



Future proofing your farm ahead of El Nino this summer

By Anna Mackenzie

Experts are predicting droughts this summer made even worse by the presence of the El Nino weather patterns. I expect many farmers will be getting prepared for the challenges faced during extreme dry spells by destocking farms, increasing hay and silage production and dusting off the irrigation systems. Now is also the time to be securing or renewing water rights and installing or expanding water storage dams to provide for the anticipated low flows expected in our rivers and lakes this year.

Tighter controls are being placed on water use across the whole country, with central and local government bringing in more methods to manage our most precious resource. Central Government released the National Policy Statement on Managing Freshwater in August 2014 (NPS), which provides Councils with direct guidance about setting bottom lines with respect to water management objectives. The NPS has a clear focus on water quality being required to be maintained or improved. Every regional and district plan has to give effect to the NPS and I believe we will see more regulation around the use of water, the use of land within the margins of rivers and lakes and the use of aquatic environments.

Tighter controls are likely to result in increased costs and longer timeframes in order to obtain access to water, particularly in drought conditions when water is scarce. With many of our exports requiring water to grow, New Zealand's economic prosperity is reliant on our water resources.

Currently, no matter what type of resource consent

you're applying for (subdivision consent, land use consent, water take consent, etc) Councils have 20 working days to process your consent. While many councils are aiming to make this an even shorter timeframe by choice, there is no guarantee that this will occur. The RMA requires that council processing days officially stop over the Christmas period (20th December to the 10th January each year), further extending the potential timeframes for a consent to be granted.

The fear of reduced water quantity to provide for our environment through over abstraction and the ever increasing competition for the right to take water, has resulted in many councils publicly notifying all water abstraction consent applications as a default position. This requires the application to be notified to the public for one month, and then if any submissions are received, further time is spent preparing to attend a hearing. This will add around 3 months to the processing of a resource consent.

All the while your farm might be desperate for water which you simply have no right to-use. So now is the optimum time (if you haven't already), to review your current resource consents, and make sure you will not be left high and dry this El Nino summer. It might be a good time to apply for new water take consents or consider water storage before summer really kicks in. There is no harm in future proofing your farm now, to ensure you survive this summer and summers to come.

For more information contact Anna at Avanzar Consulting Ltd, 0277 422 122