

**SUBMISSION TO
THE COMMISSIONERS
ON
CENTRAL PLAINS WATER TRUST APPLICATION**

**By and on behalf of:
MR ANTONY DONALD STEVENS**

My name is Antony Donald Stevens and I am now a Christchurch resident, previously of Little River where I retired from an active life in the rural community. My ancestors have been on and involved with the land for as far back as we can trace as farmers, foresters and rural craftsmen. I do not come to you as a learned academic with a doctorate, degree or other fancy piece of paper but as a simple countryman who has lived and loved working on the land. Water has always been and always will be not only an essential element but a highly contentious necessity. For over 500 years to my knowledge differing methods of moving and or storage of water on and off farm have been done, always to better the land and give lasting improvement to plant and animal, wild or domestic, and mankind. Always these in the past have been done with forethought, and based on logic born of experience and being done by farmers and their labourers at minimal cost or disruption to the daily routine. It may have been as simple as digging out a spring and lining it as a cattle drink or the construction of a pond filled by the land drainage system; or perhaps as complex as the construction of a dew pond or system of water meadows.

This proposal to use water from Canterbury's rivers Rakia and Waimakariri for irrigation purposes is I must confess a daunting proposal of dramatic scale little different from the old system of water meadow construction, but, I ask is it going to benefit the land, it's people and the environment. At first it would appear at least partly so, more stock, more cropping more profit, more cash into the economy. I believe that this is only a very small part of what should be considered. I believe that this is a blatant attempt to gain control of a vital resource for personal financial gain. Why should a small group have control of an essential elemental necessity such as water? The first point needing to

be considered is; are the proposers of this scheme intending to reap reward from the users of Canterbury water or are they going to philanthropically give a free water supply to those who pay a connection fee? I have a strong feeling that this proposal is blatant attempt to monopolise the availability of free surface water with total disregard to other interests and users. Should they feel so philanthropic I would be very pleased with a wee top up of my pension!

As an angler using both rivers I believe that a reduction to about half their current low water flows has, with a few days of really hot sun in summer, the ability to raise the water temperature to a point where there would be large scale fish kills. As a river user I see people using kayaks and power boats frequently and realise that there would be insufficient room at low flow rates for all users to use the river safely if at all. The areas to be most affected are the very same that have the highest general public use. On a fine Saturday, the 8th of March at the area adjacent to the motorway bridge, (Hamilton Warf) I counted approximately 200 people using this small area for recreation in less than one hour. I believe that there will be substantial loss of recreation possibilities if this scheme is allowed to go ahead as planned.

How many people and others have already consents that rely on the rivers water? I imagine that there are a great many that have direct and indirect access to water from these sources. I feel that there are technical experts that can make a calculated guess on the possible effects on ground water levels far better than I. Experience from my past tells me that no one can really know the full effects of such extraction. If in the future stock is involved regardless of any council grand plan or desire to limit water the stock must come first on the claim to water. This scheme could add, I have read, an estimated 50, 000 dairy cows to Canterbury each requiring their 80 litres per day, How would Christchurch, Kaipoi and Ashburton Councils and residents deal with a scenario when each business and household were to be limited to 1000 litres of water per day to let cattle drink? I know what this is like as Little River residents live with this regime. In another place and another time with falling water tables my well ran dry, for a year I had to truck water in every day. When the rains came the next problem soon became apparent, pollution on a

large scale with the accumulation of faeces that didn't rot without moisture, then was released with the rain and all the waters in the valley ran like open sewers. Fifty thousand dairy cows equals 2,000,000 litres of urine per day to ground, or so Lincoln University tells me; Are Canterbury plains soils able to sustain that level of urea application each and every day for the years to come? I think not.

On the subject of pollution I know that the Canterbury Plains is a dry land farming area and records indicate it is getting dryer over the years gone by. The soils are predominantly light and unable to hold moisture in the top 15 cm for long where grasses and many crops take most of their moisture from. Many farming practices overload with water which removes fertiliser below the plants reach which is remedied by more fertiliser application. The cycle is repeated and slowly the nutrients enter the ground waters below that feed the wells and bores. The same way faecal bacillus enters the water we use. The springs that feed the rivers, ponds and streams is overloaded with fertiliser that produces lush growth of weed and algae and major problems. Most of the surviving waterways (I estimate that close to 90% are dry or marginal) even now have signs warning of toxic algae and pollution making them unsafe. Well testing reveals that many are marginal for human use, the further towards the coast the worse they are generally applies. This is the situation now; how much worse will it become if the plains are watered to the tune of 80 cubic meters of water every second to support new high intensity agriculture?

In the past my family have always passed on the message that we do not own the land we farm regardless of deeds, titles or tenants agreements; we are but the stewards of the land that we live on. It is our responsibility to wisely use that land to the advantage of not just ourselves but to all creatures that live on and in that realm under our control. It is our bonded duty to pass on the land tenancy we enjoy in better heart and condition to future generations; not to do so would destroy us all. This has been the yeoman creed for countless generations of landowners, farmers, cotters and country folk; and they have in the main prospered by keeping to this creed and diligent hard work.

I earnestly believe that this proposal to drain half the water from our main rivers is morally wrong and will bring about the demise of many rural based folks lives and livelihoods.

I therefore earnestly ask the commissioners to carefully access the proposals set before them and ask that they consider the full implications to the rural and urban communities should the water rights be made solely available to the applicants. Should a very few be able to control the water that we all ultimately rely on for our very existence. On a total environmental level is there any justifiable reason that these rivers be plundered for personal gain? As a single example on the average dairy pasture there are at most ten species (often only two) of plant to the square foot and two insects both of which are pests. On top British water meadow pasture there can be up to two hundred species and countless insects so the balance and productivity is maintained with little interference from man. Agribusiness and agribusiness men have little care for the land, or the people or the stock or the crop; all that matters is the annual balance sheet. True farmers and rural folk stay put and work with nature for the most positive outcomes they can manage and take the good with the bad, the wet and the dry years. Please give them a chance to continue the excellent job that they do and decline this scheme out of hand.

Thank you,
Tony Stevens