



Next Generation Farmers trustees, from left, Victoria Trayner, Sam Spencer-Bower, Andrew Olorenshaw, Sarah Gard and Scott Evans are raising awareness of stricter nitrate rules.

Mahinga kai concerns all

TIM FULTON

ENVIRONMENT Canterbury (ECan) has dispelled any idea mahinga kai is a marginal cultural consideration.

The policy should be part of Farm Environment Plans and applies to well-known Maori food-harvesting areas and plenty of other places, an ECan flier says.

“There is no one list of exactly what is mahinga kai for any given property,” a council statement distributed at the launch of the Next Generation Farmers Trust (NGF) says.

Mahinga kai includes things such as species, natural habitats, materials and practices used for harvesting food and places where food or resources are or were gathered.

Farmers are now required to achieve a mahinga kai target in plans, the flier says.

“This means you need to identify and understand mahinga kai values and risks on your farm and respond to those when carrying out good management practice.”

The targets will not necessarily limit the way a farmer manages land but they do require farmers to manage the risks of farming on mahinga kai.

Plans will have to provide for protection of mahinga kai species and habitats when waterways are managed or cleared. Mahinga kai must also be sustained through management of native vegetation and wetlands.

ECan recommends simple fencing and adjusting farming practices when spawning occurs in autumn.

Mahinga kai places include all waterways, drains with water, wetlands and springs, native vegetation and riparian areas.

“This means you need to identify and understand mahinga kai values and risks on your farm.”

Species include freshwater crayfish in a drain, lizards in flax and whitebait (inanga) in a creek. Whitebait can live and spawn in all waterways, including farm drains, and many of them are in vegetated waterways, particularly near the coast, ECan says.

“Their habitat is susceptible to disturbance, particularly from grazing animals and farm operations, which is why its protection is essential.”

The council says while everyone has a part to play in protecting and enhancing mahinga kai, landowners have clear responsibilities as guardians of the land.

“While the active protection of

mahinga kai is a key foundation of the Treaty of Waitangi, it is also simply part of wider environmental stewardship or kaitiakitanga.

“Looking after mahinga kai sits alongside ecosystem health and biodiversity as an essential objective in our region.”

The inaugural trust meeting at Swannanoa issued a general call for ECan to listen to vulnerable operators fearing for their livelihood under environment plan changes.

The seven-member trust, fronted by several dairy farmers, is raising awareness of stricter nitrate rules for the catchment.

Trustee Sarah Gard said the group wants to show real stories and experiences from across primary industries.

It will encourage open reporting of farming information and work with industry groups to make planning processes easier.

If a farmer is a Fonterra shareholder and a fertiliser co-op and irrigation scheme member it is hard to know who to go to for advice on a farm environment plan, for instance.

The trust also wants to pave the way for current and future farming by ensuring ECan's land management policy is workable, Gard said.

The farmer-led, member-funded group hopes to eventually represent 350 farmers. It will soon make a submission to ECan at public plan change hearings.