

Cattle in streams a real disease risk

I refer to the front-page article in *Hawke's Bay Today* on January 7, "Fishermen urge ban on cattle in rivers".

The issue about cattle owned by the Hawke's Bay Regional Council getting loose and polluting our rivers disturbs me, particularly when the council's acting manager of compliance, Wayne Wright, argues the cattle are a cheap way to control vegetation and that, while keeping stock (cattle) out of waterways is best practice, it is not an offence if stock stray into waterways unless the water becomes contaminated, "which basically needs to be proven by analysing the water".

Despite the obvious pollution that occurs when cattle foul water upstream from unsuspecting bathers and other recreational users, there are other dangers like waterborne diseases such as leptospirosis, which can be debilitating and potentially life-threatening.

I understand that water testing is a function of the regional council which, I assume, it does on a regular basis.

I think it a bit disingenuous for a regional council representative to say "pollution needs to be proven by analysing the water" when it is within its means to do so.

I am willing to bet the council does not test our waterways for the presence of leptospirosis bacteria.

Hawke's Bay has a climate conducive to the proliferation of this disease, so we need to be more sensitive to the elements that have the potential to pollute this important resource and cause harm to those who use it.

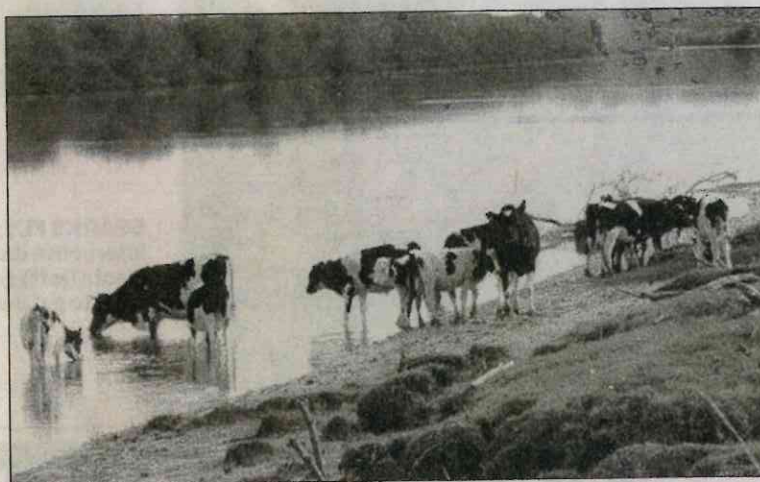
In short we should adopt "best practice", keep livestock out of our waterways and not cower down to those with ludicrous reasons for doing nothing about this serious issue.

E J Mischefski
Hastings

Fluoride worries

Recently, Dr Paul Connett, the director of

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



KEEP IT CLEAN:
Livestock should be kept out of waterways.

Fluoride Action Network (US), published this letter:

"I was very much physically and mentally affected by the fluoridated water after moving to Schuylkill Haven, US.

"It was so debilitating that I was possibly two to three weeks from being confined to a wheelchair. I, and my family, are also thoroughly convinced I would have eventually died from fluoride poisoning.

"All the medical professionals I went to for help had absolutely no idea what was wrong and could not help me. They labelled me with multiple sclerosis and sent me on my way.

"My sister finally figured out what was wrong with me. I stopped drinking, eating, and cooking anything associated with fluoridated water — the symptoms reversed and I now have my life back, although some of the damage done by my fluoride poisoning will always be with me.

"If I accidentally eat or drink anything with fluoride, my body lets me know it.

"Thank you again for the wonderful work you all do. It has made an incredible

difference in my life and probably many, many other lives."

I wonder how many people in Hastings, Havelock North and Flaxmere are being poisoned by fluoride and don't know it?

I would like to hear your experiences so we can raise awareness about this poisonous substance added to our water.

Angela Hair
Fluoride Free Hastings

LETTERS

■ An address and phone number (not for publication) must be included for checking purposes.

■ Letters may be abridged or edited for legal or length reasons.

■ Preference will be given to letters less than 250 words.

