Summary of feedback received
Community consultation 2 – Options

Development of Proposed Plan Change 5C:
Integrated Water Management for the Manuherikia Catchment

Introduction

The Water Plan sets the framework for managing the amount of water in catchments and aquifers in Otago. Otago Regional Council is assessing the amount of water that is to remain in the Manuherikia catchment and groundwater aquifers.

Consultation with the community on this assessment began in August 2016 and initially sought to understand what is important about water to the community. In March 2017, we presented several water management options to the community and invited their feedback. This report summarises the feedback we received on those water management options.

We will be using the community's feedback, coupled with scientific, social, economic, and cultural assessments, to determine a preferred management option. This preferred option will be brought back to the community for more feedback before it's notified as Proposed Plan Change 5C to the Regional Plan: Water for Otago (Water Plan) under the Resource Management Act 1991.

Purpose of consultation

In this second stage of consultation, we sought community feedback on a range of options for managing the amount of water in the Manuherikia Catchment. It also sought information to increase understanding of wider community preferences and aspirations which will contribute to the social assessment.

We invited comment on management options for:

Surface water

- how many minimum flow sites should there be
- should we manage the catchment as a whole or as several different 'sub-catchments'
- primary allocation minimum flows - summer and winter flow options

Groundwater

- allocation limits

Consultation process

Community drop-in sessions enabled people to view and discuss a variety of options for managing the amount of water in the Manuherikia catchment.

We held two sessions at each of the following locations in March:

- Oturehua
- Omakau
- Alexandra

Each session provided a range of information such as:

- Posters illustrating the plan change development process.
- Maps of the catchment showing fish species, hydrology, and the location of water takes
- General catchment background information

- Options for surface water management options (minimum flow sites and management areas)
- Options for surface water minimum flow primary allocation
- Options for groundwater allocation limits
- Wāhi Ingoa Manuherikia Catchment
- Science report: Management flows for aquatic ecosystems in the Manuherikia River and Dunstan Creek
- Feedback form
- Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Approximately 200 people attended the drop-in sessions over these days, with the consultation period closing on Friday 7 April 2017. The information was also available online.

We accepted feedback via the feedback forms at the drop-in sessions, online, via email, by letter, verbally at the consultation sessions and at other times, on maps and through other resources. We received 130 forms of written feedback alongside what people told us in person at the drop-in sessions.

What happens with the feedback received?

The feedback received will be considered as we develop the preferred option. We will analyse the options, taking into account feedback, the reports including science, economic, social and cultural assessments, effects on the environment and any other relevant information. From this the preferred option, the consultation draft plan change, will be developed. We will then consult with the community on this. Feedback will also contribute to the development of the economic and social assessments.

Feedback summary - what we heard

Seven key messages came through consistently throughout the consultation. These were:

1. Social and economic assessments should be provided to enable an informed decision.
2. Concern that water use to date has supported farming practices at an intensity which is not suited for the locality.
3. Concern that the options don't address the impact and purpose of Falls Dam.
    - Do naturalised flows and MALF data take into account the Falls Dam effect on flows?
    - Common opinion that Falls Dam releases water to prevent the river from drying in lowest flows.
4. Why was status quo not an option?
5. Groundwater is affected by efficiency of irrigation; need to take this into account.
6. Concern about water quality issues in the region.
7. There should be an explanation for the calculation of 7 day MALF (Mean Annual Low Flow).

Looking closer at the feedback

Here's a summary of what we heard:

1. Options for surface water management

What we asked:

- Which surface water management approach do you prefer, and why?
- What do you dislike about the other options?

What we heard:

