

# WATER MANAGEMENT POLICY

## Water Restrictions – Above Dam Irrigators

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## PURPOSE OF POLICY

This policy describes the policy for company imposed restrictions on use of water for irrigation during dry seasons when catchment and lake storage conditions are critically low.

The purpose of the policy is to ensure that different water availability conditions experienced by those shareholders who do not benefit from augmentation directly from the dam are recognised when water restriction regimes are implemented.

This policy is intended to provide balance and fairness across all Opuha Water Ltd (OWL) shareholders.

## APPLICATION

This policy applies to OWL shareholders and irrigators whose water takes are not directly augmented by released from the Opuha Dam. These groups of shareholders are generally referred to as 'Above Dam' irrigators.

It is intended that this policy will be trialed for two seasons.

This policy is intended to be consistent with the terms and conditions of the Water Supply Agreement that applies to all OWL shareholders.

## DEFINITIONS

<i>Above Dam irrigators</i>	Those OWL shareholder irrigators whose water takes are not directly augmented by releases of stored water from the Opuha Dam. This covers the groups of irrigators who take water from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The inflowing tributaries of the Opuha Dam of which the main water sources are the South Opuha and North Opuha Rivers and the Ribbonwood and Station Streams.</li><li>• The Opihi River and its tributary creeks and streams above the confluence with the Opuha at Raincliff</li><li>• The Te Ngawai River</li></ul>
<i>ORRP</i>	The Opihi River Regional Plan (2000)
<i>OEFRAG</i>	The Opuha Environmental Flow Release Advisory Group. The entity established under the ORRP to provide advice and recommendations to the Regional Council on temporary variations to the releases from the Opuha Dam and the minimum flow requirements, under the ORRP, in the Opihi River. The composition of OEFRAG includes representatives of Timaru and MacKenzie District Councils, Arowhenua, Forest and Bird/DoC/Fish & Game, farmers and OWL.
<i>WSD</i>	Water Shortage Direction. The mechanism by which ECan can enable water users to temporarily operate outside of the conditions prescribed in their resource consents. A WSD is issued by ECan for a maximum of two weeks and specifies the revised conditions that are

applicable during this period. Typically the WSD specifies revised minimum river flows and limits on water takes.

## **POLICY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The ORRP prescribes the operating ‘rules’ for the Opuha Dam in relation to the flows to be maintained downstream in the Opihi River at Saleyards Bridge. The minimum flow requirements are different for each month of the year. Included in the ‘rules’ are provisions for the minimum river flows to be reduced if the storage level of the Opuha Dam reaches critically low levels. Under the ORRP, the OEFRAG group are mandated to make recommendations to the Regional Council (ECan) on variations to the minimum flow regime. While this mandate was originally aimed mainly at the transition of monthly flows and for flushing flow releases, OEFRAG has established a wider mandate that includes recommendations for management of dry seasonal/drought conditions. The recommendations of OEFRAG are typically implemented by ECan through the issue of a WSD that will prescribe a modified river flow limit to be maintained by releases from the Opuha Dam and may or may not prescribe restrictions to the consented water takes affiliated to OWL and for other water users including the Timaru District Council.

Water restrictions recommended by OEFRAG for OWL irrigators had typically been made on a blanket basis with the same restrictions applying to all OWL shareholders. On the basis of experience gained by the OEFRAG members through the dry seasons of 2014/15 and 2015/16, different restriction regimes were sometimes recommended by OWL for Above Dam irrigators as compared with those below the dam. As well as this differentiation by OEFRAG, OWL has also sought to self-manage the restriction regime across all its shareholders to achieve required water savings rather than having the restrictions prescribed within a WSD which then becomes mandatory for all consent holders and shareholders.

All OWL irrigators operate under consents that are subject to constraints based on Dam storage levels and minimum flows in the Opihi River at Saleyards Bridge. In addition to these constraints, the Above Dam irrigators’ consents have additional constraints based on the minimum flows of their specific river/stream (that are not augmented by dam releases). Historically these minimum flow constraints on the unaugmented rivers and streams have resulted in restrictions for the Above Dam irrigators in most seasons. The historical reliability of irrigation water supply to the Above Dam irrigators is less than that of the irrigators below dam.

It is the view of the OWL Board, that this inherent discrepancy in reliability experienced by Above Dam irrigators and the inability of these irrigators to get direct benefit from the dam storage and from any water savings during dry seasons, should be recognised when water restrictions are imposed during dry seasons.

### **1.2 Policy Requirements**

#### **1.2.1 General**

1. Where OWL retains the discretion on the implementation of water restrictions across its shareholder irrigators, *Above Dam* irrigators will not be subject to OWL imposed restrictions that are intended to preserve dam storage for irrigation.
2. OWL will advocate for this differentiation in the OEFRAG forum.

3. Where lake storage levels become critical such as to threaten the ability to maintain minimum river flows below dam, Above Dam irrigators will be subject to restrictions.
4. The OWL Board retains the discretion to impose restrictions on Above Dam irrigators where, in the opinion of the OWL Directors, the conditions within a season require such restrictions so as to provide a reasonable fairness of water use across all its shareholders. In this context, the Board may apply different restriction regimes across the three different groups within the Above Dam irrigators.
5. The OWL Board and/or management will consult with representatives of Above Dam irrigators during a season where water restrictions are likely and before any restrictions are imposed on Above Dam irrigators.

### **1.2.2 Consents and Regional Plans**

1. Above Dam irrigators will always be subject to the conditions of their resource consents.
2. OWL will advocate on behalf of Above Dam shareholders and in relation to their inherent reduced reliability, during any review of existing consents or Regional Plans and in the development of any new regional water management plans.

### **1.3 Review of Policy**

1. It is intended that this policy will be trialled for two seasons after which time it will be reviewed.
2. The OWL Board retains the right to review this policy in the interim period, if it deems a review or change is required.
3. OWL will consult with representatives of Above Dam irrigators as part of any review of this policy.