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# **An evaluation of the Land and Environment Planning toolkit for advancing soil and nutrient management in hill country and steepland farm systems**

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## Abstract

The Land and Environment Planning toolkit recently re-launched (December 2012) by Beef + Lamb NZ is a package developed to assist the sector with resource and business planning. The toolkit has three levels, from an introductory (Level 1) through to more advanced Levels 2 and 3, each providing a step-by-step guide to assess farmers' with on-farm land and environment issues and includes a framework to address the management of these issues. To date the evaluation of the toolkit has been very limited. It has not been critiqued as a tool for advancing sustainable nutrient management. In this study a multi-disciplinary approach was taken using both quantitative and qualitative methods, including a case study and interactive workshops, to determine the utility and value of each of the three levels of the Beef + Lamb NZ Land and Environment Planning Toolkit (LEP) for advancing nutrient management.

The research included a case study (farm interview) and interactive workshops, to determine the utility and efficacy of each of the three levels of the LEP toolkit and whether they progressively add the elements, flexibility and rigour necessary to address the current and future drivers that will shape sustainable nutrient management (SNM) for hill country and stepland farm systems. Primary data was collected during the fieldwork and interviews on the case farm, and during the LEP workshop meetings and immediately following through interviews. Data was analysed separately against each of the three key drivers identified in the literature review (freedom to operate, nutrient use efficiency and ability to demonstrate sustainability) using a framework developed as part of the study. Data collected as part of the analysis of the utility of each level of the toolkit was coded and grouped according to the degree the information obtained assisted in addressing the elements identified in each of the three driver identified for advancing soil nutrient management.

The research findings concluded that the introductory (1a and 1b) levels of the toolkit proved useful as a desktop investigation that allowed the identification of factors influencing environmental issues, but offered little assistance in developing tailored solutions. The research findings recommend that Level 1 is used as an introductory package, with a pathway to Level 2 built into the initial conversation. Levels 2 and 3 proved more useful in advancing nutrient management by assisting with resource mapping and planning, but it was Level 3 that provided the most utility for addressing all the drivers of sustainable nutrient management (i.e. Freedom to operate, nutrient use efficiency and demonstrated sustainability). This was largely through the use of a highly detailed and comprehensive analysis and review of the farm's resources, nutrient budgets, strengths and weakness analysis for the LUC classes identified for the farm and greater level of interaction between the farmer and the land use experts. Although it was highlighted that the Level 3 evaluation might not be comprehensive enough to achieve further growth or deal with the issues at hand, further investigation into the land resources and the linkages between nutrients and the landscape is required. The findings of this research will give an indication of the utility of the toolkit,

and identify, if necessary where modifications can be made to improve utility and reporting, not just for the farmer but also for the Sheep and Beef sector.

The findings from this research also supported the use of the LEP toolkit as a stepwise approach, and find that any programme (LEP Level 1, 2 and 3) needs to be simple enough for the lower end of farmers to buy in and not be intimidated, whilst providing a framework for a natural progression of stages for the farmers to continually improve through the completion for each level of the toolkit, as well as a final level that has sufficient rigour to produce a robust defensible nutrient management tool.

Several recommendations for the future development for the LEP toolkit are made. Investigate the possibility of combining Level 1 (1a and 1b) with Level 2 as a single exercise. Within the same workshop, Level 1 would be used as an introductory step to the completion of the Level 2 farm plan. Greater integration of the Level 3 with other farm planning tools has the potential to extract greater value from the information collected and analysis as part of the process of developing the plan, but also the opportunity to better integrate resource management into the business planning cycle. An integrated farm planning tool would increase the utility of the toolkit by allowing the SNM issues to be considered alongside all the other drivers influencing the business. The addition of these proposed modifications for the toolkit would not only be of benefit for the farmer undertaking the LEP toolkit evaluation but also for continuing to extend the overall knowledge of the industry and Sheep and Beef sector as we move into a more environmentally aware and agriculturally sustainable future.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures .....	vii
List of Tables.....	viii
List of Acronyms.....	ix
Chapter One Introduction .....	1
1. Research aim and objectives .....	2
2. Significance of research .....	2
3. Structural overview.....	2
Chapter Two Literature review .....	5
1. Background.....	5
2. Drivers for advancing soil and nutrient management.....	7
2.1 Freedom to operate .....	7
2.2 Nutrient use efficiency.....	16
2.3 Demonstrated sustainability.....	31
3. Current tools available to the Sheep and Beef sector .....	37
3.1 Land and Environment Planning toolkit.....	43
4. Summary.....	45
4.1 Freedom to operate .....	45
4.2 Nutrient use efficiency.....	46
4.3 Demonstrated sustainability.....	47
4.4 Current tools available to New Zealand Sheep and Beef farmers .....	47
Chapter Three Research design .....	49
1. Introduction .....	49
2. Qualitative research design .....	49
3. Case study farm: Springvale Station .....	50
3.1 Stepwise evaluation of the Land and Environment Planning tool kit.....	59
3.2 Data collection .....	67
3.3 Analysis .....	67
4. Land and environment planning workshops .....	70
4.1 Description .....	70
4.2 Data collection .....	70
4.3 Analysis .....	70
Chapter Four Findings .....	71
1. Case study farm interviews .....	71
1.1 Level 1 Evaluation .....	71



