

The South Today

Betrayal claim over water move

An application by the Christchurch City and Selwyn District Councils to take water from the Rakaia and Waimeakariri Rivers is being regarded as a betrayal.

The councils have joined with the Ashburton Community Water Trust to apply to take 40 cumecs of water from the Rakaia River for irrigation. The two councils also applied yesterday to take 40 cumecs from the Waimeakariri River for their proposed Central Plains Water irrigation scheme.

A Central Plains Water working party meeting in Rolleston erupted on Wednesday night when told of the applications, with some accusing the councils of betraying 18 months of consultation with the community.

Others believed it prudent to secure the water now.

Many had no idea an application was being prepared and had expected that decision to be made only after the working party and the steering committee had reported back to the councils.

The proposed Central Plains scheme would irrigate 84,000 hectares of farmland, adding \$600 million to the regional economy, but there are concerns over the safety of a proposed storage dam, the value of the land it would flood, and the resulting relocation of State Highway 77.

Dan Action Group resident Ken

Tom McKinlay in ASHBURTON



Gwathkin said the councils' duplicity in appearing to consult while secretly preparing the application, would harden the attitudes of opponents.

"I would think there will be a closing of ranks among those who have doubts about the scheme."

The working party was to have finalised its report on the proposal on Wednesday, but the meeting

erupted when told about the application.

Meeting facilitator Richard Budd said the councils had to secure the water rights to ensure public money spent developing the proposal was not wasted. No physical works could begin until after community consultation was complete, he said.

Ashburton Community Water Trust chairman Alistair Argyle said the Rakaia River water could nearly service irrigation plans on both the central and Mid-Canterbury plains. Trust chief executive Eric Weir said the water conservation order on the river would ensure

water taken did not harm in-stream values.

Ashburton District's cut of the water is likely to be extracted around Highbank and use the Rangitata Diversion Race to supplement irrigation in the district. It is part of a larger plan to use water storage and Rangitata River water to irrigate the whole of Mid-Canterbury.

Fish and Game representative on the Central Plains working party Wayne McCallum said fishers would have concerns over



Richard Budd

impacts on the Waimeakariri fishery. The applications indicated the Central Plains scheme was gathering a momentum that would be difficult to stop regardless of community concerns. Steering committee member John Donkers said the application by no means made the scheme a foregone conclusion.

Conservation Department representative Bruce Arnold queried if an application to take water that did not include its use, would stand Resource Management Act scrutiny.

Appendix 1

**K.R. Gwatkin
256 Westminster St
Mairehau
Christchurch 8013**

In providing Files saved since my time as Chairman of the "Dam Action Group" I feel I have to make my position quite clear.

As a matter of principal I am not opposed to the concept of irrigation on the plains.

I am concerned however that any scheme proposed has, inbuilt, the highest levels of protection for the environment and in particular the quality, both in respect to pollution and levels, of the aquifers which underlie the plains and supply drinking water for most if not all of the residents of the total area.

I became aware of the Central Plains proposal in 2000 in the early stages of the meetings of the "Consultative Working Party" and a member of the community group formed as a result of resident and land owner concerns regarding the various options then being discussed. This group took up the name of "Dam Action Group" and I accepted a position on the committee elected at a public meeting and later the roll of Chairman.

My reason for becoming involved related to the fact that three sites in the Malvern Hills then under discussion namely High Peak, Whitecliffs, or Wairiri Valley were upstream of the property we own in Glentunnel and thus were of concern to us because of the perceived potential threat they posed to life and property. Our lack of knowledge of the proposals ensured the only way to become knowledgeable was to become involved in some manner.

I attended many of the meetings of the Consultative Working Party held in Rolleston where it initially became clear no firm proposal for storage of water had been selected but after discussion and being asked to score many aspects of the various options the Wairiri valley was selected by the Steering Committee as the preferred option. It was at this time that my opposition to the proposal or at least the proposed dam and reservoir became firm. Not because of irrigation but because of the siting of the proposed dam and storage facility and the then uncertain method of how water could or would be transferred to the headrace canal down the Selwyn River.

Members of the Dam Action Group composed as it was of people of various positions in the community, farmers in the valley, residents of Whitecliffs, Glentunnel and Coalgate, land owners east of the Harper hills etc had various reasons for concern and opposition to the scheme but in all correspondence of that time it was made clear the opposition was to the dam and reservoir not necessarily to irrigation as such.

