

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 TREVOR ISITT ON BEHALF OF
THE NORTH CANTERBURY FISH AND GAME COUNCIL**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 My name is Trevor Isitt and I am 61 years old. I caught my first salmon in the Waimakariri when I was 10 years old and have been an ardent salmon and trout fisherman on the river since. Being close to Christchurch, the Waimakariri River has great recreational value for a wide and diverse range of users, most of who rely on good river flows to aid the various pursuits that bring them to the river.
- 1.2 I have previously given evidence to the Rangitata River Water Conservation Order hearing on behalf of the Rangitata North and South Hutholders' Associations.
- 1.3 I have been asked by Fish and Game to describe my experiences as an angler on the Waimakariri River, including my observations of the conditions that make for good fishing and my concerns about the potential effects of further abstraction from this river.

2. ANGLING EXPERIENCES

- 2.1 During the course of a season, my best catch of fish, generally spread between the Waimakariri and the Rangitata, was 66 salmon. On average I catch approximately 15 salmon, and numerous trout each season.
- 2.2 To me, fishing is not just about the act of hooking and landing a fish. It is about an appreciation of the pristine environment, observation of wildlife, meeting other river users and generally an escape from the more mundane, but necessary, long hours of work over the years. This appreciation has been passed onto my family and my children have been lucky to share and love the river environment as I do.
- 2.3 I will first address my observations of fishing relating to river flows, as I believe that fishability, river flows, water temperature and turbidity are inter-twined. The river colour at higher levels can be dictated by which catchment in the high country rain falls; physical events such as a slip or landslide into a tributary river and localised rainfall events – especially southerlies, can cause temporary higher flows, but not necessarily very dirty, and vice versa (i.e. flows that are dirty but not necessarily high).

- 2.4 The highest flow that I have caught a salmon in the Waimakariri River on spinning gear is 110 cumecs, when I could see about six inches into the water. The flow of 80 cumecs, on the back of a fresh, is an ideal time to fish as salmon seem to be on the move all day and there is a good chance upstream to encounter a fresh fish that hasn't seen any gear in the lower reaches.
- 2.5 As the river drops off, many of the fishing lies where a salmon might stop for a rest disappear and fish movement slows. By the time the flow reaches 50 cumecs, the salmon seem to hole up in the deeper water at groynes or along the willows and as there are long runs of shallow water between lies, fish movement appears to be more related to hours of darkness, rather than in broad day light – this is especially so at full moon February to April, where I have observed extensive fish movement after dark.
- 2.6 When the river is low, clear and warm, salmon become hard to catch, so this factor along with far less fishable water gives rise to concern on my part when I hear that someone, for financial gain, wants a share of the water that could reduce the angling experience, not only for me, but for future generations, from whom no-one has the right to take the river away.
- 2.7 The value of the Waimakariri River to individuals is immeasurable – given the scale of recreational use of the river, whole industries revolve around various recreational river uses. I am currently employed in a hunting and fishing retail shop and it is great to meet with like-minded people who share my passion for the river – from young children through to people in their mid-eighties, for whom the river and fishing forms a main focus in their lives.
- 2.8 As an “expert angler”, I was invited to take part in a Fish and Game field study of the Waimakariri River in conjunction with NIWA. The study took place between 27 - 31 May 2007.
- 2.9 On 27 May the expert anglers were asked to assess the fishability of lies over a section of the Waimakariri River on the back of a fresh, rating each lie either Good, Average or Poor. We then returned to that same reach on the 28th, 29th and 31st May and re-assessed the number and quality of lies present. Although our assessments were reached independently without collaboration, there was a large degree of uniformity of judgement between expert participants.

2.10 The results of this survey will be presented by Dr John Hayes.

3. EFFECTS OF ABSTRACTION

3.1 Based on my experience as an expert angler, I have a number of concerns about the potential effects of the proposed CPW Scheme on the Waimakariri River.

3.2 I consider that low flows have an effect on migrating smolt. Warm flows make smolt less active. This, accompanied by less depth of water, leads to increased predation. Because the Waimakariri does not have the same velocity of the Rakaia or the Rangitata, I am concerned that the warming effect at low flows is potentially greater.

3.3 I also see the potential for silting up of the lower reaches if dirty water and low velocity occur on a regular basis.

3.4 Less flood water may lead to a build up of lupins in the riverbed, allowing cover for predators to get closer to wading birds and other wildlife that enjoy the sanctuary of wide open tracts of the riverbed. Over the years I have also enjoyed duck shooting. Camps of ducks always seem to be on the most open stretch of river edge, where there is no cover for hundreds of metres.

3.5 In my view, lower levels and less minor braids would mean less invertebrate life and therefore less food for fish and the many varieties of birdlife who visit and live on the river.

3.6 I would be concerned that any abstraction would bring about the possibility of a repeat of the Rangitata RDR experience where a great number of smolt became entrapped in the race system – a recognised problem that has only recently, and in my opinion, reluctantly, been addressed and then at the lowest possible cost.

3.7 Any canals, races, etc, entering or leaving the river could also potentially obstruct free access for salmon and trout up or down the river and also, in crossing various tracks, may prevent personal access.

T Isitt

May 2008

APPENDIX A

