

# **CERTIFICATION OF NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT ADVISERS**

## **– ONE YEAR ON**

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The nutrient management adviser certification programme was formally launched in late 2013 to certify nutrient management advisers in New Zealand. This paper provides some brief background on the programme and an update on developments and growth of the programme over the last year. A more detailed account of the rationale and processes for establishing the programme is provided by Tillman and Mladenov (2014).

### **Why was the programme needed?**

Freshwater management reforms in New Zealand are driving an increasing demand for well-qualified, well-trained people with appropriate experience who can provide high quality nutrient management planning advice to farmers. These plans need to be trusted and useful to farmers, compliant with the regulatory requirements of the region in which the farm is located, and done in a consistent and fair manner across the country. The demand for such people greatly outstrips the supply at this time. The intent of this programme is to ensure all stakeholders, including farmers, regulatory agencies, the public, and domestic and overseas markets, that the people stepping into this vocation are professionally qualified to a set of agreed industry standards, are capable of providing nationally consistent nutrient management advice of the highest quality to farmers, and are keeping up to date with the latest science, technologies and policy developments in their field. Certification is open to all practising nutrient management advisers who want to be recognised as meeting the standards set for New Zealand.

### **Establishment of the programme**

The first step in establishing the programme was to convene a wide-ranging Advisory Group comprising 17 primary sector organisations that included:

- The Fertiliser Association of New Zealand and its two member companies Ravensdown and Ballance Agri-Nutrients
- Primary industry organisations including DairyNZ, Horticulture NZ, the Foundation for Arable Research, Deer Research, and Beef + Lamb NZ
- The New Zealand Institute of Primary Industry Management
- Regional Councils
- Lincoln and Massey Universities and AgriOne
- AgResearch and the Ministry for Primary Industries
- Fish and Game New Zealand and Federated Farmers

The Advisory Group endorsed the concept of the certification programme and made key recommendations on how the programme should be established and operated. The Advisory

Group nominated an expert Standard Setting Group to make recommendations on the standards, criteria and competencies on which certification would be awarded. The Advisory Group also provided approval to form a not-for-profit company, the Nutrient Management Adviser Certification Programme Limited, to own the IP associated with the programme on behalf of the Advisory Group, and to administer the programme on a day to day basis. This company is governed by a Board of Directors comprising representatives from the Fertiliser Association of New Zealand, DairyNZ, Ravensdown, Ballance Agri-Nutrients, and AgFirst NZ.

### **The programme standards**

To become certified, nutrient management advisers have to demonstrate they have: appropriate qualifications and experience in agriculture; a suitable training record for a range of relevant subject matter defined by the Standard Setting Group; successfully completed the Intermediate and Advanced courses in Sustainable Nutrient Management in New Zealand agriculture offered by Massey University; and achieved passing grades on a rigorous competency assessment that tests candidates' knowledge of nutrient management science and their use of the OVERSEER<sup>®</sup> nutrient budgeting tool. In addition, advisers are required to provide testimonials from two farmers verifying that the nutrient management plans which they produce are easily understood, useful and able to be applied, as well as verification from a supervisor as to the candidate's training and experience.

### **Continuing professional development**

A continuing professional development (CPD) policy was embedded in the programme in mid-2014 to provide opportunities for certified advisers to remain current in the science of nutrient management and keep up to date with rapidly evolving regulatory requirements. To maintain certification, a nutrient management adviser must complete a minimum of 15 hours of CPD each year. Activities that qualify for CPD include:

- Educational modules offered online, which can be mandatory or optional depending on the subject matter; these modules are developed in association with the Fertilizer and Lime Research Centre at Massey University and AgriHQ Academy
- Attendance at approved workshops, conferences, and field days
- Presentations at approved workshops and conferences
- Authoring or co-authoring papers in approved conference proceedings and journals

Certified advisers can also apply to have activities and workshops that they plan to attend approved for CPD purposes.

### **Learning management system**

The application process, competency assessment and recording of continuing professional development activities are carried out using an online learning management system (LMS). The programme's LMS is powered by the Moodle open-source e-learning software system.

### **Achievements to date**

At the time of writing, 87 advisers across the country have achieved certification and are listed on the programme's website ([www.nmacertification.org.nz](http://www.nmacertification.org.nz)) (Figure 1).

