

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER of applications for resource consent by the Central Plains Water Trust and a notice of requirement for the designation of land by Central Plains Water Limited associated with the construction and operation of the Central Plains Water Scheme

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF DIRK BARR ON BEHALF OF
THE NORTH CANTERBURY FISH AND GAME COUNCIL**

1. INTRODUCTION

Qualifications and experience

- 1.1 My name is Dirk Antony Barr. I have spent my life enjoying a wide variety of recreational activities on Canterbury's braided rivers. Over 30 years of experiences on these rivers, in particular the Waimakariri and Rakaia, has led me into a wide range of roles mostly relating to the protection and enhancement of these braided rivers and the fishery within.
- 1.2 I am the current Club President of the Canterbury Lure Fishing Association. With a membership of over 200 our main focus is giving our junior members experiences on our rivers. They really enjoy what we do and eagerly look forward to our upcoming outings. We are involved in organising the annual Take a Kid Fishing Day which attracts 4,000 - 5,000 children and their parents each year.
- 1.3 I am also a committee member of Rakaia River Fishing Promotions. This group organises the annual Rakaia River Fishing Competition which attracts about 1000 entries of which 120 are juniors. This event attracts anglers from all over New Zealand and worldwide. All proceeds from this event are put back into the river, in the way of ova planting and smolt rearing for releases into both the Waimakariri and Rakaia rivers.
- 1.4 From 1992 to 2006, I worked as a fishing guide. I established my own company called "Wild Trout and Salmon New Zealand" in 2001, and I am currently contracted to "New Zealand Itineraries". In this role I have had some great experiences with clients from all over the world who are always in awe of the beauty of our natural river systems.
- 1.5 I am currently a North Canterbury Fish and Game Council Honorary Ranger and have been a part time employee at Fish and Game since 1996. My responsibilities are to look after the access information program. I have just begun employment at Montrose Salmon Hatchery, where I will be responsible for the salmon enhancement programme. I am also NIWA trained in the techniques of Electrical Fishing, which is the practice used to safely electrocute and transport freshwater fish which have been stranded by low river flows.

- 1.6 For the past 20 years I have worked as a volunteer for the New Zealand Salmon Anglers Association and Fish and Game involved in ova planting, smolt rearing and habitat improvement. I am also a Westpac Fishing Scholarships Tutor, showing primary school children how to fish and teaching them about respecting the environment.

Scope of evidence

- 1.7 I have been asked by Fish and Game to comment on my experiences as an angler on Canterbury's braided rivers, taking into account what attracts me to fishing and when is the best time to fish. I have drawn on my personal experiences in preparing this evidence, and have taken particular account of the influence of low and variable flows on angling conditions, and what I consider to be the values of a natural braided river.

2. ANGLING ON CANTERBURY'S BRAIDED RIVERS

- 2.1 I have kept a comprehensive fishing diary since 1983. The data in my diary has been analysed by Fish and Game, and the interpretation of the results will be presented by Dr John Hayes.
- 2.2 I have also taken many photos relating to the benefits and enjoyment of a natural braided river, some of which are attached to my evidence. I have compiled a photo album which focuses on my experiences on rivers throughout Canterbury, and that is available if required.

What attracts me to fishing and what's the best time

- 2.3 Over the years I have spent a lot of time fishing all over Canterbury but my favourite rivers are the Waimakariri and Rakaia. I generally fish these rivers between October and April and will fish between 30 and 60 times there a season. The salmon and trout that inhabit these rivers are a huge attraction for me, especially the salmon as it is such a magnificent fish to catch.

