

Frequently-asked questions – environmental

Q: *What is the NOIC Scheme?*

A: The NOIC scheme pumps water from the Waitaki River up to a head pond near Ngapara. The water is then gravity fed into the North Otago Downlands area, including the Kakanui and Waiareka valleys. Pressurised water is delivered to the farm gate via NOIC's piped network.

Some water is also discharged into the Waiareka Creek near Pig Island Road. This water is abstracted by irrigators further down the Waiareka Creek.

NOIC currently has over 170 shareholders and the infrastructure to deliver just over 8 cumecs of water which will irrigate approximately 25,000 ha within a command area of 64,000 ha.

Q: *I understand NOIC has a resource consent that says irrigators must have zero run-off?*

A: NOIC's resource consent states that NOIC shareholders '...shall take all practical steps to ensure ...irrigation shall not cause surface run-off.'

Q: *What is run-off?*

A: Run-off is defined as irrigation water moving across the surface of the ground.

Q: *Why is preventing run-off important?*

A: Because excess water can carry nutrients off the land and into the waterways causing poor water quality. Excess water is also wasteful and expensive.

Q: *How does NOIC check whether irrigators are complying with this condition?*

A: Primarily through the implementation of an Environment Farm Plan (EFP) system. At least one-third of our farms are audited every year to ensure they are implementing the best practices detailed in their farm plans.

To prevent run-off, we are most interested in irrigation management. If a farm receives a low grade in their audit they are required to enter an Action Plan Process to address the issues raised and are then re-audited. Even those farms receiving high grades must act on the recommendations made as a result of the independent audit.

In addition to the EFP audit process, NOIC also undertakes weekly unscheduled compliance checks. Complaints received from the public or other shareholders are also an important mechanism for identifying and addressing issues. All complaints will be dealt with through NOIC's complaint management process.

Q: *So, what are the practical steps to prevent run-off?*

A: NOIC has developed a Run-off Management and Mitigation Policy that details the practical steps that NOIC expects will address run-off issues. This policy focuses on preventing run-off from occurring through appropriate system design and correct irrigation scheduling practices.

Where problems are identified, NOIC will work closely with shareholders to ensure best-practice irrigation management is in place. NOIC also recognises that as there is now more water in the system than there was prior to irrigation. This means there is now less space for rainwater in the soil profile and the aquifer is now recharged, causing springs to flow. This water must be appropriately managed to prevent damage to neighbouring properties. NOIC will facilitate this process, but NOIC itself will not pay for works to be carried out.

NOIC firmly believes that neighbour communication is essential to resolving these issues. If necessary, NOIC will involve the Otago Regional Council in these negotiations to ensure a fair and open process. The affected parties are responsible for ensuring that any obligations under the Resource Management Act are met.

Q: *Has Otago Regional Council been involved in this before?*

A: Yes. NOIC has worked closely with Otago Regional Council to develop our run-off policy and they have been involved in negotiating drainage agreements between neighbours.

Q: *Does NOIC have any ability to control irrigators?*

A: Yes, NOIC has an enforcement process and we will turn-off or restrict water to irrigators who are not meeting the required environmental standards; however, that is not our preferred option.

Q: *Has NOIC ever turned off a shareholder for poor performance?*

A: Yes.

Q: *Can NOIC shareholders irrigate in winter?*

A: No. The irrigation season runs for nine months from 1st September to the 31st May. Outside of this period it is not possible to irrigate with NOIC water. Most irrigators don't irrigate in September or May in most years.

Q: *How does NOIC address leaks?*

A: NOIC has a Leak Investigation Process that we follow to identify and repair any leaks. Shareholders are responsible for installing and maintaining their own on-farm infrastructure and must take all practical steps to investigate and repair leaks. If NOIC does not believe that practical steps have been taken, we may take enforcement action. NOIC itself will not undertake to investigate and repair leaks to a shareholder's own on-farm irrigation infrastructure and has no authority to do so.

Q: *Can NOIC access its shareholder's land?*

A: Under the terms of our Water Supply Agreements, NOIC has the right to access our own irrigation infrastructure located on a shareholder's land. NOIC does not have the right to access a shareholder's land for other purposes.

Q: *What else are you doing about environmental performance?*

A: Environmental Leadership is a key strategic objective of NOIC and we invest annually in an environmental improvement plan to promote continuous improvement.

Some of the components that we have invested in include:

NOIC invites Iwi to take part in Farm Plan Audits and has an agreement with Te Rūnanga o Moeraki to ensure a good working relationship.

NOIC provides on-going education to shareholders through field-days, training, through our Facebook page and newsletters.

NOIC was the inaugural investor and continues to invest in the North Otago Sustainable Land Management group that invites farmers to talk to farmers about best practice and the health of their water-ways.

NOIC is working with irrigation designers to improve system designs.

NOIC is working with Otago Regional Council on water quality in the Kakanui catchment as part of a Memorandum of Understanding to work together with open and honest communication to address any challenges in the Kakanui environment.

NOIC facilitated the setting up of the Landcare Trust led Kakanui Community Catchment Project.

NOIC has an incentive programme to reward good environmental performers. We also have an innovation award as we want to encourage our shareholders to take action and learn about their environment.

NOIC has an annual scholarship available for local people wanting to begin a career in environmental studies.

North Otago Irrigation Company Ltd

Office 1st Floor, 149 Thames Street, Oamaru, New Zealand 9400 | Postal PO Box 216, Oamaru 9444
Email office@noic.co.nz | Phone 03 433 1201 | Web www.noic.co.nz

