run by water users in a co-operative manner, and as appropriate to their situation.

Other methods:

- Encouraging awareness of, and participation in effective rationing systems.
- Providing assistance to those developing rationing systems to ensure they're effective and sufficiently flexible.
- Encouraging awareness of suitable methods to improve supply or efficiency.

Goal 3:

Existing infrastructure is improved and appropriate new infrastructure is developed.

The benefits of additional water and increased security of supply are spread as widely throughout the community as possible. Co-operative groups of users are in the best position to plan and invest in additional infrastructure, with appropriate assistance from local government.

Other methods:

- Helping to identify options for new infrastructure schemes, and providing detail on the possible scope of such schemes.
- Liaising with central and local government regarding contributions to bulk rural water infrastructure.

Goal 4:

A holistic, catchment-wide approach is taken to selecting appropriate water sources.

Consideration given to all available sources of water, with sustainable and appropriate use of each source.

Regulatory methods:

- Requiring consent applicants to consider alternative water sources, and state reasons for their proposed choice.
- Ensuring the inter-connectedness of water sources is considered during the consent application process.
- Giving priority to local water uses. If local demand for water is satisfied, then it may be exported from the local area.
- Giving consideration to natural climatic variability, long-term trends in climate, and changes in vegetation patterns when assessing possible sources of water.

Other methods:

- Assisting water users who wish to investigate alternative or multiple sources of water.

Goal 5:

Increased awareness of water as a scarce resource, resulting in increased efficiency in water use management.

Efficiency of use in all areas: rural, urban, those currently with adequate supply, and those with limited supply.

Regulatory methods:

- Continuing to ensure that the amount of water granted in a water consent is no more than that needed for the intended purpose of use of that water.
- Ensuring efficiency related conditions are included in water use consents. Examples include requiring best practice to be used, or requiring consent holders to promote water use efficiency.

Other methods:

- Providing information on water scarcity and efficient use, and work with water users to increase efficiency in water use.
- Raising awareness that water is a scarce resource, with prudent and efficient management required.



Water allocation

Goal 6:

A water allocation system that achieves sustainable and efficient water use management.

The amount of water allocated more closely resembles what is actually able to be accessed, both at an individual consent, and catchment-wide level. Consent replacement applications are given priority resulting in stability and prosperity for Otago.

Regulatory methods:

- Ensure that the quantity of water allocated to consent holders is no more than that which they have previously been able to access.
- Ensure water takes that can only be accessed at high flows have supplementary, rather than primary status.
- Giving consideration to natural climatic variability, long-term trends in climate, and changes in vegetation patterns, when setting allocation limits, and allocating water to individual consents.
- Continuing to afford consent replacements priority over new applications.

Other methods:

- Providing information to consent holders (including deemed permit holders) regarding new provisions that may affect them.

Goal 7:

Essential uses are appropriately provided for.

Existing essential use takes continue to have an appropriate level of replacement certainty. Increasing demand for essential water use is met appropriately.

Regulatory methods:

- Continuing to apply existing plan provisions regarding replacement of listed public water supply takes and their exemption from minimum flows.

Other methods:

- Liaising with territorial authorities regarding possible sources of water for essential use needs.
- Provide guidance for people considering developments, especially in water short catchments.



The way forward

This strategy proposes some changes in the approach taken to water management and allocation that will enable more sustainable, integrated and efficient use of Otago's water resources. It sets out a vision for the future which includes:

- Water users increasingly working together.
- Skilful and effective management during times of water shortage.
- Development of new, and improvements to existing infrastructure.
- A holistic approach to selecting appropriate sources of water.
- Increased efficiency of water use, particularly where it's scarce.
- A water allocation system that achieves sustainable and efficient water use management.
- Water takes for essential uses being appropriately provided for.

Water users are already taking positive action in many of these areas. However, the ORC must also ensure that it can facilitate and accommodate the types of dynamic developments which will be necessary for this vision to be fully attained. An updated Water Plan, as well as various other methods promoting positive action, will be essential.

The proposals discussed in this strategy aim to improve the overall effectiveness with which we use our limited water resources, enabling the community to benefit from changes in water management and allocation. This will allow for the continued socio-economic prosperity of our region, while still safeguarding environmental baselines to provide for natural ecosystems, and the cultural, aesthetic and recreational values attached to our water bodies.



Definition of terms

Allocation limit or allocation volume - The maximum flow or quantity of water in a water body, which can be allocated to resource consents for taking.

Conditions - In relation to plans and resource consents, includes terms, standards, restrictions and prohibitions.

Consent - See Resource Consent

Consent authority - The Minister of Conservation, a regional council, or a territorial authority, whose permission is required to carry out an activity for which a resource consent is required under the Resource Management Act 1991.

Over-allocation - Where the amount of water allocated to the holders of resource consents and deemed permits is greater than the allocation limit.

Deemed permit - An entitlement to take water that originates from a mining privilege, issued under early mining legislation. Deemed permits are organised according to a priority system and are now used mainly for irrigation. The Resource Management Act 1991 provides that they will finally expire on 1 October 2021.

Effect - (a) Any positive or adverse effect; and (b) Any temporary or permanent effect; and (c) Any past, present, or future effect; and (d) Any cumulative effect which arises over time or in combination with other effects. Regardless of the scale, intensity, duration or frequency of the effect, and also includes – (e) Any potential effect of high probability; and (f) Any potential effect of low probability which has a high potential impact.

Environment - Includes - (a) Ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities, (b) All natural and physical resources; and (c) Amenity values; and (d) The social, economic, aesthetic, and cultural conditions which effect the matters stated in (a) to (c) of this definition or which are affected by those matters.

Hydrological values - The natural processes of an ecosystem in providing regulated water flow and enhanced water quality.

Method - The practical action by which a policy is implemented.

Minimum flow - The flow below which the holder of any resource consent to take water must cease taking water from that river.

Mining privilege - See Deemed Permit.

Policy - The course of action to achieve an objective in a regional plan.

Primary allocation - The volume of water which is able to be taken subject to the lowest minimum flow.

Regional plan - An operative plan approved by a regional council.

Resource consent - A consent for an activity as set out in Section 87 of the RMA 1991; and includes all conditions to which the consent is subject.

Supplementary allocation - A volume of water able to be taken subject to minimum flows higher than the primary minimum flow.

Taking - In relation to the taking of water, is the process of extracting the water for any purpose and for any period of time.

Use - In relation to the use of water, is the passive use of water that does not involve any extraction, damming, diversion or discharge.

Water - (a) Means water in all its physical forms whether flowing or not and whether over or under the ground; (b) Includes fresh water, coastal water and geothermal water; (c) Does not include water in any form while in any pipe, tank or cistern.

Water Permit - See Resource Consent

Water Plan - See Regional Plan

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