Beef + Lamb New Zealand

Environment Strategy Progress Report

December 2019

Our vision is to be world-leading stewards of the natural environment and sustainable communities
He kaitiakitanga mo te tai ao

In May 2018, Beef + Lamb New Zealand launched its Environment Strategy and Implementation Plan, setting the following goals for the sheep and beef sector:

- **Carbon neutral:** Farmers continue reducing carbon emissions; moving towards a carbon neutral sheep and beef sector by 2050.
- **Thriving biodiversity:** Sheep and beef farms provide habitats that support biodiversity and protect our native species.
- **Cleaner water:** Sheep and beef farmers actively manage their properties to improve freshwater. New Zealanders can gather food from and swim in freshwater surrounding our farms.
- **Healthy productive soils:** Land use is closely matched to soil potential and capability. Farmers are working to improve soil health, carbon content, and productivity, while minimising soil loss.
- **Every farmer to have** and be implementing a Land and Environment Plan by the end of 2021.

Highlights of the environment strategy to date

The focus in our first year has been understanding the environmental footprint of our sector, developing tools to help farmers understand their individual footprint, and start to identify steps they can take to reduce it.

Progress on foundation projects

- Great progress has been made with farm environment planning. We held 72 workshops in 2018-2019 and these were attended by 916 farmers. Over 3,750 farmers have now attended an LEP workshop.
- 49 percent of sheep and beef farmers now have a Farm or Environment plan in place, up from 36 percent in 2017 (Source B+LNZ UMR Quarterly Survey).
- 80 percent of sheep and beef farmers with a Farm or Environment plan are actively implementing their plan.
- We have significantly lifted our support of catchment communities around the country, producing resources to help community groups get started and make rapid progress. In the last year there has been huge momentum across the country with new catchment community groups being set up. We are now supporting about 70 catchment groups nationwide.
- Extensive policy development, engagement and decision making within the organisation and with regional and central government.

CARBON NEUTRAL BY 2050

- We've made good progress in quantifying our sector's emissions and offsets, and encouraging farmers to look at how to integrate trees on their farms. Our sector is already very close to being carbon neutral. We hope to be able to have some metrics on this in early 2020.
- Since 1990, sheep and beef farmers have reduced their absolute greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent.
- Research by the University of Canterbury last year, identified 1.4 million hectares of native forest on sheep and beef farms. The B+LNZ Economic Service also estimates 180,000 hectares of pines on our farms.
- The Auckland University of Technology is doing research to measure the carbon sequestration from these trees, which we believe will take us a long way to being carbon neutral.
- We have developed and launched new "Farms, Trees, and Carbon" workshops to help farmers understand climate change, the Emissions Trading Scheme, on-farm planting, and the One Billion Trees programme. Nine workshops have been held already with 200 farmers attending. Farmers are interested in how they can better integrate trees into their farms for carbon, water and biodiversity benefits.
- We have actively engaged in the Zero Carbon Bill process, making submissions and providing advice to farmers on engaging.
- In partnership with 10 other primary sector organisations, we put forward the Primary Sector Climate Change Commitment, *He Wake Eke Noa* for measuring and managing agricultural emission at the farm level which the government agreed to
- B+LNZ strongly supports the integration of trees on sheep and beef farms, but is concerned about the potential impact mass afforestation could have on rural communities. Recent research that B+LNZ commissioned from BakerAg highlights this risk, illustrating that blanket forestry could reduce in a loss of 1 in 5 jobs from rural communities.

→ Next steps:

- Getting the *He Waka Eke Noa* work programme up and running as quickly as possible.
- We are progressing work on establishing a carbon measurement and certification scheme for sheep and beef farmers.
- Looking for partnerships (including with the One Billion Trees programme) to work with farmers on integrating trees on farms.
- Continuing our Farms, Trees, and Carbon workshops.