As discussion at the Working Party meetings progressed it became clear that though the opposition of groups such as the Dam Action Group was heard, little if any weight was evident in consideration of that opposition in

progressive announcements and reports released. One point which became very clear was that those who would lose their land and livelihoods to the scheme and those concerned by their proximity to the reservoir were not considered "Stakeholders".

Our position was we had more at "stake" than those downstream who were likely to participate in the much extolled virtues likely to accrue from its implementation. It seemed there was at least a token acknowledgement of the concerns of organisations such as Fish and Game but the individuals with greatest concern and those with most at stake began to feel more like an "Endangered Species" than the creatures these folk wished to protect.

The final collapse of any faith in what was purported to be the ultimate in consultation came when the lodgement of the application for resource consents was announced at a meeting of the Consultative Working Party, that is whilst consultation was still in progress and prior to any final resolutions from that process being forwarded to the combined councils. It seemed evident that despite what may eventuate from discussions councils were determined to press ahead regardless without the courtesy of prior advice to the working party.

Subsequent to the termination of the Consultative Working Party there were some public meetings held intended to allay the fears of residents of the area and their concerns about the possible and real effects of scheme construction and implementation. As might be expected no great reduction of residents concern was evident, in fact more people of the wider area began to join the ranks of those expressing opposition.

Also some time during this prolonged period of strain and concern it was announced that the Wairiri proposal was shelved but not necessarily dropped whilst the Waianiwaniwa was explored as a possible better proposition. When this was eventually adopted land owners in the Wairiri Valley and to a large extent residents of Whitecliffs and Glentunnel were relieved of their immediate concerns but not necessarily of any of their wider concern about broader aspects of the total scheme.

Waianiwaniwa landowners and the Coalgate residents are now the endangered species and to a large extent neglected in the consultation process. As with those before them it is hard not to believe that being ignored is an indication of arrogance on the part of those promoting the scheme. I believe it is just their inability to front up manfully to those they wish to sacrifice to their god of progress and prosperity and be frank and honest.

I can't be certain but I feel sure there has been more real consultation with those likely to gain some advantage from implementation of such a scheme but who are not being asked either to suffer degradation of their living surroundings for no gain or surrender their land and living for the benefit of others.

The Dam Action Group by force of necessity changed its focus to the broader aspects of the perceived necessity to consider the welfare of the Malvern Hills area and residents and became The Malvern Hills Protection Society with a greater membership and more organised and active administration. I remain a member and support their efforts to be heard midst the hubbub generated by the claims of the great advantages which will result from granting resource consents and eventual implementation of the scheme. I certainly am not convinced that irrigation of an additional 30,000 hectares will bring the great increases of wealth and opportunity being touted. Surely half of that should already be evident from the 30,000 acres presently under irrigation in the scheme area. I do feel sure some large corporate dairy operators will. So be it, but if the environment is degraded in the process what then, who pays?

Ken Gwatkin

31 Mersey St
Christchurch 8014

14 February 2008

Rosalie Snoyink
Malvern Hills Protection Society
6 Homebush Rd
Glentunnel

Dear Rosalie

Following is a copy of my prizewinning letter to *The Press* in May 2001. It was written in response to published articles about the proposal to dam the Wairiri Valley in order to provide irrigation for the Canterbury Plains. My concerns arose for several reasons: I am a Christchurch resident, have lived all my life in Canterbury, and appreciate the need to preserve our natural resources, especially untreated water; our bach which has been used by my family for 53 years overlooks the Wairiri Valley from the bank of the Selwyn River; my family has strong historic ties to the area as my mother was born and brought up in Glenroy and my cousins – the Dennis family- still farm in the area. Roger Dennis joined the fight against the scheme because he owned land in the Wairiri Valley including a piece under QE2 Covenant. My family does not wish to see the historic and cultural values, even the visual appearance, of Canterbury destroyed.

I joined the Consultative Working Party meeting monthly in Rolleston at about the time of my letter. The group comprised supporters and critics of an irrigation scheme. The aim was to reach a consensus in support of a scheme. We had speakers from Forest and Bird, Fish and Game, Lincoln College, various engineers and scientific experts, farm advisers, and experts on the Maori viewpoint. We were told about all the environmental risks, the geological and construction dangers and the social impacts, and on the other side the economic advantages, the safety and mitigating factors. I concluded that consensus was impossible because we critics were unconvinced and immovable. I believe that is the reason the meetings stopped, and a Trust and Company were set up to meet behind closed doors.