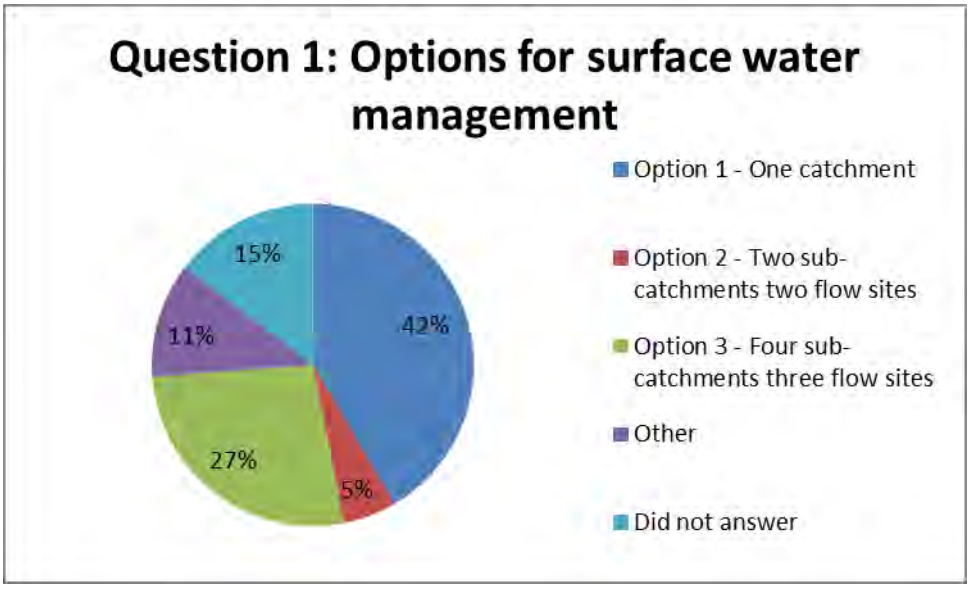

Figure 1: Options for surface water management

To manage the catchment with one minimum flow site at Campground was the preferred option (option 1), refer to Figure 1.

Managing the catchment with one minimum flow site at Campground

- The whole catchment approach will support community and stakeholders to work together rather than compete
- It is the simplest form of management, and is how the catchment is currently managed
- Campground is a logical minimum flow site. Suggestion of managing as one but with an additional flow site at Ophir (flows to relate and work together)
- Managing the catchment as one will enable the impact of Falls Dam to be considered across the whole catchment.

Managing the catchment as four sub-catchments and exclude Ida Burn and Pool Burn (option 3) was the second most preferred.

- A detailed approach is fairer; addressing the unique needs and values in the catchment
- More measurement sites will mean a healthier river, for its entire length
- It will enable better monitoring, management and sustainability into the future
- The option best supports fish habitat, especially in the upper reaches ie Dunstan Creek.

Other (Option 4) was the third most preferred.

- Status Quo should be maintained
- More information is required on how the different approaches will impact economically and socially before selecting an option
- Additional flow sites on tributaries and the main stem should be included to provide for values e.g.: Lauder Creek, Thompson's Creek, Chatto Creek, Ida Valley and Galloway.

Managing the catchment as two sub-catchments with two minimum flow sites (Option2) was the least preferred.

- Ophir is useful to monitor changes between Falls Dam and Campground.
- This option can manage the impact Falls Dam has on the river flow, and can better manage the use between the higher and lower reaches of the catchment.

2. Options for summer primary allocation minimum flows

What we asked:

- Which summer minimum flow option do you prefer and why?
- What do you dislike about the other options?

What we heard:

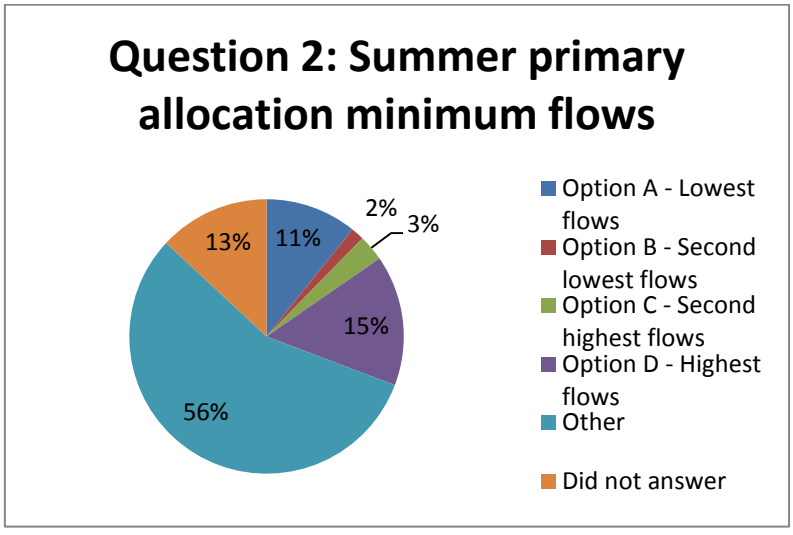

Figure 2: Options for summer primary allocation minimum flows

***Other* was most preferred.**

What we heard:

- All options are too high, impacting on Falls Dam storage, ecosystems and farming operations, especially in a dry year.
- Alternative minimum flows at Campground were suggested including 700l/s.
- Many supported the status quo of 820 l/s at Ophir. The existing system uses water efficiently, supports the current level of irrigation and the river is in a good condition. Any change will economically affect farmers, the local economy and the broader Central Otago region.
- A flexible minimum flow approach, taking into consideration Falls Dam levels and seasonal variation e.g. 1,250l/s at campground with reductions when required to maintain storage and acceptable irrigation.
- Option A levels, less 20%.

