

Dairy farmer news

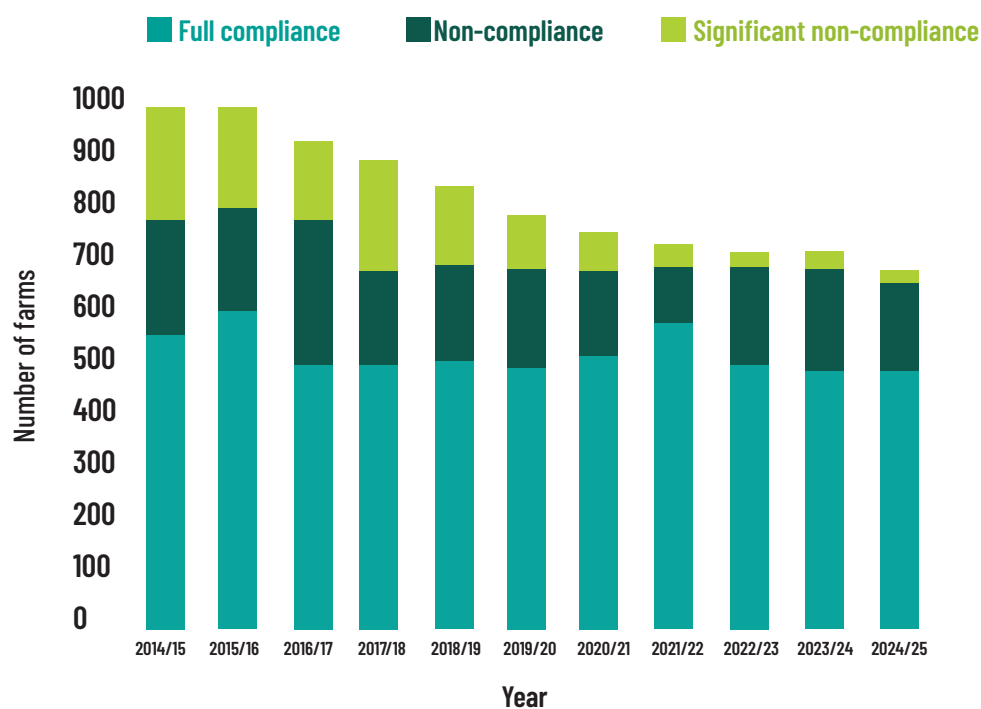
Pānui Kaipāmu



Northland's primary sector faced a significant summer dry spell, particularly on the West Coast.

Rain arrived in April 2025, with the region receiving an average of 400% of its expected rainfall, officially ending drought conditions. Compliance reports for the last year show similar trends to the previous period: out of 691 farms monitored, 481 were fully compliant, 161 were non-compliant, and 49 were significantly non-compliant.

Farm dairy effluent compliance (all farms)



With upcoming regulatory changes and anticipated shifts in supply terms, we're adjusting our approach. We plan to implement several changes to our monitoring programme this year, aiming to better support farmers through these transitions.

Feel free to contact our farm monitoring team to discuss your situation - 0800 002 004



Annual monitoring inspections – notification

The farm monitoring programme aims to ensure farm wastewater disposal is carried out in a manner that complies with regional rules and relevant resource consents. Annual monitoring inspections have been carried out on a non-notified basis for a number of years.

At annual monitoring inspections from this year, **upon request**, council's monitoring officer will send a text message upon their arrival on farm to a nominated mobile number.

If you would like to be notified of our FDE Inspectors arrival, please provide a preferred mobile number and your FDE number to **fde@nrc.govt.nz** by 31 July 2025.



Post-season survey

Some farmers may remember our end-of-inspection-season surveys. Good news – we're reinstating this feedback loop this year. This survey gives you a valuable opportunity to provide feedback to our team about your site visits and offer any suggestions for improvement. We're keen to hear your thoughts to help us work better.



Changing regulatory environment

Keeping pace with regulatory changes can be challenging. In this ever-changing environment, council's farm monitoring team are available to help you navigate regional and national rules and regulations. You can talk with a farm monitoring officer on 0800 002 004 or email us at **fde@nrc.govt.nz**.

Silage storage

Over the last monitoring season, we've had reports and investigated instances of silage leachate discharging into waterways and artificial drains. This is a concern, and during our last two monitoring seasons, we've observed that many silage making and storage activities aren't meeting the permitted activity rules, particularly concerning setback distances.



Our farm monitoring team will be assessing silage storage areas on an individual basis and will be in touch with affected farms over the coming months to discuss options for achieving compliance.

To ensure your silage making and storage is a permitted activity (and avoids issues!), you must meet these key conditions:

1. No discharge onto land within the specified setback distances.
2. Your storage site must NOT be located within:
 - 50 metres of surface water, a continually or intermittently flowing river, artificial watercourse, lake, natural wetland, or the coastal marine area.
 - 50 metres of the head of any water supply bore.
 - 50 metres of a dwelling owned or occupied by another person.
 - 20 metres of a public road or public space.