I agree with a spokeswoman (I think from Forest and Bird) who said that because there was such a lack of scientific proof – in fact we were presented with many contradictory 'facts' that claimed to be scientific – that we should take the path of least risk: the scheme should not go ahead.

There was uproar in one of the later meetings when it was revealed that application to the authority to take water from the Waimakariri and Rakaia Rivers had been made without consulting us. However I was not surprised, because as a group we had no legal status, or at least no legal power with the result that even the title of our group was rather glorified. And although the meetings were useful, fair and informative, we were coming no closer to consensus.

There are two major reasons why I oppose the scheme. The first is the environmental risk and inadequate mitigating factors in the scheme. I agree with Roger Dennis' view that we are caretakers of the environment and not exploiters. There is no proof that this irrigation scheme and the resulting intensification of farming will not bring more harm to the environment than economic or social good. For example we still argue about how our deep aquifers are replenished. Nobody knows for sure whether Canterbury's water will be polluted by leaching on the plains. Many engineers are not convinced of the safety or feasibility of creating a reservoir so far above sea level. There are unanswered concerns about dam safety, water leakage and land collapse.

We have been presented with inadequate mitigating features. For example we were shown plans of the recreational possibilities of the reservoir, but these did not gel with the more likely summertime mud and dust at low water levels and water made putrid by decaying vegetation.

Another mitigating plan is that farmers will need warrants of fitness in order to access the irrigation water. However farmers are no different from the rest of the population when it comes to matters of environmental consciousness, moral responsibility and carrying on activities without a current warrant of fitness. It takes only one negligent farmer to ruin a waterway. If farmers were environmentally conscious they would not choose to dairy farm on Canterbury's unsuitable soils. Other areas of New Zealand have a much more suitable environment.

The second main reason why I am quick to voice opposition to the scheme is the supporters' constant and dangerous use of spin. I have enclosed a second letter to *The Press* which was a response partly to the use of spin. I also question the description of the scheme as 'public', when the primary beneficiaries are private landowners. I fear that the use of the word 'public' is one reason why CPW has been granted Statutory Requiring Authority. During our meetings some farmers admitted that once the scheme is in place they will be able to sell their farms at a good price. To me this shows neither commitment to the public of Canterbury nor concern for fellow citizens who will be harmed by the scheme.

I dispute the belief that river water that runs out to sea (no matter whether during normal flow or flood) is 'wasted', and therefore should be harnessed for irrigation. Nobody knows the effects both locally and globally of altering a river's natural flushing cycles.

Spin is especially dangerous if it is disguised as science. From my layman's point of view, even the use of the term 'nutrients' instead of 'pollutants', which I first heard at the meetings, is an example of spin.

Kind regards

Francine Bills

Letter of the Week Christchurch Press May 2001

Sir – I can not see any reason why we Cantabrians should allow a couple of hundred rapacious dairy farmers to ransack our rivers, battle with our climate, increase our contribution to greenhouse gases, and poison our water.

If the \$600 million profit they expect passes through their pockets first, and if those farms are owned by foreign investors, and if much of the “profit” is negative expenditure in an attempt to clean up the mess, then how much will our sacrifice be worth?

Whatever profit remains in Canterbury, it definitely will not be the only thing that is left to trickle down to the rest of us.

F.D. Bills

Letter to Christchurch Press 4 May 2005

Load of bull

I have just received the latest spin from Canterbury Plains Water, which tells me that water taken from the rivers and poured over the upper plains will percolate down and help top up our aquifers.

Evidently this is an improvement on the present system, by which that same water is left in the rivers to do its thing.

On its way down to us, this abstracted water may pass through the gut of an animal and out the other end, or may wash its way down through faeces and fertiliser.

But our rivers, stream and aquifers will be protected from nitrate leaching by the application of a miraculous nitrification-inhibiting spray – presumably not mixed with water – marketed by a New Zealand fertiliser company.

I am willing to believe in miracles but at the moment this sounds like a load of bull. Could we therefore have a series of articles from reputable scientists to show us how these miracles will actually work?

Francine Bills
St Albans