Minimum flows of 2,500l/s at Campground, 2,500l/s at Ophir and 600l/s at Dunstan Creek (option D) was second most preferred.

What we heard:

- This option is closest to the natural state of the catchment and will result in the best outcome for ecosystem health and water quality.
- Higher flows support tourism, recreation, the economy and water quality.
- A flexible flow approach shouldn't be used to lower flows below the environmental baseline.
- Other options are not appropriate - Option A is too similar to the status quo where temperatures have been observed to fluctuate, at times to dangerous levels for trout. Option B provides for less than half the habitat of naturalised MALF. Neither option supports recreation use.
- Option D is still a compromise at only 64% of the naturalised MALF. The proposed National Environmental Standard on Ecological Flows and Water Levels suggests an ideal baseline allocation to protect environmental values is 80-90% of naturalised MALF. However there is recognition that irrigation requirements call for a compromise.

Minimum flows of 1,250l/s, 1,500l/s and 400l/s at Campground, Ophir and Dunstan Creek respectively (option A) was third most preferred.

What we heard:

- This is a balanced approach, providing for the environment and minimising the impact on farming and horticulture.
- It is the only option that will enable farming to be profitable. Some thought this option would only work provided the dam capacity is expanded.
- Concern it will still impact water users, especially in dry seasons when historically the river has dried up. May require government intervention.

Minimum flows of 1,250l/s, 1,500l/s and 400l/s at Campground, Ophir and Dustan Creek respectively (option B) was the fourth preference.

What we heard:

- The health of the river system should be a priority; this option appears to be the right compromise between the environment and the farming community.

Minimum flows of 1,500l/s, 750l/s and 500l/s at Campground, Ophir and Dustan Creek respectively (option C) was the least preferred.

What we heard:

- This will address public health issues such as water quality and algal blooms.

3. Options for winter primary allocation minimum flows

What we asked:

- Which winter minimum flow option do you prefer, and why?
- What do you dislike about the other options?

What we heard:

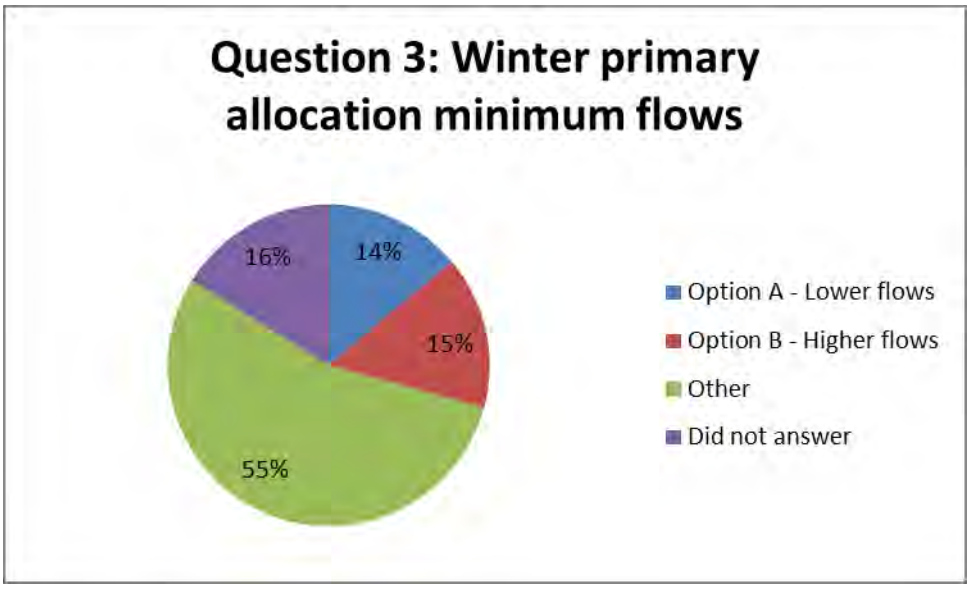

Figure 3: Options for winter primary allocation minimum flows

Most people did not indicate a preference or provided alternative suggestions (Other*).*

What we heard:

- Not enough information on the impacts of winter minimum flow to make an informed decision.