1.2 Level 2 Evaluation .....	75
1.3 Level 3 Evaluation .....	80
2. Beef + Lamb NZ Workshops.....	82
3. Evaluating against drivers for advancing SNM.....	84
3.1 Freedom to operate .....	84
3.2 Nutrient use efficiency .....	84
3.3 Demonstrated sustainability .....	90
4.4 Summary of LEP Workshop .....	90
Chapter Five Discussion.....	93
1. Introduction .....	93
2. Current status of the Land and Environment Planning toolkit.....	93
2.1 Freedom to operate .....	94
2.2 Nutrient use efficiency .....	95
2.3 Demonstrated sustainability .....	97
3. Workshops .....	99
4. Utilisation of the LEP toolkit.....	99
5. Evaluation of the toolkit .....	101
5.1 Level 1.....	101
5.2 Level 2.....	101
5.3 Level 3.....	102
6. Looking to the future.....	105
6.1 Meeting the criteria.....	105
6.2 Greater linkages between the landscape and nutrients .....	105
6.3 Integration of the level 3 into other farm planning tools.....	106
6.4 Identification of land for future opportunities.....	108
7. Limitations of the research.....	109
Summary & Conclusions.....	111
Chapter Six References.....	117
Chapter Seven Appendices .....	127

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 2.1</b> The main drivers for advancing soil and nutrient management practices highlighted in this research. ....	7
<b>Figure 2.2</b> Relationship between government and regional authorities in addressing soil and nutrient management responsibilities.....	8
<b>Figure 2.3</b> Schematic representation of the P cycle within a legume-based pastoral system.....	18
<b>Figure 2.4</b> Schematic representation of the nitrogen cycle within legume-based pastures.....	22
<b>Figure 2.5</b> Nutrient transfer loss and uneven re-distribution back to the paddock as affected by the topography in hill country and stepland landscapes.....	24
<b>Figure 2.6</b> Relationship between Social, Economic and Environmental perspectives and sustainable development. ....	31
<b>Figure 2.7</b> The general trend of increasing knowledge and complexity of soil and nutrient management tools available to the New Zealand Sheep and Beef sector. ....	37
<b>Figure 3.1</b> Location of the case study farm Springvale Station. ....	50
<b>Figure 3.2</b> Local geology of the case study farm Springvale Station.....	52
<b>Figure 3.3</b> Land Use Capability classes present on Springvale Station.....	53
<b>Figure 3.4</b> Springvale Stations paddock layout (2012) .....	56
<b>Figure 3.5</b> : Current fertiliser policy for the Springvale Station over the last 12 months (2011/2012) .....	57
<b>Figure 3.6</b> Outline of steps taken for Level 1 evaluation.....	59
<b>Figure 3.7</b> Outline of the steps taken for level 2 evaluation. ....	61
<b>Figure 3.8</b> Outline of the steps taken for level 3 evaluation. ....	64
<b>Figure 4.1</b> Land and Environment Planning toolkit - Level 1a: Springvale Station's perceived environmental issues and main production land units.....	72
<b>Figure 4.2</b> Assessment of Springvale farms Nitrogen loss risk - Land and Environment Planning toolkit - Level 1b Water quality. ....	73
<b>Figure 4.3</b> Assessment of Springvale farms phosphorus and faecal bacteria loss risk to water - Land and Environment Planning toolkit - Level 1b Water quality. ....	74
<b>Figure 4.4</b> Assessment of Springvale farms un-realized potential productive capability - Land and Environment Planning toolkit - Level 1b Productive Capability. ....	74
<b>Figure 4.5</b> Whole farm overseer nutrient budget for Springvale Station (OVERSEER™ 6.0). ....	76
<b>Figure 5.1</b> Status of the Land and Environment Planning toolkit (levels 1-3) in relation to addressing all the drivers for advancing sustainable nutrient management.....	94
<b>Figure 5.2</b> Differences observed between level 1, 2 and 3 of the LEP toolkit in their ability to address nutrient use efficiency issues for hill country and stepland farm systems. (The scale 0-6 and sequence of issues are based upon the order of issues in Table 4.8). ....	96
<b>Figure 5.3</b> Proposed improvement of the Land and Environment Planning toolkit as a more integrative nutrient management tool.....	107

