

Position Statement:

Regional Water Restrictions

Date: February 2024

Organisation: New Zealand Plant Producers Incorporated (NZPPI)

BACKGROUND

Plant producers and garden retailers are concerned about the increasing frequency and impacts of regional water restrictions on the environment, communities, and our industry.

Water restrictions often target plant nurseries and gardening creating uncertainty about access to water and discouraging gardening and planting projects.

Our industry is asking water suppliers and Councils to develop policies and communication strategies related to water restrictions that are effective, equitable and that minimise unnecessary impacts.

NZ Plant Producers has developed an industry Code of Practice for Sustainable Water Use that will support the adoption of good practice in water management.

Introduction:

New Zealand Plant Producers Incorporated (NZPPI), as the peak body for plant nurseries in New Zealand, acknowledges the vital role that plants play in enhancing our environment and sustaining communities. The plant production sector, including horticulture, greenlife and afforestation, contributes approximately \$500 million annually to the New Zealand economy and employing around 4,000 people in skilled, regional jobs.

A supply of healthy plants is critical for the success of New Zealand's food production, ecology, climate change adaptation and thriving communities. Plant production underpins a number of environmental and community goals including for food security, urban greenlife and gardening, native afforestation and climate change adaptation.

Water Restrictions – Policies & Communication

Seasonal water restrictions are a policy tool used by water suppliers and Councils to manage and conserve water resources during periods of scarcity from droughts or due to constraints on water infrastructure.

We believe that current policies and communications related to water conservation

unfairly target plant nurseries and gardening, often requiring few changes from other industries and domestic uses.

Communications and media coverage commonly focus on problems with water use in nurseries and gardening, sending a signal that these activities are of low value and can be sacrificed.

1. Equitable Water Restriction Policies & Communications:

We recommend that water restriction policies and communication strategies adopt an equitable approach, avoiding the key focus on plants and gardening. Restrictions and communications should prioritise water conservation strategies across a wider range of industries and domestic uses beyond plants and gardening.

Plant nurseries and gardening are efficient and valuable uses of water.

Modern irrigation technology and practices enables the precise placement and timing of water application in plant nurseries and home gardens. This means that meaning that targeting them with restrictions will result in only small regional savings.

Modern nurseries and garden centres often have water storage capacity and technology for the efficient use and precise placement of water,

Fixed irrigation systems in nurseries and garden centres remain the most efficient water delivery systems and should be encouraged over hand watering. Similarly, modern domestic hand-held watering equipment for gardening enables the precise control and placement of water, minimising waste.

2. Efficiency of modern irrigation and watering systems:

Restrictions that are focussed on plants and gardening will deliver only small reductions in water use, regionally. Modern irrigation and watering equipment ensures water is precisely delivered to plants with minimal waste. This precision in water application means that restrictions on these activities will yield minimal regional water savings. We advocate for policies that focuses on areas of water use with greater potential savings rather than penalising already efficient practices.

Protecting plants for food security and the environment:

An increasing number of households and communities in New Zealand rely on home and community gardens as part of their food security. This is particularly true as families face the current cost-of-living crisis. Our research shows that vulnerable households and community groups generally purchase seedlings from garden centres.

3. Protecting food security

Policies and restrictions should explicitly support the cultivation of food plants and food security, including specific exemptions for watering fruit and vegetable plants at all but the most severe restriction levels.

Recently planted trees, shrubs and annual / perennials require water for their survival. Councils often sacrifice newly planted shrubs and trees in parks and gardens, at a significant financial cost and loss of the future environmental benefits.

4. Survival water

Policies and restrictions should explicitly allow 'survival water' to sustain long lived shrubs and trees that are at risk.

Business & employment impacts:

A sudden drop in demand for plants due to water restrictions impacts plant sales that have been programmed for the region.

There is no ability to hold unsold plants and they will either be moved to another market at a lower price or be dumped. This is a sunk cost to producers and garden retailers that will lose the value of the dumped plants. Plant producers have invested in these crops, often with finance and there is no deposit paid, nor is insurance available. This impacts businesses and risks skills jobs in the industry.

We believe that there are a range of opportunities for water conservation in other industries and domestic uses that would have less impact on business and employment.

5. Minimising business & employment impacts:

Restrictive measures should be proportionate, minimising impact on a particular group of businesses and jobs. We advocate for policies that share the burden of restrictions across the range of businesses and water uses. E.g. restricting activities like car washing and indoor uses will not cost jobs.

Invitation for Dialogue:

NZPPI invites all stakeholders, including water suppliers, Councils, community groups, nurseries and garden retailers to engage in a constructive dialogue. Our goals require policies that support water conservation while protecting our economic, community and environmental objectives.

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