

Water Rights Trust Annual Report - 2010/2011

Thank you to the University of Canterbury, and the Waterways Centre for Freshwater Management for hosting the Water Rights Trust for this event. Canterbury's water issues have been thrown into the background by the turmoil of the last year, but they haven't gone away. Indeed, they are more acute than ever.

We continue to lose our pure water reserves

The rural sector, ECan, previous Governments and an apathetic and unaware public led our region into its present water management predicament, characterized by dewatering of our lowland streams, and growing contamination of both surface and groundwaters, which substantially limits recreational options and threatens the regions drinking water in many areas. **It is part of a complacency** that is damaging the quality of life for many Cantabrians and our international reputation for being clean and green. **The denuding of the plains** of shelter belts, replaced by giant irrigation hardware; and dry, or slime filled stream beds are part of the physical manifestation of our lust for dirty growth. Such manifestation is accompanied by the unseen, long term damage that is accumulating in our soils and water day by day, year by year, decade by decade. Fonterra's much touted 2003 Clean Streams Accord has failed to deliver the required outcomes.

The announcement, 25 August 2011 of efforts **to protect and restore Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere**, is commendable and at last we may look forward to progress towards remedying a disgraceful situation. But our entire lowland water system is being damaged from the unseen contaminants entering groundwater from inland dairy farms and resurfacing in lowland streams and lakes to continue the pollution for decades to come. The sooner **all farmers** are required to control nutrient leaching into groundwater within sustainable limits, the sooner will our descendants see the benefits.

Recently, Dr John Kent wrote to the National Geographic Society, pointing out the problems and inviting them to take a look at what is happening in New Zealand. Such a step was brought about by the Prime Ministers assertion on international media upholding New Zealand's reputation for being '100% Pure'. You can understand his discomfort, not only as Prime Minister, but as Minister for Tourism at New Zealand losing its unique position in the global marketplace. **More difficult to understand** is his apparent determination to continue to lead our country on this singular path to disaster. **The brand 'New Zealand 100% pure'** is swiftly becoming an international joke and an embarrassment to all New Zealanders.

Local and central government have been far too slow to respond

For several years, the WRT was a lone voice crying 'danger' amidst a wilderness of apathy. **ECan did eventually respond**, but struggled to achieve any real traction because for far too long it failed to recognize the scale of the emerging problem and when it finally did, it found it lacked the necessary legislative support. **Repeated requests for the power to implement a moratorium** on new consents to take water for irrigation were ignored by the Governments of the day. **The Environment Courts interpretation** of the Resource Management Act meant that the gold rush mentality for water could not be contained in any coherent framework. **And throughout** these years, the behaviours that are causing mounting contamination of our waters have continued to expand. **While many farmers** have indeed made the necessary adjustments, and some pressure is now being applied for more to adapt, far too many damaging behaviours behind the farm gate continue unchallenged.

ECan's Natural Resources Regional Plan, promised by the then chairman, Sir Kerry Burke mid 2001, has only very recently come in from the wings. **The NRRP** is now in the process of being adapted into a new Land & Water Regional Plan, along with a toothless National Policy Statement, the proposed Regional Policy Statement and the CWMS to give a simpler and more coherent framework. **Such changes won't deliver** the immediacy of action the situation demands.

We find it all too easy to shelve the real issues behind an ongoing plethora of meetings and plans that give the semblance of action. **The horse has well and truly bolted**, and reining back our environmental losses is becoming an increasingly costly prospect that will weigh heavily on our grandchildren and theirs.

We need to restore and protect our environment

We must not continue to destroy our environment in this vain chase to catch Australia. Canterbury is at a stage in its history where wise, bold and decisive action is necessary to avoid going beyond the tipping point where recovery becomes impossible. **The ECan Commissioners** are still to prove they can deliver such action. **The costs of change** were highlighted by the draft Hurunui/Waiau ZIP as a major issue concerning farmers. **This document is of great significance** for the whole region, because the H/W Zone is leading the way in the implementation of the CWMS. **The draft ZIP said:** *“There is no plan for implementing improved nutrient management in Hurunui Basin. Roles, responsibilities and timetable, including incentives for uptake and resourcing to support farmers and groups need to be identified”*.

New forms of farming are essential

The WRT has always argued that we can have the best of both worlds -- clean, viable rivers streams and aquifers, and a healthy rural economy. **Dr Morgan Williams**, past Parliamentary Commissioner for the environment, pointed out the problems and solutions in his 2004 report, “Growing for Good”, but his suggestions have been ignored or put down by the rural sector, rather than grappled with, adapted and used.