## List of Tables

<b>Table 2.1</b> Cumulative N leaching maximum by Land Use Capability (LUC) class .....	12
<b>Table 2.2</b> Average N fertiliser use according to dominant land use.....	21
<b>Table 2.3</b> Various market based approaches present in the Sheep and Beef sector of today's markets.....	33
<b>Table 2.4</b> Description of the Industry codes of Practice of the New Zealand Sheep and Beef sector.....	36
<b>Table 2.5</b> : A snapshot of some of the industry and Regional Councils approaches and initiatives that are relevant to soil and nutrient management in hill country and steep-land farm systems (Sheep and Beef sector).....	40
<b>Table 2.6</b> Brief description of what is required at each level of the LEP toolkit.....	44
<b>Table 3.1</b> A selection of the suite of LUC present at 1:6,500 scale for the landscapes of Springvale Station.....	54
<b>Table 3.2</b> Stock resource evaluation June 2011 .....	54
<b>Table 3.3</b> Fertiliser policy Springvale Station (2011/2012).....	58
<b>Table 3.4</b> Details of fieldwork carried out 14th-17th May 2012.....	65
<b>Table 3.5</b> Description of the YES/NO codes used to define the level of information given for determining the farm's freedom to operate for each level of the Land and Environment Planning toolkit.....	68
<b>Table 3.6</b> Description of the codes used to define the level of information given for addressing soil and nutrient management issues for each level of the Land and Environment Planning toolkit.....	68
<b>Table 3.7</b> Description of the tick code used to define the level of information given for determining the farm's ability to demonstrate sustainability for each level of the Land and Environment Planning toolkit.....	69
<b>Table 4.1</b> A description of the key attributes and typical land use for each production unit on Springvale Station.....	73
<b>Table 4.2</b> Springvale Station's response plan designed after completion of Level 1 of the Land and Environment Planning toolkit.....	75
<b>Table 4.3</b> Cumulative N leaching maximum by Land Use Capability (LUC) class for Springvale Station.....	77
<b>Table 4.4</b> Strength and weakness resource management chart for the land management units on Springvale farm.....	78
<b>Table 4.5</b> Springvale Station's response plan designed after completion of Land and Environment Planning toolkit - Level 2 .....	79
<b>Table 4.6</b> Environmental works and monitoring programme recommended for the Springvale farm over the next five years.....	82
<b>Table 4.7</b> A simple assessment of the three levels in relation to the information gained throughout the process to satisfy as evidence of compliance at both the National and Regional level for a selection of rules and regulations related to soil and nutrient management practices.....	86
<b>Table 4.8</b> Assessment of the three levels in relation to addressing soil and nutrient management issues on Springvale Station .....	87

<b>Table 4.9</b> Comparison of Land and Environment Planning toolkit levels against criteria required for an Environmental Management System (EMS) using a simple YES/NO technique:.....	90
<b>Table 5.1</b> A list of the audit status of Environmental Management systems available to hill-country sheep and beef farmers. ....	98
<b>Table 5.2</b> Strengths and weaknesses of the Land Environment Planning toolkit at a technical and practical level against the three main drivers.....	103

## List of Acronyms

BMP – Best Management Practices
BNF – Biological Nitrogen Fixation
DM – Dry matter (per hectare)
EMS – Environmental Management systems
FARMS – Farmer Applied Resource Management Strategies
FCPNM – Fertiliser Code of Practice for Nutrient Management
FDE – Farm Dairy Effluent
GAP – Good Agricultural Practices
HEL – Highly Erodible Land
HRC – Horizons Regional Council
LEP – Land and Environment Planning tool kit
LMU – Land Management Unit
LUC – Land Use Capability
MAF – Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
MfE – Ministry for the Environment
MPC – Maximum Permissible Concentration
MPI – Ministry for Primary Industries
NMP – Nutrient Management Plan
NPS – National Policy Statements
NZFLRC – New Zealand Fertiliser and Lime Research Centre
NZFSA – New Zealand Food Safety Association
NZLRI – New Zealand Land and Resource Inventory
OnePlan – Horizons Regional Council one plan document
PCE – Parliamentary Commission for the Environment
POP – Proposed OnePlan
PSWP – Primary Sector Water Partnership
RC – Regional Council
RMA – Resource Management Act (1991)
SLUI – Sustainable land Use Initiative
SNM – Soil and Nutrient Management
SUBS – Sustainable Land use Underpinning Business Success
SWOT – Strengths and Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis
WFP – Whole Farm Plan
WRC – Waikato Regional Council