- 2.4 There are also many days I spend on the river not fishing myself but showing others how to fish. I enjoy passing on my experiences and watching others especially children learning how and where to cast and showing them why and what water to fish.
- 2.5 I spend most of my time fishing with my family and friends and we will often camp out on weekends near good fishing holes. We have a lot of fun fishing, swimming, boating and just enjoying the basic things like cooking together on a camp fire and telling a few yarns. Our children and my friend's children have a real ball out there, mostly playing as kids do and they are always waiting for the next trip to the river. Our children say they would rather be doing that on the weekends than anything else. On an occasionally good day one of them will catch a fish and that really puts a smile on their face. There is nothing that compares to a smiling child so proud of landing a fish.
- 2.6 The beauty of our braided rivers is amazing, the bird life living on the free flowing braids, the salmon and trout resting in the pools and the stony riverbeds are truly unique. I have some favourite places that we go to on these rivers. On the Waimakariri, Browns Rock, Courtenay, The Willows, McLean's Island and Groynes number 1 and number 11 are special places for us, we visit them regularly. On the Rakaia we often camp at Highbank, Sleemans Road, Steeles Road, Griggs Road and Dobbins Ford. All of these places have a lot of history around them for us. I have grown up fishing there with my father and grand father and now our children are enjoying the same valuable upbringing we had.
- 2.7 Perfect fishing conditions create a fever amongst the Canterbury angling community. The anticipation of good fishing prospects after a flood will see thousands of anglers and their families heading for the river during peak season.
- 2.8 Many anglers like myself will be on the Waimakariri or Rakaia scouting for a good hole a day or two before it is fishable. A good hole is deep but has a nice flow of about walking pace, with a deep slow to slack edge just off the main current line. It is here that the salmon will stop to rest briefly whilst migrating to their spawning grounds. A hole like this will fish well until the river colour drops out and it becomes too clear.
- 2.9 The main reason that fish are hard to catch when it is too clear is that they feel threatened by any foreign surroundings such as anglers and their tackle which

become very visible to them. Also as the river drops in cumecs the slack edge on the side of a good hole narrows too much to hold fish which forces them to hold in the faster more oxygenated water until the next flood comes through. Other small lies are fished too, these are small pockets on the edge of fast runs which can be productive. As the river clears and drops these pockets are the first to lose any chance of angling success as salmon won't stop there.

- 2.10 During this period of low clear waters some anglers will move downstream to the river mouth to try their luck at fish that are entering the river mouth but not running the river in the clear water. Salmon are enticed in from the sea with the tide but will go back out again when they realise the clear conditions they have entered. Other upstream anglers will choose not to fish and eagerly await along with the salmon for the next flood that the fish will run on, and the natural cycle of salmon runs and angler anticipation builds again.
- 2.11 The best conditions for catching salmon and trout in the Waimakariri and Rakaia rivers is as the rivers are clearing to a cloudy blue colour. I like to be able to just see the toes of my boots in knee deep water. This prime fishing colour may only be in the river for a few days at most before the colour and flow drop too much and the water becomes too clear.
- 2.12 The best cumec flow for angling in the Rakaia is usually at around 180 cumecs. The Rakaia river fishes well at this flow and large numbers of trout and salmon are caught until the flow drops below around 130 cumecs. In the Waimakariri the same applies, although being a smaller river the optimum flows for angling are lower. The Waimakariri, being a smaller river with less water and a narrower bed than the Rakaia fishes best from 80 cumecs down to 50 cumecs.
- 2.13 The natural floods that occur in these rivers are a very important part of the fishery. These floods provide important protection in the way of safe unimpeded migration for salmon and trout returning to spawn. Although anglers can not fish for them in the dirty water most anglers are happy in the knowledge that large numbers of fish will have in fact completed their journey home to the spawning stream during this time.
- 2.14 My grandfather Frank passed his knowledge and values on to me through my childhood and I have taught my 12 year old son Ryton those same values. As an angler I have been taught to limit my take, not take my limit. I practice a catch and

release policy to conserve our fishery as a resource. I do this in an attempt to ensure that the resource is there for future generations to enjoy.

