

Dairy farmer news

Pānui Kaipāmu

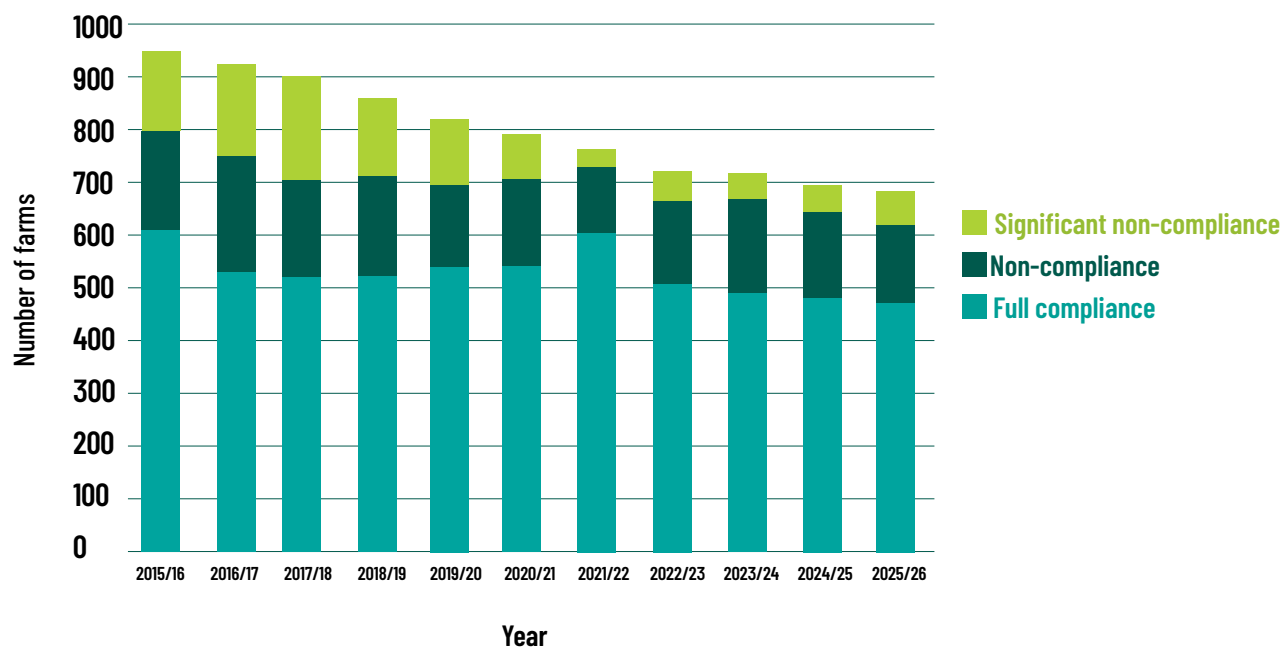


For many Northland dairy farmers, the past season has been one of managing variable weather conditions, day to day operational pressures, and regulatory expectations and changes.

As planning turns toward the next season, maintaining good environmental and waste management practices remains an important part of running an efficient, sustainable, and compliant dairy operation.



Farm dairy effluent compliance (all farms)



Of the 681 farms monitored in 2025/2026, 69.5% were fully compliant, 21.3% were moderately non-compliant, and 9.2% were significantly non-compliant. A slight increase in significant non-compliance highlighted the need to ensure appropriate infrastructure, training, and management are in place, particularly for new irrigation systems. Proactive effluent management and regular routine checks across ponds, pipes, sumps, diversions, irrigators and stockholding areas are critical to prevent or quickly address discharges.



Annual monitoring inspections – text notification option

Last year council introduced a text notification option for FDE inspections. Upon request, council's farm monitoring officer will send a text message when they arrive at the farm to a nominated mobile number.

