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Further Evidence For Submission In Opposition to the Central Plains Water Scheme

To be presented, Friday 25 July, 2008
by Mrs Christine Dennis

My name is Christine Dennis, my maiden name Christine Nimmo. I was born at Darfield, grew up in Coalgate and have been living at Glenroy for the past 20 years with my husband, Chris.

As outlined in my submission, I would like to explain to the panel some ways in which the proposed Central Plains Water Scheme has affected and continues to adversely affect me and my extended family.

We are affected in the same way as many other individuals and groups with concerns over the Environmental and Social effects of re-constructing large portions of our countryside by earthworks as well as horrified by the thought that a private Company can force people to hand over their properties for the financial gain of others. But specifically we are affected in three ways.

Firstly: 7 Years of Uncertainty with No True Consultation

In 2001 we purchased a property in the Wairiri Valley, between Glentunnel and Glenroy. We paid the deposit for the property and the following day heard of a meeting called for landowners in the valley which was to take place soon after. I attended this meeting at the Glenroy Hall run by Richard Budd. At this meeting we were told of the proposed Irrigation Scheme and how it would supposedly benefit Canterbury by providing numerous jobs. Mr Budd was the convener of the meeting, as he was at others that followed. He presented the ideas and plans of CPW and then others in the audience brought up questions and concerns. He was unable to answer many of these questions but said that the message would be passed on. However neither minutes nor notes were taken at meetings to record the concerns held by locals. When Mr Budd returned to subsequent meetings there were no answers to previously asked questions, indicating that the concerns of locals had not been communicated to CPW and discussed there.

Also at this initial meeting we were told that land sales would take place on a 'Willing Seller, Willing Buyer' basis. The meaning of this terminology was not explained to the meeting. I understand now that this means that the purchaser is able to take the land *as if* it was from a willing seller.

Also mentioned, near the end of the meeting, was that sellers could expect to receive GV + 10% as compensation for land purchased. This was considered laughable by the meeting as land was fetching well above GV at that time.

We attended a number of meetings at different venues, each of which was in a similar format. The CPW scheme and ideas were presented, members of the public expressed concerns and asked for answers to their questions and to questions from previous meetings. No answers were forthcoming. The so called "consultation" was a farce.

Following investigations into the feasibility of flooding the Wairiri Valley, CPW decided to shift their focus to the Wainiwaniwa Valley. This was not, however, the end of the matter for us. The same overbearing, arrogant tactics were then continued with a new set of land owners.

It has also been suggested by CPW that they may eventually need "more storage" for the scheme. To the landowners in the Wairiri Valley this is just another threat hanging over us.

Secondly: Mineral Rights in the Wainiwaniwa Valley

In this matter I am speaking also on behalf of submissions made by my other members of my family.

My grandfather came to Coalgate from Ngapara in the 1940s to work in the Klondyke Coalmine. He later became the manger for a number of years.

During the 1950s he started his own Coal Mining Business - "Nimmo Collieries Ltd". This family business mined coal from the valley. When I was a child there were 5 small family coal mining businesses in the Wainiwaniwa Valley supplying factories, schools, hospitals and homes all over Canterbury. Our mine worked underground seams with the help of pit ponies in the earlier years and then moved to open casting. By 1986 our's was the only mine still in operation, the price of coal making the business marginal. My father then died suddenly and it was not financially feasible to continue the mining business with the price of coal at the low level it was fetching at the time.

Shortly before his death my father had signed a new 99-year lease for the Mineral Rights to the area he had been mining and to surrounding areas. Further Mineral Rights are owned by the Deans and Boyes families.

Nine years ago our family leased our mining rights to Ken Shearer of Kenroll Services. Mr Shearer has invested heavily in his business and, at the last I heard was extracting approximately 3000 Tonnes of coal per Annum. He carts the material to Rolleston where it is screened and returns the waste to the mine site, enabling the land to be restored to productive farmland in the process.

Other minerals are also present in the valley floor. I remember my father experimenting, along with a building materials company in Christchurch, with the use of crushed rock as a heat-proofing material for walls, and for roading as well as coloured rocks for landscaping. There is a variety of clays present in the valley floor and some clays are currently being extracted and used by the Darfield brick works.

Due to the way the coal has been deposited and the fact that seams are often interrupted and moved, the quantity of coal and other minerals in this area is unknown, although it is considered to be significant. As the need for energy resources continues to increase in the future, the extraction of coal will potentially become more financially viable. Other minerals, present in the valley may also prove to be important.

Should the Wainiwaniwa Valley be flooded as proposed, Mineral Rights owned by my family would be worthless. This would then be a financial loss to us. It would also be a loss to the country if important energy and mineral resources are buried by water, and consequently inaccessible.

Thirdly - Race Canal - Te Pirita Church

The Te Pirita church was purchased by my husband and me in the year 2000. We renamed it The Church of the Open Door. It is a place that is open to the public at all times. Over 300 people, from various parts of the world have entered, enjoyed the experience and signed the visitor's book over this time. Others have visited and not left their names. It is a facility well appreciated by a growing number of people.

We were informed that the church would be in the pathway of a canal for the CPW Scheme. The construction of canals on the site, or near the site, would severely impede the role of the church as a quiet retreat.

These are the three main ways that the Central Plains Water Scheme has affected and continues to affect my family. Thus seven years have now passed, a lot of money has been spent by CPW and we, along with other landowners, still have the same threat hanging over our heads. My husband and I were each concerned sufficiently about the injustice of the process that we each stood as candidates in the Local Body Elections. These seven years have been very tiring and caused many anxious times for us, in particular - contributing to health problems for my husband for which he has been hospitalised three times.

I am asking that the consent authority decline all applications in regard to the Central Plains Water Scheme.