

BEFORE THE

Waikato Regional Council

IN THE MATTER OF

Healthy Rivers Wai Ora Plan
Change 1 and Variation 1A

STATEMENT OF BENJAMIN NICHOLAS AND LEANNE FAYE GILBERT

19 March 2019

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1. We are Benjamin Nicholas and Leanne Faye Gilbert.
2. We are 5th generation sheep and beef farmers in Oparau.
3. We have a 2 year old son who we would like to have the opportunity to become a 6th generation farmer if he chooses.
4. We have been farming for six years, since returning home from Australia in early 2013.
5. We lease 550ha from Ben's family and have purchased a neighbouring 160ha from Ben's grandmother.
6. The farm is a sheep and beef breeding farm.
7. The stocking ratio fluctuates between these two classes depending on market and climatic conditions.
8. This season we are trying to finish approximately 700 lambs and 50 two year old steers, so we are by no means an intensively farmed operation.
9. We whole-heartedly support the vision of healthy rivers for everyone, however we are very concerned that the plan will not achieve this.
10. With regard to stock exclusion, we agree that intensively farmed, flat land should have waterways fenced off. However, we think FEP's should be used on sheep and beef hill country farms such as our own, to mitigate the nutrient and sediment loss, rather than adopting an overall exclusion of stock from waterbodies. The financial cost to fence the waterways and put in a water reticulation system is impossible for us to achieve.
11. The grand-parenting approach to nitrogen referencing will effectively cripple us financially also. We took over the family farm from people who had been running minimal stock with a no fertiliser policy. There was also back to back droughts during these years. If we were fixed to a stocking rate that was run during these years then we would have no option but to walk away from the farm.
12. We also feel the grand-parenting approach punishes the low emitters and rewards the high emitters. Everybody should be responsible for their own pollution.
13. *Farm Environmental Plans seem like a pivotal step in achieving healthy rivers.* We strongly feel that the land should be farmed according to what the land can handle – and not some arbitrary stocking level obtained during a drought.

14. However we are worried about farmers not having the necessary time or resources to develop an effective FEP and think that the timeline should be amended so that the process isn't rushed. We view this as our one chance to ensure the healthiest waterways are left for future generations and don't feel it is something that should be hurried through.
15. We feel a sub-catchment approach is the only way to ensure a fair reduction in nitrogen emission and other contaminants, with the highest polluters having to do the most to rectify their water quality. We are part of the Hauturu-Oparau Sub-catchment group, and are working with them as part of our ongoing water quality conservation. Currently we regularly drink out of our streams while out on the farm, and are doing all that we can to ensure that this carries on.
16. The survival of our rural community is very much pinned on its economic viability and we ask that a thorough economic analysis be done showing the cost of implementing this plan at a farm level. We are also very concerned the impact the plan, in its current form, will have on the mental health of farmers in our community.
17. In summary, we hold high the vision for healthy rivers and feel it is something we can achieve with well thought out legislation. However we believe that in its current form, this plan will not succeed and in the process destroy many farms, families and communities. Our view is that FEP's and a sub-catchment approach hold the greatest promise to ensuring healthy rivers remain for the next and future generations.