

# Frequently asked questions

## **What is the purpose of Plan Change 5C (Manuherikia Catchment: Integrated Water Management)?**

PC5C aims to establish a water management regime for the Manuherikia catchment and aquifers which will provide for environmental, community and tāngata whenua values, while enabling the sustainable and efficient use of water.

## **Why is the ORC doing this plan change?**

Section 30 of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) requires regional councils to set levels and flows for water bodies, if appropriate.

The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2014 (NPSFM) requires every water management unit to have 'environmental flows and/or levels' and to phase out over-allocation and ensure efficient water use. ORC began a programme of plan changes in 2004 to set minimum flows and levels for catchments throughout Otago.

There are also a number of historic 'deemed permits' in Otago which provide rights to take water which have not yet been required to comply with take restrictions such as minimum flows. Under the RMA these expire in 2021 and the process of replacing deemed permits with resource consents has begun. Plan changes for catchments with high numbers of deemed permits are now prioritised to ensure as much certainty as possible for those applicants replacing deemed permits.

## **How does the ORC manage surface water?**

The Regional Plan: Water for Otago (the Water Plan) uses two principal mechanisms for managing water takes: minimum flows for rivers and connected groundwater, and allocation limits for consented water takes. Residual flows and recovery flows are additional mechanisms that can be used in particular cases to achieve sustainable management of catchment water. Any takes not using the Water Plan's limits can be considered on a case-by-case basis.

## **What is a minimum flow?**

A minimum flow restricts when water can be taken from a river under low flow conditions. When a river drops below its minimum flow, anyone with a consent to take water (other than a deemed permit) must stop taking. It does not apply to some individual permitted activity takes for domestic use, stock drinking water, firefighting and consented takes for scheduled community water supplies.

The aim of setting minimum flows is to protect aquatic ecosystems and the natural character of Otago's rivers, while taking account of community and stakeholder social, cultural, economic and environmental values. Schedule 2D.1 of the Water Plan contains a list of matters to be considered when setting a minimum flow.

Schedule 2A of the Water Plan identifies minimum flow limits for specified catchments and catchment areas in Otago. The Manuherikia River catchment upstream of Ophir is listed in Schedule 2A, and has a minimum flow of 820 litres per second (l/s). Existing takes within any catchment not listed in Schedule 2A have no minimum flow, but any new takes will be subject to a minimum flow consent condition. The Manuherikia River catchment downstream of Ophir currently has no minimum flow set in Schedule 2A.

## **What is a residual flow?**

A residual flow applies to specific consents that take water from a tributary of a main river. A residual flow recognises that a tributary stream often has different flow characteristics from the main river stem. It is set at the point of take on a case by case basis, to provide for the aquatic ecosystems and natural character of the source water body, at or downstream of the take point.

## What is an allocation limit?

An allocation limit is the amount of water that consent holders are allowed to take from a catchment. There are two types of allocation in the Water Plan for surface water: primary and supplementary.

## What is primary allocation?

Primary allocation is the maximum amount of water that can be taken from the catchment by holders of a consent classed as “primary”, and has the lowest scheduled minimum flow. A primary allocation limit is set to provide for economic, social and cultural wellbeing, while also supporting reliable access to the water resource.

Schedule 2A identifies primary allocation limits for specified catchments in Otago. Catchments that are not listed in Schedule 2A have a “default” primary allocation limit, which is 50% of the 7-day mean annual low flow (MALF).

The Manuherikia river catchment (from the confluence with Clutha/Mata-Au to the headwaters) has a primary allocation limit set in Schedule 2A of 3,200 l/s. Primary allocation is currently over-allocated in the Manuherikia Catchment.

## What is supplementary allocation?

Supplementary allocation, which can be in blocks if appropriate, is available if primary allocation is fully or over-allocated. Supplementary allocation consents have a higher minimum flow and water is usually taken in winter and spring and stored for later use. When river flows drop, supplementary consent holders will be required to stop taking water before those with primary allocation consents. Supplementary allocation beyond this can be made at still higher minimum flows, including generous allocation called ‘further supplementary’.

Policy 6.4.9 provides for supplementary allocation and Schedule 2B of the Water Plan identifies those catchments which have supplementary allocation blocks, and specific minimum flows for those blocks. Method 15.8.1A guides how supplementary allocation blocks will be calculated for the Manuherikia and this will be added to Schedule 2B.

## How does the ORC manage groundwater?

If groundwater is considered to be ‘connected’ to a surface water body, then it is managed as surface water, and would be subject to any relevant minimum flow and allocation limit. ‘Connected’ groundwater is defined in Policy 6.4.1A of the Water Plan, and includes any aquifers identified in Schedule 2C, any groundwater that is within 100 m of a surface water body, and has a hydrological connection to it (the taking of groundwater would deplete the surface water body). If groundwater takes are located more than 100 m from a connected surface water body, and deplete the surface water body by at least 5 l/s, a dual water allocation regime applies.

Other groundwater takes are managed by setting a maximum allocation limit and, where necessary, restriction levels on an aquifer. Any other groundwater take is considered on a case-by-case basis.

## What is a maximum allocation limit?

The maximum allocation limit for specified aquifers is set in Schedule 4A of the Water Plan. It sets a limit to the volume of water that can be taken annually from an aquifer by consents and is set to maintain long-term groundwater levels and avoid aquifer compaction. The aquifers in the Manuherikia catchment are not currently listed in Schedule 4A.

When no limit is set in Schedule 4A, the maximum allocation limit is determined as 50% of the mean annual recharge (MAR) of the aquifer. The maximum allocation limit is expressed in million cubic metres per year (Mm<sup>3</sup>/yr).

## What is an aquifer restriction level?

A restriction level restricts the taking of groundwater from an aquifer during extended periods of low recharge, or assists with sustainably managing groundwater in localised areas of high demand. These protect the aquifer from over-depletion. Typically, the restriction will be of a percentage of a consented take. Schedule 4B.1 of the Water Plan identifies the aquifer restriction levels at which the taking of groundwater will be increasingly restricted and the nature of the restriction that applies at different restriction levels. The aquifers in the Manuherikia catchment do not have aquifer restriction levels.