If you'd like to discuss your specific situation or explore your options for compliance, please don't hesitate to contact our farm monitoring team.

Resource consents



Over the next few years, many resource consents to discharge treated wastewater to water will be expiring. A letter will be sent out to consent holders 6 months prior to expiry outlining instructions on how to renew your consent.

Due to uncertainty about how the discharge of treated farm dairy effluent will be dealt with in any future regional plans, together with central Government's programme of changes to the Resource Management Act, any new consent will be issued for a maximum of 5 years.

The consent will allow council to ensure that land irrigation is maximised and discharges to water are minimised to critical periods.

Please note that your application to renew your consent must be received by the council prior to the expiry date of your consent, otherwise you will not be able to legally discharge to water under any circumstances until the council has made a decision on your renewal application.

If choosing not to renew your resource consent, the farm will instead operate under the permitted activity rules in rule C.6.3.1 of the Proposed Regional Plan for Northland. This means that there can be no discharge of treated wastewater to water. Discharge pipes in the final pond should be removed or permanently capped from the inside. Annual inspections will still be carried out, however the farm will be assessed against the permitted activity rules. The permitted activity rules include conditions for irrigation, stormwater management, wastewater storage facilities and contingencies.

Council recommends engaging with a suitably qualified person to assist you in your decision. Council's farm monitoring and consents teams are also available for any queries you may have.

Earthworks

Farms undertaking earthworks for wastewater storage or improvements must adhere to specific rules outlined in the Proposed Regional Plan for Northland, specifically Rule C.8.3. These rules include earthworks thresholds, stabilisation of exposed earth, preventing debris from entering waterways, and implementing erosion and sediment controls (GD2016/005). The Regional Council's Compliance Manager must be given at least 5 days' notice of any earthworks activity being undertaken within a high-risk flood hazard area or flood hazard area.

If you are unsure if your earthworks activity requires resource consent, please contact council's duty planner on 0800 002 004.

Farm Wastewater Application

During the last monitoring season, some farms didn't meet wastewater discharge rules when applying farm wastewater to land.

Common Issues:

Irrigator Placement or Slurry Tanker Application

Some irrigators were set up too close to drains, waterways, and roads (within 20 metres). Some slurry tankers were spreading effluent too heavily or too close to waterways and drains.

Saturated Soils

Wastewater was applied when the soil was already too wet, causing ponding and runoff.

Equipment Problems

Irrigators and pumps weren't well maintained, leading to system failures and over-application. Pressure sensors can help by detecting leaks, blockages, or irregular pressure levels. Contingencies must be available to stay compliant if power, pumps, pipes, irrigators or other equipment fails.

Lack of Monitoring

Irrigators that are in operation weren't checked frequently enough, allowing faults to go unnoticed and wastewater to be over-applied. Farm staff must be adequately trained to operate irrigation systems.

A well-planned and maintained wastewater system ensures compliance and benefits both farm productivity and the environment, resulting in healthier soils, cleaner waterways, and more efficient resource use.

See 'Understand the Rules' overleaf for further information about land application.

Understand the rules



The discharge of farm wastewater onto or into land and any associated odour, can be a permitted activity, provided you meet the following conditions. It's essential to understand these rules to ensure your operation is compliant:

1. No Direct Discharge to Water

Your wastewater must never directly enter:

- » Surface water or the coastal marine area via overland flow (i.e. runoff) or via any subsurface drains (like tile or mole drains).
- » Artificial watercourses (man-made drains or channels).

2. Maintain Your Setback Distances

You cannot discharge wastewater onto land, or allow it to flow, within these critical distances:

- » 20 metres of any river (flowing constantly or intermittently), lake, natural wetland, or the coastal marine area.

- » 50 metres of a water body within 2,000 metres upstream of a mapped priority drinking water abstraction point (check I Maps | Ngā mahere matawhenua if you're unsure where these are).
- » 20 metres of an artificial watercourse.
- » 20 metres of a neighbouring property boundary.
- » 20 metres of a public road or public space.
- » 20 metres of the head of any drinking water supply bore.
- » 50 metres of another person's dwelling.

3. Proper Application is Key

When you apply wastewater to land, it must be done in a way that:

- » Evenly distributes the wastewater across the pasture.
- » Does not result in ponding on the land for longer than three hours after application.
- » Minimises overland flow (runoff).
- » Does not cause an offensive or objectionable odour beyond your property boundary.

4. Be Prepared: Contingency Measures

You need to have contingency measures in place to prevent any discharge issues if there's a power outage or if your pump, pipes, irrigator, or other equipment fails. Planning ahead here is crucial for continuous compliance.



Hi, my name is Geoff Dacre

I am a contractor providing Farm Dairy Effluent monitoring services for the Northland Regional Council since 2003. I get to see first-hand how tough and stressful farming in Northland can be - you have my respect. I get to enjoy the fruits of your labour (yum) and the great outdoors, walking over some of the most glorious land in New Zealand. While I'm not allowed to give out advice, I can provide information and am happy to do so. I look forward to seeing you all this year.



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