If you would like to be notified of our FDE Inspectors arrival, please provide a preferred mobile number and your FDE number to **fde@nrc.govt.nz**



Changing regulatory environment

Keeping pace with regulatory changes can be challenging. Council's farm monitoring team can help you navigate regional and national rules. Phone 0800 002 004 or email **fde@nrc.govt.nz**



Illegal burning on farms

During the 2025/2026 monitoring period, we observed several illegal burn piles on farms containing plastics, household waste, aerosol cans, treated timber, filter socks and silage wrap. These materials cannot be burnt in Northland. Only the following are permitted to be burned: untreated wood, paper, cardboard, vegetative matter, and (on production land) animal carcasses and offal. Burning prohibited materials releases toxic substances and may lead to enforcement action.

Refuse disposal

Recycling, collection services, transfer stations and approved disposal services are recommended methods for managing farm waste.

On farm disposal of small amounts (less than 12m³ per year) of household or primary production waste may be permitted without consent if these conditions are met:

- Waste must be generated on the same property
- No industrial waste, hazardous substances, agrichemical containers or dead animals and offal (this is covered under rule C.6.3.4 of the Regional Plan)
- The property must be more than 20km from a council refuse facility
- The disposal sites must be well clear of waterways, bores, neighbouring properties, and the coastal marine area
- There is no stormwater intrusion, wind-blown refuse, or offensive or objectionable odour or dust

See C.6.7.2 of the Regional Plan for Northland for more information

Recommended links:

www.agrecovery.co.nz (recycling of HDPE plastic containers for ag-chem, animal health and dairy hygiene products, and safe collection and disposal agrichemicals)

www.plasback.co.nz (recycling silage wrap, feedbags, bailing twine)

www.northlandwaste.co.nz (locations of transfer stations, general information and collection services)

Agrichemical use (Ground & aerial spraying)

Agrichemical rules can be found under C.6.5.1 of the Regional Plan for Northland. (www.nrc.govt.nz/regionalplan)

For ground-based or aerial spraying, you **must**:

- Notify neighbours (within 50 m for ground spraying, 200 m for aerial spraying)
- Have an annual spray plan in place. A risk assessment must also be completed before spraying
- Take all practicable steps to ensure spray remains within the target area and does not cause adverse effects beyond it
- Follow spray buffer requirements based on wind speed and direction

A spray plan should include:

- A map of nearby sensitive areas (e.g. houses, schools, waterways, roads, crops)
- Areas to be sprayed
- Likely chemicals, application method, and timing
- Measures to minimise spray drift and protect waterways
- A list of neighbours to be notified
- Applicator details and qualifications (e.g. GROWSAFE)

Additional rules may apply if spraying directly into waterways (see rule C.6.5.2)

If a complaint is received, your spray plan and risk assessment may be requested.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.nrc.govt.nz/environment/air/issues/agrichemical-spray/>

Adverse weather events



Northland has faced several recent storm events, increasing pressure on effluent systems and the risk of overflows and runoff. Now is the time to check storage, ensure diversions are working, and assess whether soils can safely absorb irrigation. Reflect on how your system performed in previous events and identify any risks.

When ponds are at or near capacity, extra care is needed to prevent overflows and unauthorised discharges. If irrigation is necessary, use careful, low risk practices, including:

- Only irrigating onto the driest, lowest-risk paddocks. Be aware of paddocks with subsurface drainage, steep slopes, flow paths or flood prone areas
- Apply at low rates, on the fastest speed, for short periods.
- Closely monitor irrigators and stop immediately if excessive ponding or overland flow occurs
- Increase buffer distances from waterways and drains – for example, use a single central pass where paddocks are usually irrigated in two runs
- Avoid irrigation before forecast heavy rain or on saturated or compacted soils

If urgent actions are necessary, notify Council as soon as possible via 0800 002 004 or fde@nrc.govt.nz. Keep records and photos documenting the actions taken, the reasons for them, and how environmental impacts were managed or mitigated.

When things get tough, help is available via the Dairy NZ Farmer Information Service (0800 4324 7969), Rural Support Trust (0800 787 254), Federated Farmers (0800 327 646), Mental Health Support via Need to Talk (text 1737), your vet practice, your milk supply company dairy advisor, or MPI On Farm Support (0800 707 133).