- Strong support for retaining the status quo for winter as there is currently no problem with winter flows. Flows in between Option A and the status quo were also supported.
- Consider variable flows to recognise Falls Dam levels and the season characteristics e.g. above and below 900l/s – a range between 750l/s – 1250l/s.
- Concern that winter minimum flows will impact Falls Dam storage and in turn impact summer flows and power generation. If Falls Dam is raised, will need more water to fill it.
- There was also support for flows to reflect naturalised flows to protect the ecosystem, natural character, provide for flushing flows and river shaping flows.
  Irrigation can be required until mid-May, the winter flows dates should reflect this. Monitoring winter flows will complicate the process.

Lower winter flows (option B) was second most preferred.

What we heard:

- Option B seems to balance the need for storage and the ecological benefits of winter flows.
- This is the best option to support aquatic invertebrates and support natural flows.
- Option A flow is lower than naturalised flows in summer, hence it is too low.

High winter flows (option A) was least preferred.

What we heard:

- Lower winter flows will allow for more water storage to help irrigators. This will help compensate for summer flows being set.
- This option maintains a healthy river and protects amenity and recreation values.
- A variable rate based on the levels in Option A should be set taking into consideration the weather and how wet/dry the season is.

4. Options for groundwater – management approach.

What we asked:

- Which groundwater management option do you prefer, and why?

What we heard:

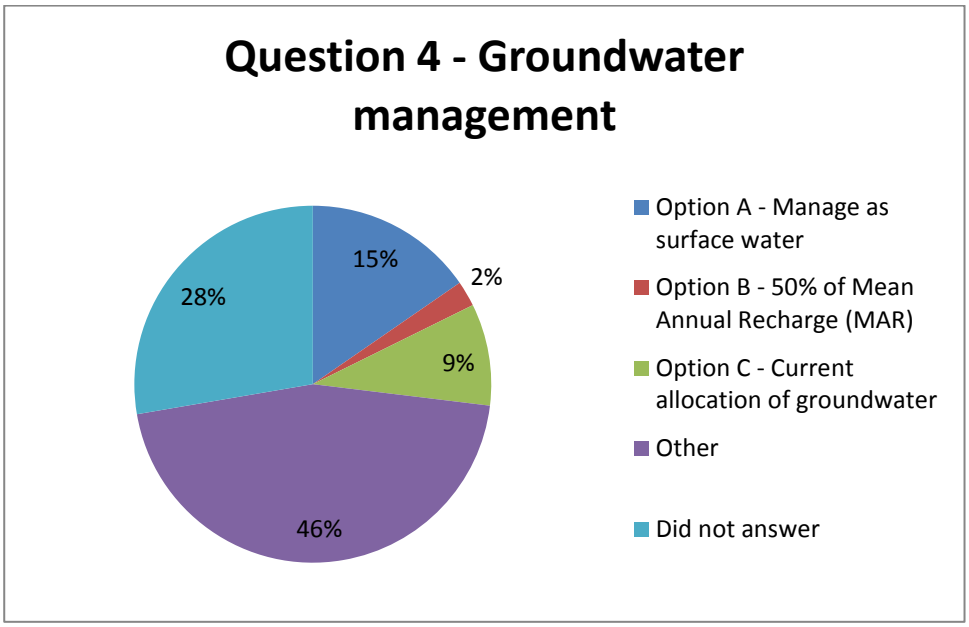

Figure 4: Options for groundwater management

Most people did not give a preference or provide alternative suggestions (Other).

What we heard:

- There is not enough information about recharge to make a decision.
- It is too difficult to answer until the minimum flows are set.
- Status quo should remain as currently little groundwater is used for irrigation.
- Groundwater and surface water should not be connected, especially when they are not physically connected; they have different users.
- A variety of approaches should be applied. Option A for Manuherikia Basin, Ida Valley Basin and Manuherikia River Alluvium Ribbon Aquifer. Option B for Manuherikia Claybound.

To manage groundwater as surface water (option A) was the second most preferred.

What we heard:

- This approach recognises the interconnected nature of the system, and will ensure aquifers are not depleted in the long run.
- A requirement for higher surface water flows may increase groundwater taking.
- Groundwater that is close to surface water should be managed as such and groundwater that is further than 100m should be managed on a case-by-case basis.
- A precautionary approach should be implemented.

To manage groundwater as it is currently allocated (option C) was the third most preferred.

What we heard:

- Groundwater is limited in the catchment and must be protected from depletion and pollution for domestic use.
- The recharge areas are quite small and hence should be protected.