The general view in the dairy industry is that riparian management, improved nutrient budgeting and control of effluent application will solve the water quality issues. But these things only go part of the way to reducing impacts and *a great deal more* needs to be done to reduce nitrogen impacts. **The changes needed are huge, and they are urgent**

Animal urine which accounts for some 80% of leached nitrate into groundwater needs special attention, and must limit stock carrying capacity in some catchments. **These limits** are still to be determined. **There is a range of farm system tools** available that are capable of helping to deliver sustainable environmental outcomes. The knowledge of how to apply these tools on a week to week basis and the incentives to do so are the limiting factors. *Intensive farming* must be accompanied by rigorously implemented *intensive management*, but that is still lacking on many farms across the region.

Potential for different forms of farming, including organic farming, must be exploited so that soil structures are built up to retain nutrients and moisture to best effect. **There will be resistance** from fertilizer companies and dairy companies because such initiatives may impact on the volume of production, but there is compelling evidence that profit is maintained if not enhanced because of less fertiliser and water input.

A partial response serves no purpose

We are presently in ‘no-mans land’ without the unequivocal commitment from farmers and Government to do what is necessary to clean up the region. A partial response towards meeting required standards will cost a lot of effort and money, but would still leave us with dirty water. **Half way measures won’t do.** The simple reality is that if a particular land-use cannot guarantee achievement of water quality limits, then that land use should not be pursued. If a farmer is already committed to such land-use, then a time frame should be agreed by which he will have changed. **We cannot depend on future technologies**, as some continue to suggest we do, to provide the solution when there is no guarantee that such technologies will be forthcoming. Sustainability decisions must be made in light of existing technologies.

A levy on volume use of water would help to fund costs of change

The extent to which farmers are reimbursed part or all of the costs of change, or whether they are required to accept these costs in total as part of the price of access to water needs urgent resolution. **Associated with** this is the question of whether a levy should be imposed on volume water use to help fund such transition costs as well as restoration of past damage. **Again, the WRT** has highlighted the need for such a levy for many years, and again, the issue has been sidelined. It is good that the Green Party has taken this on board.

Need assurance of sustainability before determining new water allocation

The WRT repeats its view that determination of new water allocation should be with-held until we know what the optimum mix of land-use is for a catchment under sustainable farming techniques. **Then we will know how much water** is needed to support maximum environmentally sustainable economic return. **It is putting the cart before the horse** to try at this stage to define how much water each catchment needs (and how that water may be sourced) without first having solved the contamination and efficiency issues, and what is needed to get *all* farmers locked into environmentally sustainable performance for their properties and catchments. We have long held the view that this is not possible under existing rural mindsets without further Government intervention. **The concern expressed by farmers** throughout the draft ZIP on the costs of change reinforce this concern.

Need integrated critical path, financial strategy, and compliance strategy

We **need a comprehensive financial strategy** linked into a critical path that is tied to the delivery of sustainability targets to ensure farmer behaviours are adjusted across the region to the extent needed – **zone** by zone; **catchment** by catchment; **farm** by farm. **We need to define the hammer** so that it is clear in the minds of reluctant compliers what the costs of non-compliance are, and be prepared to use it to reinforce the message. The gentle approach of education and persuasion is doing part of the job but it is far too slow and incomplete for what is needed. Such a strategy would help to close the circle on all our efforts towards achieving a sustainably managed environment. **In short, the answers are there**, but not yet the commitment to embracing them.

Threats to our major rivers are of continuing concern

We remain concerned over the future of the **Rakaia River**, particularly given the 30 cumecs of water that is lost from the river between the foothills and the sea, and plans for further takes from the river system. **The Waimakariri River's** relationship with city aquifers and city streams is also poorly understood and needs further research before any plans for increased abstraction are finalized.

The WRT remains intractably opposed to any intrusion on one of Canterbury's great natural assets, the **Hurunui River** above the Mandamus River. This is a key stake in the ground for our continuing support of current processes. It is of considerable concern that such intrusion remains on the table among the options being considered by the Zone Committee. The Trust is more likely to support the proposal for a dam on the Waitohi River as an alternative to the Hurunui proposals, but again we re-iterate our view that this should be considered in detail only after efficiency and nutrient control issues have been resolved.