Earthworks

Many farms across Northland are undertaking earthworks for new or existing effluent ponds, water storage dams, tracks, stockholding areas and other farm infrastructure.

Earthworks are managed under Rule C.8.3.1 of the Regional Plan for Northland. Some activities may require a resource consent.

Key considerations include:

- Whether works meet the area and volume thresholds, with stricter limits near waterways, wetlands, flood hazard areas, erosion prone land, and coastal areas
- Using effective erosion and sediment controls to prevent runoff entering waterways
- Stabilising exposed earth to minimise erosion and slope failure
- Avoiding increased flood risk, runoff to neighbouring properties, or land instability
- Notifying council in advance of earthworks in flood hazard areas

Ensure any new ponds are constructed well away from waterways and flood areas.

Check that your activity is permitted or requires consent. For advice, contact Council's consents duty planner on 0800 002 004. The regional plan can be found in its entirety at www.nrc.govt.nz/regionalplan



Silage storage areas

Council has been working with a number of farms to improve compliance at silage storage areas and reduce the risk of leachate entering waterways.

We would like to thank those farmers we have worked with so far for their cooperation and efforts to achieve compliance.

We will continue to review silage storage areas as part of our monitoring programme and will be in contact where any issues are identified.

If you are unsure whether your silage storage area meets requirements, we encourage you to get in touch – we are here to help.

Stockholding areas



This monitoring season, we will be assessing any non-consented stockholding areas on dairy farms against the requirements of the

Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) Regulations 2020 (NES-FW).

During inspections, we will check whether the activity meets permitted activity conditions under the NES-FW, including:

- A sealed base that meets the required permeability standard (1×10^{-9} m/s)

- Effluent is collected, stored, and disposed of in line with regional rules or a resource consent
- The area is located at least 50 m from any waterbody, drain, water abstraction bore, and the coastal marine area

Where needed, we will work with you on practical compliance solutions. This may include:

- Making improvements or modifications (council always recommends seeking expert advice prior to any changes)
- Applying for a deemed permitted activity (where non-compliance is marginal)
- Applying for a resource consent

Our aim is to support farmers to understand the requirements, and to find workable solutions that protect the environment, while remaining practical on-farm.

Nitrogen reporting

A reminder that under the National Environmental Standards for Freshwater (NES-FW), dairy farmers must provide records of synthetic nitrogen fertiliser use each year. This year, records should cover the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026, with records due by 31 July 2026.

Farmers can supply their nitrogen records using one of the following approved tools:

- Ravensdown's HawkEye app
- Ballance's MyBallance app
- The national N Cap webform (n-cap.teurukahika.govt.nz/)

Farmers are encouraged to keep fertiliser records up to date throughout the season to ensure timely and accurate reporting by the July deadline.

If you have any questions about nitrogen reporting, please contact NRC at ncap@nrc.govt.nz or visit our website <https://www.nrc.govt.nz/environment/farm-management/synthetic-nitrogen-fertiliser-use/>

Emptying ponds prior to winter

Having farm dairy wastewater ponds at or near empty before winter helps reduce environmental and compliance risk, and is required under the permitted activity rules (C.6.3.1(7)(b)) and for most farms operating under resource consents.

Going into winter with full or near full ponds leaves little room to manage wet weather, increased rainfall, or system breakdowns.

By emptying ponds in late summer or autumn:

- You create critical storage capacity for wetter months
- You reduce the risk of unauthorised discharges as a result of ponds overflowing or from land application during unsuitable ground conditions
- You maximise nutrient use during better soil and pasture conditions
- You reduce pressure on staff and systems during winter

Lisa McColl

lislam@nrc.govt.nz
027 331 1562

Marc Alkema

marca@nrc.govt.nz
027 262 8126

Megan Evans

megane@nrc.govt.nz
027 245 3846

Moss Cao

mosscc@nrc.govt.nz
027 369 2683