THRIVING BIODIVERSITY

- Our focus has been on quantifying the significant stock of biodiversity on our sheep and beef farms.
- The University of Canterbury identified 2.8 million hectares of native vegetation on sheep and beef farms, made up of 1.4 million hectares of native tussock and scrub, and 1.4 million hectares of native forest. This represents 25 percent of total native vegetation in New Zealand.
- The "Farms, Trees, and Carbon" workshops, which identify opportunities for farmers to integrate trees on their farms, has a particular focus on native trees.
- We have been engaging with the government on the development of its National Policy Statement on Biodiversity. We strongly promote biodiversity on sheep and beef farms, but need to ensure that new policies do not disadvantage or discourage those farmers that have already taken steps to protect or enhance their biodiversity.

→ Next steps:

- Working with the University of Canterbury, we are identifying areas of the country where help is needed to improve biodiversity and assist farmers in developing biodiversity plans.
- The University of Canterbury is also undertaking research to understand the changes in biodiversity on farms over the last two decades. This will help inform our work programme.

CLEANER WATER

- B+LNZ's focus is on having clean freshwater surrounding sheep and beef farms where New Zealanders can swim and gather food.
- In 2019 we launched new freshwater workshops to help farmers monitor and improve freshwater quality on farm. Nine workshops have been held so far with over 100 farmers attending.
- We have worked with the Ministry for the Environment on the Freshwater Improvement Fund project, which has seen four new catchment groups formed across New Zealand.
- We have undertaken significant work in the past year to improve winter grazing practices. We updated all our winter grazing resources for farmers (to include advice on what paddock and crop to choose) and developed and launched new winter grazing workshops to help farmers minimise sediment runoff from wintering cattle on crops. We have run major communications campaigns aimed at providing advice on best-practice winter grazing management.
- We have engaged with government on the development of new policies under the Essential Freshwater (EFW) process and our teams have been working around the country on a variety of regional plan processes, such as PC1 in the Waikato.
- B+LNZ supports many of the EFW proposals such as clear science based in-stream environmental bottom lines. We are concerned, however, about grand-parenting provisions that disproportionately impact on the lowest environmental footprint farming systems, and the compliance costs of some proposals far exceed the environmental benefit. With some small, but important changes, we can get there: www.beeflambnz.com/freshwaterconsultation

→ Next steps:

- Continuing work to lift the number of farmers with Land and Environment plans and deliver more freshwater workshops.
- Continuing work to help farmers improve winter grazing practices.
- Supporting the establishment and work of more Catchment Communities and sharing their stories publicly.
- Supporting farmers on engaging in the Essential Freshwater policies and implementation.
- Collecting more information about the good work farmers have been doing across the country to improve water quality, soil and biodiversity and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

HEALTHY PRODUCTIVE SOILS

- As a sector, we're focused on matching land use to land capability, improving soil health and carbon content while minimising soil loss, so we can have a productive sector well into the future.
- We have worked to ensure that healthy soils are integrated into our overall work/projects. Key areas include:
  - Our Hill Country Sustainability project with MBIE has a strong focus on soils and encouraging farmers to adopt regenerative farming systems
  - Ensuring Land and Environment Plan workshops help farmers better understand their soils
  - Focus on sediment management in winter grazing resources.

→ Next steps:

- Continue to integrate healthy soils into our work and help farmers build their understanding of how healthy soils deliver improved outcomes across their businesses.
- Continue with the Hill Country Sustainability Project
- Supporting on-going erosion control work, which also keeps soils healthy – a healthy soil is an un-eroded soil.

Summary of where to from here?

- Working with Catchment Communities to accelerate the uptake of farmers' environment planning.
- Develop further resources to support our Catchment Communities Support Programme. This includes an interactive map of farmer stories and catchment communities to showcase the massive amount of work taking place around the country.
- Running more climate change, winter grazing, trees on farm, and water quality workshops.
- Continue our support for the Pastoral Greenhouse Gas Research Consortium.
- Ongoing advocacy on behalf of farmers to ensure any plan changes and national policy changes are fit-for-purpose and work for both sheep and beef farmers and central/local government.
- Showcase environmental best practice within a high-performance farming operation via B+LNZ's Future Farm – Lanercost.
- Better telling the environmental story of New Zealand's sheep and beef sector – within a global context – to the New Zealand public.
- Continue to engage resources with ministries and sector agencies on developing and improving good farming practices; integrating farm planning; and evolving an industry led quality assurance programme.
- Complete the development of a biodiversity programme, building on our Norton report work, to help our farmers manage and protect biodiversity.