What will Regional Councils need to do?

NZ Agriculture Climate Change Conference
8 April 2019
Regional councils have their genesis in catchment boards.

1941 Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act

Act’s origin was extreme weather events exposing the vulnerabilities of NZ land use in geological young and rapidly transformed landscapes.
The contemporary context for RCs

- Regional councils already manage the relationship between the climate/weather and land-use/communities.
- Land-use regulation for water quality: biggest reforms since RMA, step up in regulation and on-farm assistance.
- Water allocation, now with limits across the board and security of supply impacts on existing investments.
- Flood protection and drainage; levels of protection likely to be insufficient, limited community awareness.
- Civil Defence and Emergency Management; focus on community resilience and hazard risk reduction.
- Biodiversity, increasing focus from pest control to wider ecosystem interactions and restoration.
The challenges

- Lots to do: how to allocate resources, building capability and capacity in tight market, finding synergies in work
- Freshwater and climate policy closely interconnected
- Nitrogen and nitrous oxide, ruminants and contaminants
- Sediment the biggest driver of degraded water quality in much of North Island; 1m+ hectares
- Sediment pulses from extreme weather events expected to increase in frequency and intensity, accelerating effects
- Risks to infrastructure and communities
- Fast moving land-use and changing natural resource base, low planning agility and litigious RMA decision-making
- New biosecurity incursions and changing biology
The opportunities

- Alignment in sweet spot of water quality, habitat restoration, soil conservation and climate resilience
- Step change in engagement with land managers on the ground, at scale and at pace: largely NPSFM driven
- Integrated catchment management: incorporate climate futures and biophysical system resilience in engagement
- Farm management plans: opportunity to identify climate change risks and mitigation pathways, win-wins
- Afforestation of erosion prone land, including spaced
- Riparian management to minimise stream bank erosion
- Diversification of production, new pastures, crops, trees
- Farm and community scale water storage
Capability our common challenge

- Understand at finer scale the nature of climate change impacts and their potential timing: Deep South NSC
- More farm management tools and innovation in production systems to cope with change
- Scale up and upskill the existing advisory workforce to support those making decisions on the land
- Build land manager capability to plan and adapt
- Increased trust and confidence in government and its agents as being there to support land managers
- Increased system coordination between industry, government and the research community
- Cohesive plan for supporting the evolution of land use in NZ that creates prosperous and resilient pathways