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Environmental Health Indicators for New Zealand

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NUMBER OF LIVESTOCK BY TYPE IN NEW ZEALAND

Agricultural use of the land can have a major effect on the environment, particularly from the run-off of effluent into water sources, which can affect water quality (Cromar and Fallowfield 2004). Dairy cows may also have additional effects on the environment. For example, the conversion of land to dairy farming requires a large amount of water for irrigation. It is estimated that dairy farms require 420 litres of water per day per hectare, as compared to 95 litres for intensive livestock and dairy support, 60 litres for lifestyle land use, and 21 litres for non-irrigated hill country (Morgan et al 2002).

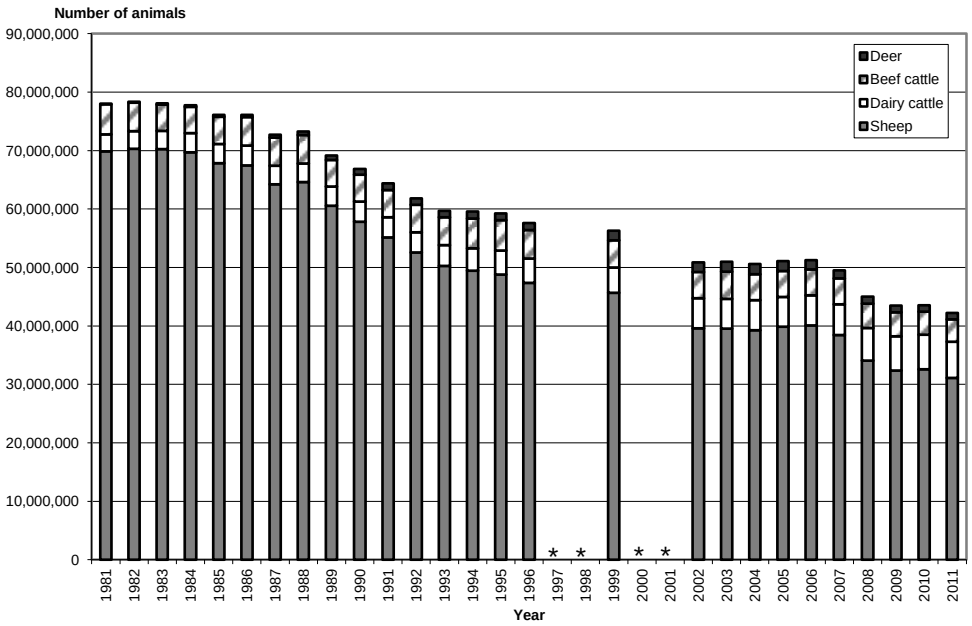
As a result of dairy farming, irrigation and the run-off of nitrates used to fertilise the grass may affect water supply levels and quality. Furthermore, dairy cows produce methane (CH_4), a greenhouse gas that is thought to contribute to climate change.

NUMBER OF LIVESTOCK BY TYPE IN NEW ZEALAND

Current situation

Figure 1 shows that livestock numbers have decreased since the 1980s, with the largest decrease occurring for sheep, which comprise the majority of the livestock numbers. There has been a considerable decline in sheep numbers since 2008.

Figure 1:
NUMBER OF LIVESTOCK BY TYPE IN NEW ZEALAND, 1981 - 2011



Note: An asterisk (*) indicates that data was unavailable for that year. Livestock only includes dairy cattle, beef cattle, deer and sheep. Year to 30 June. Numbers for 2008-2011 are based on agricultural production sample surveys, and are therefore subject to sample bias.
Source: Statistics New Zealand (2011b)

References

- Statistics New Zealand 2011b. Annual Agricultural Production Surveys, and five-yearly Agricultural Production Census.