To manage groundwater at 50% of Mean Annual Recharge (MAR) (option B) was the least preferred.

What we heard:

- A good percentage of groundwater recharge comes from flood irrigation.

5. Tell us about anything you think we have missed?

What we asked:

- Do you have any other suggestions?
- Have we missed anything important to you?

What we heard:

Water catchment management:

- There are options for several water storage areas in the catchment
- The impact of inappropriate and unsustainable land use i.e. intensive agriculture must be considered in this work. Is this the responsibility of ORC or CODC?
- Lauder Creek is an attractive and important fishing, eel and sports fish stream. Concern that proposals rely on residuals to maintain flow. Suggest a minimum flow site at the state highway bridge
- Dunstan Creek is an important habitat for rainbow trout
- Concern was expressed that water quality has been allowed to deteriorate to the point of some places being closed to swimming
- Preserve irrigation races for historic value and the unique ecosystems they contain
- Suggestions and concerns around water crossing catchment boundaries. Suggesting diverting Dairy Creek, Waikerikeri/McArthur Ridge, Golden Road/Springvale and possible lower Galloway to reduce demand on Manuherikia water into the catchment. Also concern about diverting water above Falls Dam into the Taieri catchment
- Concern expressed about the environmental effects of completely diverting the river/creeks off their natural course to enable taking e.g. Olrig Station Near Galloway
- ORC should contribute towards raising Falls Dam as businesses and individuals all benefit from the irrigation of the region
- Values are not isolated e.g. farming community also enjoys recreational activities.

Minimum flow:

- Variable flows should be considered, adjusted to the season and take into account Falls Dam (at high and low levels) for flows across the broader catchment. This will enable flexibility with water management, aligning with seasonal management of farming

- Include provision in the plan for horticulture and viticulture when water taking is restricted in order to keep valuable trees (or other) alive. A provision already exists for stock
- Water isn't a resource that can be bought and sold like 'commodities'. For this reason a precautionary approach is warranted to setting minimum flows
- High flows in the river can have adverse impacts on recreation where swimmers and other users feel unsafe due to the water levels
- If a requirement for a 'receiving flow' or 'stand down' period was required, it will delay farmers returning irrigation water to their pastures or winter feed crops.

Process for developing the plan change:

- Economic and social impact analysis is missing and is needed to make informed submissions
- The consultation process was disappointing and the purpose of the plan change unclear; lack of in depth information to how options were reached
- Concern there hasn't been a collective community approach to understand the catchment
- Uncertainty of purpose of questions 6-11
- Would have liked ORC to follow up on the catchment values before options were decided
- The community is already implementing substantial change relating to water quality rules.

6. Questions 6 to 11 – social questions

These questions were asked to increase understanding of wider community preferences and aspirations which will contribute to the social assessment. A brief summary of what we heard is:

Farming operation preferences

- A preference for family and intergeneration farms was expressed; however there was recognition that large scale farming provides greater employment opportunities, especially for younger people.
- Growth in horticulture and new technologies were also supported.
- Less intensive farming was seen as more appropriate for the Manuherikia climate and sustainable farming was preferred.

Economic activity sought

- Traditional farming (sheep and beef), horticulture and viticulture were supported.
- Dairy was more controversial and there was strong support for economic uses being suited to the climate.
- Tourism was supported, and seen as an area for growth.
- A mix of economic drivers and diversity will lead to a more resilient economy.
- The potential for new industries to enter the market was also noted. Examples are the NIWA site, the NASA balloon operation in Wanaka and the Centre for Space Science Technology project in Alexandra.

Employment in the region

- Permanent employment is desired, but it is acknowledged that part-time, seasonal and casual employment supports existing industries.
- Diverse opportunities throughout farming, agriculture, horticulture, viticulture, tourism, health, education, technology and science and retail were supported.
- Technology focussed industries were supported to support sustainability of employment.

People in the catchment

- There was a general feeling that a good mix of people currently exists within the region.
- The region is growing, but should only grow to the capacity of the natural environment and landscape.
- Future growth should be focussed to take place in urban areas.
- Retaining young people in the community is important.

Important community features

- Stable growth and employment, resilience and communities that work together.
- Community spirit being fostered by local activities, good infrastructure and a healthy environment are key and maintaining the history of the area is also important.

Amenities and facilities

- Current facilities are good; but there could be more recreation opportunities close to urban areas, better telecommunications and more variety of accommodation options.
- Small schools are highly valued.
- Development should complement the rural landscape.