3. IMPACTS OF ABSTRACTION

- 3.1 As I have mentioned earlier, I have spent my life enjoying a wide variety of recreational activities on Canterbury's braided rivers. My early childhood days were spent on the Ashburton and Rangitata rivers with my parents, grandparents and extended families. Our days were spent salmon and trout fishing, white baiting, duck shooting, swimming and playing. What a childhood this was! Everything revolved around the river. How lucky we were to have it! Hundreds of families were there. It was a great social environment for all and a very important up bringing. I remember days when over 100 salmon were landed at the Ashburton River Mouth.
- 3.2 Although I still visit the Ashburton River with my family these trips are now nostalgia trips as the recreational opportunities are no longer there as a result of the lack of water in the river. I have experienced first hand the demise of the Ashburton river which once boasted a large salmon run. In my opinion, the recreational and social value of the river has been lost. Based on my experience with local children as a tutor, this has had an impact on the values and experiences of today's younger generations.
- 3.3 I have also seen other rivers such as the Rangitata, Waimakariri, Rakaia and Hurunui affected by abnormal low water flows. Particularly in the Waimakariri and Hurunui, Chinook salmon which run these rivers to spawn have already been impeded at times on their annual spawning migration.
- 3.4 My main concern with the present application is its impact on recreational values associated with angling. In particular, the applicant has not properly valued Canterbury's unique salmon and trout run, or the thousands of anglers, hunters, or recreational river users / families who have traditionally enjoyed the true value of the Waimakariri and Rakaia rivers.
- 3.5 Canterbury braided rivers boast the only viable salmon runs, with the exception of Chile and Argentina, in the southern hemisphere. However, while Canterbury's salmon runs are currently viable they are also extremely vulnerable. The application by CPW will, in my opinion, have a major impact on the salmon and trout fishery.

- 3.6 To impede the natural flow of the Waimakariri and Rakaia rivers by harnessing flood waters before they have run their natural course may have potentially serious effects. Salmon and trout run the river on the back of a flood, usually the next day. It is not only the dirty colour of the river that entices the fish to migrate, it is also the increased volume of water flow. These natural floods are a key feature of a natural braided river and the most important thing they do is they guarantee an unimpeded safe passage for fish returning to spawn.
- 3.7 To harvest these flood waters away from the Rakaia or Waimakariri for extended periods will, particularly for the Waimakariri, "flat line" an already vulnerable ecosystem. In my opinion, this may remove the current ability that small or moderate floods have to flush out slime and pollution which builds up in times of constant low flows. Unfortunately these floods will become increasingly important to flush Didymo (*Didymosphenia geminata*) or Rock Snot from the braids now that it has recently taken hold in the Rakaia. I am concerned that without natural floods to cleanse the rivers, they could easily become Didymo and silt infested.
- 3.8 I also question whether simply complying with set minimum flows will be enough to protect the values associated with the rivers. This is not just an issue for the Waimakariri River, but also potentially affects the Rakaia River. The Rakaia Water Conservation Order ("WCO") has a monthly minimum flow in place which was set to protect the river and the thousands of salmon returning home to their spawning streams. My observations of the Rakaia River are that it increasingly flows on the borderline of the WCO. These low flows are already affecting recreational use such as duck shooting, jet boating, angling and fish migration upstream. In my opinion consistently pushing the WCO to its limit will have a serious effect on the recreational use of this river.
- 3.9 I consider the minimum flow regime on the Waimakariri fails to protect those flows that create the best conditions for salmon angling. The duration of time that the river flows are suitable for fishing is already greatly affected by present takes. I used to fish in the McLeans Island – Willows area a lot, particularly in the 1980s. In those days, the river would remain in ideal state for salmon fishing for 2-3 days after a fresh before it became too clear. Today I fish there less often, mainly because the window of opportunity is so small. If you are not there on exactly the right day, your chances to catch a fish are greatly reduced.

3.10 As an angler, I am also concerned that by taking water from the middle reaches of the Waimakariri and Rakaia Rivers it will no longer be worth fishing there. Fish become very hard to catch in low flow areas and angling opportunities have the potential to be greatly diminished. In these areas the only real opportunities for anglers will be at the river mouths where salmon and trout will be forced to congregate as they wait for a flood to entice them to migrate. Anglers congregating there will add more pressure to the already vulnerable fish.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 I recognise water is important in all aspects of the community. However, as someone who has spent their life enjoying a wide variety of recreational activities on Canterbury's braided rivers, I am concerned that the significant take of water sought by CPW from the Waimakariri and Rakaia rivers is only for the financial benefit of a few, without appropriate regard being given to the fishery or the thousands of recreational users who use it. The true value of these rivers in their natural unimpeded state is not measured in dollars; it is measured in social and family values. These rivers are unique and special places that we can take our families, they belong to the public of New Zealand. These natural braided rivers are very important recreational places to the community and it is our responsibility to protect them for future generations to enjoy.

D A Barr

May 2008

APPENDIX A

PHOTOS

Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6



Photo 7

