

Freshwater Farm Plans

New Zealand's food production is highly valued and dependent on freshwater. Many farmers, growers, and catchment groups are leading the way in global farming practices, including taking action to clean up waterways and revive wetlands - but there is still some way to go.

To help us get there, new regulations are going to require farms over a certain size to have a certified Freshwater Farm Plan.

What is a Freshwater Farm Plan?

Freshwater farm plans (FWFP) are a part of wider efforts to improve water quality and achieve freshwater outcomes.

Your FWFP will provide a practical way for you to identify, manage, and reduce the impact of farming on local waterways. Actions will be tailored to your farm's physical environment and what's important to your catchment.

Your freshwater farm plan will be:

- Tailored to your unique set of circumstances based on your local catchment, your farm landscape and climate, and your farming system and needs.
- A record of the practical steps you're taking now and are planning to take in the future to improve and/or safeguard freshwater quality in your local catchment.
- A farm planning process that puts the health of the whenua (land) and wai (water) at the centre of your decision making.
- The place to plan for all on-farm freshwater management practices. This includes actions to meet existing regulatory requirements and council rules.

Information from FWFPs required by regional and unitary councils under the regulations will be reported by certifiers and auditors through the secure Integrated National Farm Data Platform. All information held on this password-protected platform will be subject to Privacy Act requirements and protections in the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act.



Who needs a Freshwater Farm Plan?

You will need to have a FWFP if your farming or growing enterprise covers:

- 20 hectares or more in arable or pastoral use
- 5 hectares or more in horticultural use
- 20 hectares or more of combined use.

The land does not need to share a common boundary (be contiguous) to meet the threshold for requiring a plan. Small blocks in the same catchment are also captured.

The FWFP regulations are coming into effect in a location-based phased roll-out and have started with parts of Waikato and Southland. In early 2024, the regulations will apply to parts of Otago, the West Coast, and Manawatu. By the end of 2025, all farms in New Zealand over the size threshold will require one. If you are unsure if you require FWFP, contact your regional or unitary council for advice.

What is the process to develop a fit-for-purpose Freshwater Farm Plan?

A great place to start is to look at your current information, including any existing farm plans and mapping - you might already have a lot of what you need and can build on what you've already done.

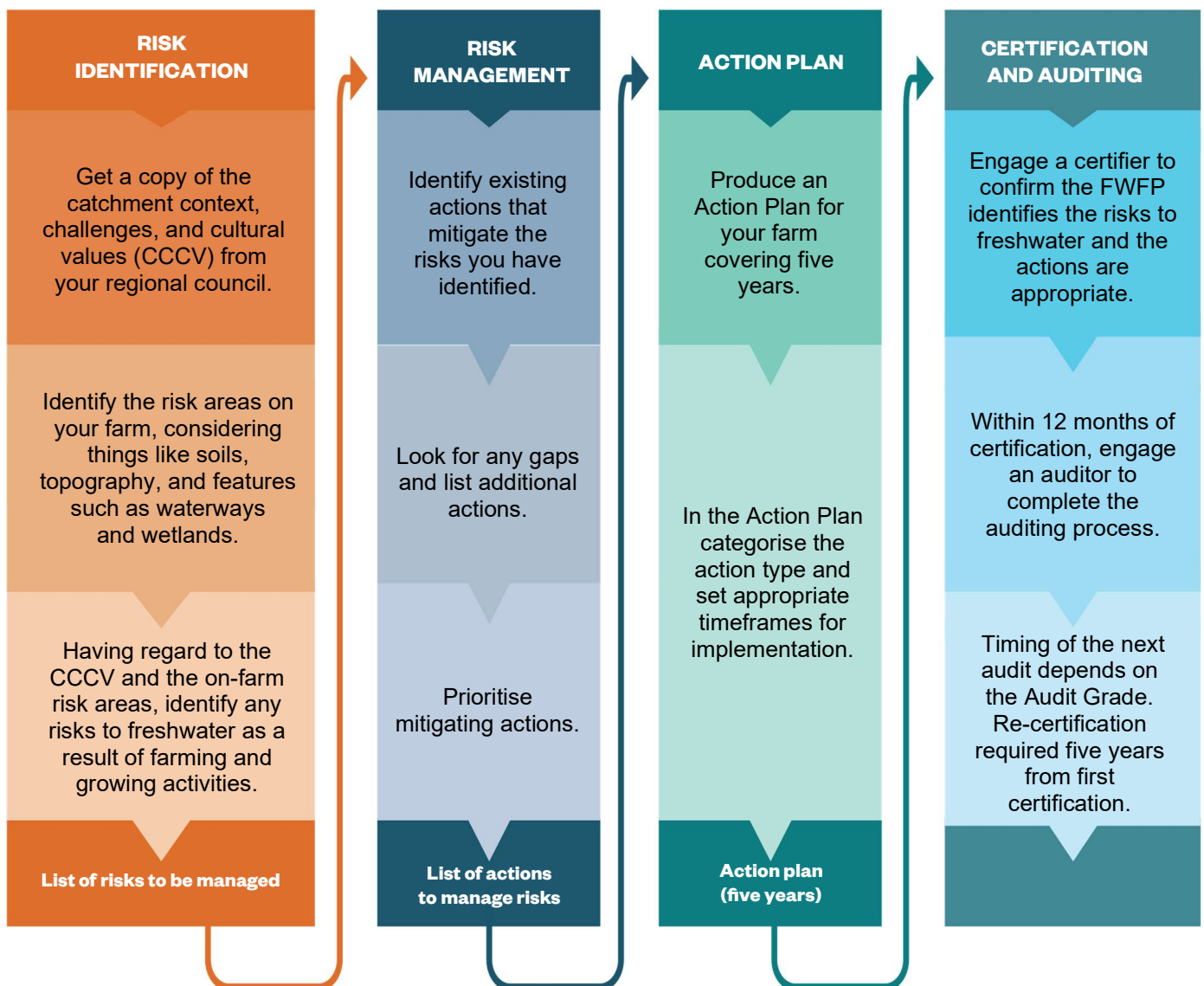
How you format your plan is up to you because when it comes to managing risks on-farm, one size does not fit all. If you'd like a step-by-step guide to follow, check with your industry group or regional council. The FWFP Regulations set out the minimum content requirements for a plan to be certified.

Every FWFP must include administrative details for you and your farm, an on-farm risk identification and assessment, risk management, and an action plan.

Once your Plan is ready, you need to choose a FWFP certifier who will check that everything has been captured and that your FWFP meets the certification requirements. Within 12 months of your FWFP being certified, you need to engage an auditor who will check that the actions you committed to carry out in that timeframe have been undertaken.

THE PROCESS

You can complete the Plan yourself or engage an advisor or certifier to develop it with you.



You can find resources for writing your freshwater farm plan from a variety of sources including:

Your regional/unitary council | Te Uru Kahika – Regional and Unitary Councils Aotearoa | Ministry for the Environment | Ministry for Primary Industries
Your primary industry body | Your milk supply company.

We recommend you read the System Overview Guidance published by the Ministry for the Environment for an overview of FWFPs and information about certification and audit requirements. Link: www.environment.govt.nz/publications/freshwater-farm-plansystem-overview