■ The writer's name must be included unless discussed with editor.

■ Pen names are not accepted.

Fishermen urge ban on cattle in rivers

By Lawrence Gullery
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Evidence showing cattle getting into rivers and anecdotal stories of animals being slaughtered next to streams have renewed calls for the introduction of a bylaw to exclude stock from Hawke's Bay's waterways.

It comes after vandals cut a fence to access their favourite river spot, also giving cattle a free pass to access and trample the banks as well as defecate in the water upstream from swimmers and fishers.

A Napier angler, who did not want to be named, spotted more than 20 cattle in the Tutakuri River, near Brookfields Bridge, between Meeanee and Pakowhai this week.

"The reason it concerned me is that people are further down swimming and fishing while cattle are in the same river and we're being told by the regional council not to let any cattle into the waterways."

"I used to fish a lot in that river and was driving past the other day, had a look over and saw the cattle standing in it. Obviously they are drinking because it's hot and they're able to do what they do in the water."

Regional council acting manager of compliance Wayne Wright said the council owned land at

Brookfields Rd, next to the river: "We have cattle there which we graze to keep the vegetation down. They are fenced off from the river."

"What is happening is that people want free access to the river and someone is cutting the fence down to get to the water, which is allowing the cattle in."

Mr Wright said it had been an ongoing problem. The regional council could prosecute the vandals as it was deemed "wilful damage".

The regional council currently had no rules which prohibited cattle from walking into rivers and streams but encouraged farmers to use "best practice" and not allow their animals near waterways.

"The only offence which may come from cattle in the river, could be if the water is contaminated, which basically needs to be proven by analysing the water."

Fishing club members reported hearing stories that people were also butchering cattle on the river banks as the animals were easy to access. It was thought up to 50 stock a year were lost to thieves but Napier Freshwater Anglers Club president Hugh Peterson said those stories could not be verified.

"I haven't heard anything substantial on that matter, it's only stories second or third hand."

Mr Peterson said cattle in rivers "were a nuisance" if they weren't fenced off property and

Federated Farmers president Bruce Wills says illegal slaughtering of livestock is "the bane of farmers" around the country.

"It is an all too common thing for most of us and nothing short of robbery. I have witnessed my own stock being mauled by dogs, being shot by passers-by and it makes my blood boil."

"These are the stock we care for and rely on to sell so we can pay our mortgages and feed our children."

Mr Wills said the stories of cattle being butchered near the Tutakuri River, although not verified, are similar to other recorded incidents. "The police are very supportive and we encourage people to call the authorities, be vigilant and watchful."

Mr Wills said Federated Farmers advocated for its members to exclude stock from waterways, particularly cattle. "This is an on-going issue and

by continuing to fence off cattle.

"There is no bylaw to exclude stock from rivers but one is needed."

"That is something we will be pushing for, stock exclusion from rivers Hawke's Bay-wide. It keeps effluent out of the water, keeps sedimentation down because the banks crumble when the cattle get up and down and release a lot of phosphorous and nitrogen."

Mr McIntosh had not heard of any cattle butchered at the river but had fielded reports of sheep being slaughtered and the guts of the animals thrown into the river.

"People think they are feeding

it's not appropriate to have cattle in large numbers in your major waterways.

"Hawke's Bay Regional Council is working hard to keep stock out of waterways but it appears in this case [Brookfields Bridge] the fence has been cut so it's important those fences are repaired quickly."

Mr Wills said there were many initiatives aimed at keeping stock out of rivers and streams.

the animals but it's not too pleasant when you see that go floating past when you're fishing or swimming."

Regional council chairman Panton Wilson said using cattle to graze the edge of rivers was the most economical option to keep the stop banks in "pristine condition" for the public.

"Everyone in charge of livestock has an obligation to do the right thing to manage the integrity of the waterways. We encourage people to use our 24-hour hotline number if they have any issues."

■ The pollution hotline is 0800 108 838.

Time to come clean over stock in water

By Eric Mischefski

MONDAY WRITE-IN

THE CURRENT debate about the compromising of the quality of our waterways due to livestock having open access to rivers and streams is a matter that should concern the whole community. The ramifications arising as a result of stock fouling the water are potentially huge.