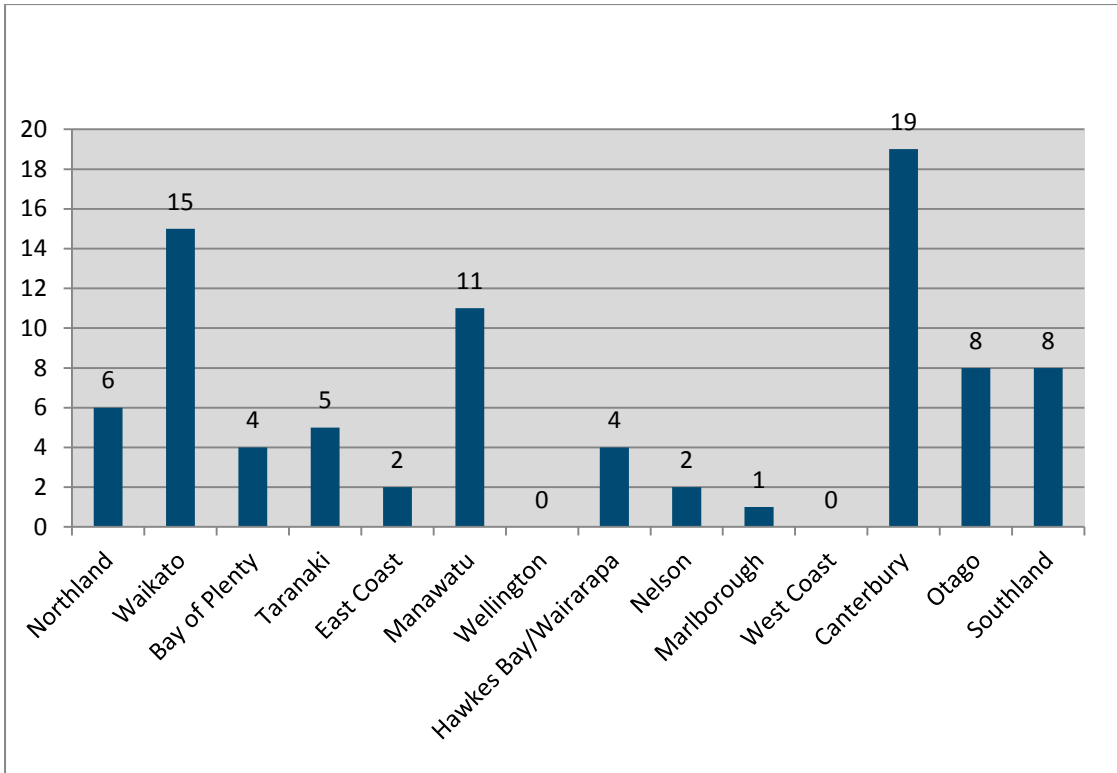


Figure 1. Number of certified nutrient management advisers by region.

In addition there are about another 50 advisers enrolled in the programme who are at various stages in the process of seeking certification. Currently, the majority of advisers seeking certification come from the two large fertiliser companies in New Zealand. However, a growing number of independent consultants are also becoming certified (Figure 2).

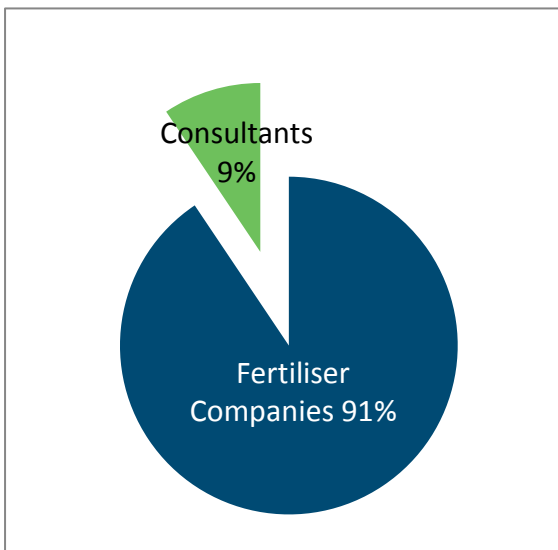


Figure 2. Sources of certified nutrient management advisers.

It is anticipated that the number of advisers becoming certified will increase steadily over the next few years as more farmers become aware of the programme and begin to preferentially seek out certified people to deliver their nutrient management plans, thereby driving demand. Also, a number of regional councils have already made it a requirement that certified advisers should be used to produce compliant nutrient management plans. An increased rate of uptake, including among independent farm consultants, is anticipated as more regional councils adopt such policies.

### **Building an adviser community**

It is important that there is regular communication with the growing community of certified nutrient management advisers. This is being done currently through a mobile-friendly electronic newsletter, Nutrient News, which provides certified advisers with up-to-date information about the programme, including new CPD opportunities and upcoming events.

### **Linking the certification programme with other accreditation programmes**

A number of other accreditation programmes in agriculture are emerging in New Zealand, more or less independently of one another. Each of these programmes comes with their own set of required qualifications, assessment processes, CPD policies and online learning management systems. There may be opportunities to develop greater linkages among these programmes, where possible, to make it easier to recognise and cross-credit compatible qualifications and CPD activities. This would reduce duplication and allow agricultural professionals to more easily gain and retain certification across a number of different programmes.

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **References**

R Tillman and P Mladenov (2014). The nutrient management adviser certification programme. Primary Industry Management 18 (1), 26-28.