Like many others, the Water Rights Trust support for the CWMS depends on adequate environmental protection. **Water Conservation Orders in Canterbury** provide examples of a careful balance between irrigation, conservation and recreation interests. **Having these WCO's** in place has enabled many of us to support the CWMS knowing that proposed infrastructure projects would need to comply with them. **Under the ECan Act**, the protection offered by WCO's in Canterbury has been weakened, exposing the Rakaia, Rangitata and Hurunui Rivers to greater exploitation than previously.

The WRT support for existing processes tenuous

You will gather that while the WRT is still working within the system, our position is tenuous. **We are firmly of the view** that the government has only done part of the job by changing the structure

of water management in Canterbury. **It has not done as we asked** in upholding the primacy of environmental imperatives, and as a result, we are still in a position where short term financial concerns take precedence over long term environmental ones. **This must change** if we are to succeed in the major adaptation of behaviours that are necessary across the region.

We need a cogent long term vision for a sustainable NZ

Perhaps the harshest criticism we have for our political leaders is that we still do not have a cogent long term vision for a sustainable New Zealand which would encompass our natural resources and our economic and social future. There are those who argue that all this is just too hard, and that we should exploit the dairy dollar to its maximum potential – otherwise NZ will continue to slip down the economic rankings. **The opposite is true.** Speaking at Strategy NZ, a forum on New Zealand's future direction held at Parliament earlier this year, Sir Paul Callaghan said: *“while we know the story, we seem to have forgotten it, or decided it is too hard, because again the country has been drifting back into talk about the money-making potential of agriculture and the extractive industries. Water the Mackenzie country and grow cows. Bring in diggers to mine the conservation estate. The same old, same old. The problem, says Callaghan, is that closing the gap with Australia would require we increase our exports by \$45b a year. And we can't do that through more dairy. There just is not the pasture or water for a quadrupling of the national herd.*

So, assuming we can't shake off our addiction to infinite growth - after we've exploited our land and water to the maximum potential, what then? **Where do we** look to find more growth? **Where do we go** after we have exploited the last river? **When we have converted** the last dryland property to irrigation? Here in Canterbury we have some outstanding success stories in the manufacturing and software industries, and this is where more research and development dollars should be going, right now. **We know the world is full of niche opportunities.** Difficult though it may be, this is where we must find our future. We must look towards exporting more of our knowledge and skill in the products we make, and less of our pure water reserves and fewer of our expensively trained graduates from our magnificent tertiary institutions. **We must proactively seek out and develop opportunities for clean growth.** Alternatively, we will carry on compromising our pride in self and place and continue to run down our environment and our standard of living – **beyond the point of no return.** Again, the WRT has trumpeted this logic, and again, it has been greeted by a profound deafness among our leaders.

One of the effects of the trauma in Canterbury over the last year is that it has forced us to think of our long term future. It also has demonstrated that we are rich in courage and resilience when the chips are down. With water, the chips are now being placed on the table. Now is the time to choose: We can take the high road to our future, or carry on slumming our way as fast as we can along the low road – **beyond the point of no return.** The sooner we make this choice, the sooner will the destructive short term economic pressure begin to be eased from our waterways. Our leaders might then start to use the words 'clean and green' with integrity. And our grandchildren would have cause to thank us. We still have a glimmer of hope that we may get this right. Based on our performance to date, I have a great fear however we may already be too late.

The WRT is in process of adapting to changing arena

The arena within which WRT has sought to influence change has shifted, with the changes brought about by the ECan Act. **The WRT is in the process of adapting** to this change. We welcome Tim Wardell, Gavin James and Roger Young onto the board. These people have demonstrated the commitment and ability to make a significant contribution to the work of the Trust, and join Brett Waterfield, Martin Clements, John Sanders and me as Trustees. The Trust has accepted the resignations of Professor Ian Shaw and Symon Filet. **We welcome Roger Young as the new chair of the WRT, effective from today.**

I would like to express my deep gratitude for the continuing support of Martin Clements, Brett Waterfield and John Sanders as secretary to the board, and to the great many others who have contributed over the years with their wisdom and financial support.

The legacy of unpolluted water for our grandkids to splash around in at the river and clean water to drink from our aquifers across the region are at least as important as being able to update our iPods. **At this stage**, we have a glimmer of hope that just maybe we can still get this right. If that hope fades, then a bleak and bitter future awaits us all – old generation iPods, dirty water and all.

The WRT looks forward to your continuing support on this vital issue

It now my great pleasure to introduce Dr Russel Norman, co-leader of the Green Party.

Murray Rodgers
Chairman
Water Rights Trust
August 2011