Having spent the past 30 years employed in the NZ meat industry, I believe I can comment with some degree of knowledge about zoonotic diseases (those passed from animals to humans). However, I stress that I am not a qualified expert. But I have served on many panels analysing the cause and effect of diseases in meatworkers.

Many of the people I represent as a union advocate are exposed to these diseases on a daily basis and processing companies go to great lengths (and expense) to implement safe behaviours to try to protect employees from infection.

The most common of these diseases in New Zealand is leptospirosis, which is transferred to humans by exposure to animal urine. It can be transferred through cuts and abrasions, through mucus membranes, such as eyes and nose. The bacteria can also become airborne and be ingested.

In a slaughterhouse, great care is taken to avoid contact with urine due to potential infection of workers. This is mandatory. Employers and employees risk prosecution under the Health and Safety Act if they fail to comply.

Equally, livestock can be vaccinated to protect against infection (leptospirosis can cause livestock to abort offspring).

It is an established fact that water plays host to this disease and assists in the spreading of it.

It is my contention that if there are safe behaviours (initiated by the Department of Labour) around the exposure to animal urine during the slaughtering process, why not have

similar rules while the animal is alive? Animals produce more urine in their lifetime than at the point of slaughter and therefore the risks are arguably greater when the animal is alive.

There are preventative measures. Effective animal vaccinations are available but not mandatory. Therefore it is "not an offence" to avoid inoculating stock. I have attended many forums regarding this issue over the years accompanied by representatives from a wide range of organisations, Fed Farmers, NZ beef industry, microbiologists and Department of Labour to name a few.

Ultimately the conclusion of these gatherings has been the same, either it is too expensive to inoculate stock or there is not enough scientific evidence to warrant the expense. It is a proven fact that bovine animals can be successfully inoculated against the disease. That is why Fonterra have a mandatory vaccination code for their supplier dairy herds. I understand that Land Corp (who manage state-owned farms) have a mandatory inoculation policy for all of their cattle.

Over many years, successive governments have not put money into research of leptospirosis in humans but have contributed to research in animals. Indeed, the current research under way at Massey University into leptospirosis in humans, contracted from sheep, is being funded largely by Rural Women of NZ, with other organisations such as ours contributing more modestly.

I think this speaks volumes when you consider that rural women are at the coalface, as it were, to potential exposure to leptospirosis, due to living in close proximity to animals.

Therein also lies a paradox. Farmers, along with meatworkers, feature highly in the leptospirosis infection statistics.

ACC will only pay earnings-related compensation for leptospirosis infection if it is occupationally acquired.

So what then of the unsuspecting users of our waterways who may be indulging in recreational use, or for the purposes of gathering food, etc?

If it is not an offence for farm animals to wander aimlessly in and out of our waterways, but it is an offence to pollute. How does one prove the source of contamination? One farmer could point to his neighbour operating upstream. I suggest there would be limited ability to prove either way. And who would be responsible and or pay for such tests?

Equally, it would be difficult to require waterways to be totally fenced off. Our main tributaries are arguably owned by the Crown. Should the requirement to fence off be the responsibility of those trying to keeping stock on private land or the Crown wanting to keep stock out of waterways? Let's enter the phrase "not an offence" back into the debate. If it is not illegal to allow stock to frequent our waterways and if, as the regional council suggests, it may take 10 years to resolve this problem (which I can't accept) why not test our waterways for the potential threats for diseases like leptospirosis and, dare I suggest, make inoculation of livestock mandatory?

In the intervening period, the relevant players can continue to play politics around why it is "not an offence" for livestock to share the same swimming pool as humans. Or maybe they would prefer that we keep humans out of our waterways, until the cows come home.

■ Eric Mischefski is employed in the NZ meat industry and has been a union advocate for the NZ Meat Workers Union for 27 years.

■ Organisers, experts in their field and interest groups are invited to contribute opinions for this column. Email to: editor@hbtoday.co.nz