

**IN THE MATTER OF** the Resource Management Act 1991

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER OF** resource consent applications by Killermont Station Limited to take and use water to irrigate parts of Killermont Station Limited.

**JOINT STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF DANIEL BERNARD THOMAS AND KERRY N  
ELIZABETH THOMAS**

**Introduction**

1. Our names are Dan and Kerry N Thomas. We are the directors of Killermont Station Limited. Killermont Station Limited has made eight applications for resource consent from Environment Canterbury.
2. We have applied for water takes to irrigate separate areas of our property, these can be summarised as:
  - (a) A take from the Ahuriri River to irrigate 216 ha on the "Pebbly Block" and 300 ha on the "Woolshed block".
  - (b) A take from Manuka Creek to irrigate 75 ha.
  - (c) A renewal take from Frosty Gully to irrigate 28ha.

**Life on Killermont Station**

3. Killermont Station has been in the Thomas Family for 71 years. Dan is a third generation farmer. He was in a farming partnership with his parents for 22 years up until 2003. We have since then, been farming Killermont ourselves under the company name of Killermont Station Limited.
4. Dan is a born and bred high country farmer. He has been on various committees involving Merino wool growers over the last 20 years. He was Chairman of the Ultra Fine Merino Company for 3 years where he was very involved in marketing the company's wool overseas and secured contracts with major companies. He is still actively involved in the

breeding programme and continues to be a share holder. We are very passionate about Merino wool having taken on all and any information regarding the improvement of our own wool and flock.

5. We spend a great deal each year on selecting sires that give us a genetic gain to keep improving our weights; wool production; constitution etc. We have not muled our flock for 7 years so are Zque accredited. We grow spinners wool which goes to Italy to be made into fine suits. Our wool is highly regarded in the merino industry.
6. Dan's parents still live on the farm in the Homestead. We are currently going through farm succession, however with no fat in the system Dan's parents are not able to move off the farm. We live in the farm cottage. We have six children, four of them are now away at Boarding Schools in Timaru and Christchurch. They are all home often and love helping out on the farm with stock work, feeding out and any other general jobs that need catching up on (especially if it involves driving). They have learnt so many invaluable life skills from the many opportunities that farming life provides. Lamb marking and shearing times are especially important for us as a family. They are the two biggest income earners in our financial year. We make it a real family occasion even taking the odd day off school if necessary. Everyone mucks in to do the drenching, crutching, feeding out, loading out the wool bales, pressing up and of course learning as much as possible from all involved about our wool.

### **The Mackenzie Basin**

7. The Mackenzie Basin is full of leisure activities. All of the family are keen hunters, fishermen/women, waterskiers, snowskiers (boarders). We spend time in the summer at Lake Benmore. We launch our jet boat at Sailors Cutting. There are always lots of campers and locals enjoying the lake from October through to March. We appreciate what is on our back door, such as the Ahuriri Conservation Park, where we go to tramp, camp and enjoy the great outdoors. Dan grew up with the Williamson boys (the previous owners - before the crown purchased Birchwood Station) and spent a lot of time at Birchwood.
8. In 2006, we finalised Tenure Review because we believe in providing access to the general public without jeopardising our farming business. It was a lengthy process that required compromise from both parties. We lost summer grazing country and riverbed frontage which caused a reduction in our stocking rate. We have changed our farming practice to accommodate the changes by investing in the existing irrigated area. We now have a DOC

track through our property with significant Outstanding Natural Landscape areas taken out of the farming fold so people can enjoy it as it is. We are very proud of how we maintain the unique and protected plants and species that this area is renowned for. We are vigilant at carrying out an intensive rabbit control programme. The family are committed to preserving the special nature and character of the place and the surrounding areas.

9. In the winter the local school has a ski programme that has seen all our children head up to Ohau snowfield each Friday afternoon. Dan attended Omarama School as a small boy before heading off to Boarding School and five of our six children have attended Omarama School. Archie is only three so has not made it yet! The school is the hub of our community, with a lot of fundraising necessary, it brings the families together and provides a much needed social connection for children and parents alike. In the last 8 years we have seen the school roll drop to the point that we lost Government funding for a young teacher who is from a local farming family, forcing her to move away to find employment.

#### **Challenges of farming in the Mackenzie Basin**

10. There are many challenges associated with the weather when farming in the Mackenzie Basin. The growing season is short with any real growth happening in early October through to the beginning or mid April. That is when we need to take advantage of the high temperatures and nor'west rainfall.
11. If we do not get good spring rains the pastures and forage crops are dried off by November. This causes a real problem when trying to grow supplementary feed to carry stock through the harsh winter months and still maintaining the stock we have on hand. During the summer months we have had to sell our run cows because of a lack of feed. The winter months are just as challenging with snow falls causing feed to disappear for weeks at a time.

#### **Current farming practices**

12. We have invested heavily over the last 40 years, but particularly in the last 6 years, developing a farming operation that will provide better economic returns. Part of the farming operation includes maintaining and enhancing the property so that grass growth is maximised. For example we already have not put fertiliser on the hill country for 9 years which has resulted in regeneration of native grasses and less scrub in the gullies and we have used Nitrosol liquid organic fertiliser on the lucerne paddocks of our existing irrigation and have seen great results. We have changed from a Gun to a Centre Pivot using our

existing take from Manuka Creek of 20lt/sec to become more efficient. At the same time we changed our system to take advantage of the ability to gravity feed all the existing irrigation. The fencing, troughing and regrassing was all part of the capital development cost.

13. We currently have 3200 Merino Ewes, 2600 Merino Hoggets, 150 Wapiti/Red Hinds and we fatten 60 - 80 cattle each year depending on the market. We sell our weaners in April/May because we don't have the feed reserves to winter them. This is not the most profitable option. We keep 700 replacement hoggets to go into the flock as two toothers and the rest we sell in October/November/December before they cut their teeth. We shear our ewes in September and always have to sell to the market price in early October. Our hoggets are shorn in early October again to sell as soon as possible but to the market price on the day. Not being able to hold on to wool or stock greatly reduces any income we could benefit from by being more flexible.

#### **Future ambitions for the property**

14. Due to the challenges we face because of farm succession, the harsh environment and market vulnerability, irrigation is our last option to make this a sustainable, viable, progressive farming unit. We are excited about the prospect of being able to perfect the balance on Killermont. We are overwhelmed by this process and at the thought of having to struggle as we are with the only option left to us being to sell our family farm.
15. We hope to be able to establish an irrigated farm to sustain our stocking rate throughout the year (and to increase our stock numbers to increase our income). This will enable us to take advantage of the market vulnerability by only selling stock when the prices are at their highest and the stock are at their maximum weight for age. This will also release the pressure on the more fragile country and high country in times of extreme weather conditions. The ewes will still be set stocked for lambing on the hill country (providing much needed shelter) with feed having been summer and/or autumn saved. The flats are prone to wind erosion and we are often unable to cultivate areas with no shelter from the spring nor'wests that prevail here.
16. The top soil will benefit on the blocks that we have put annual crops into because of the wasting organic matter being left on the land. When this cropping land is sown in a permanent pasture the following season we have had blocks that have lasted for 10 years - still being highly productive. On the irrigated land we have increased production along with

animal health benefits. The young stock are able to be shifted more frequently avoiding any unwanted worm burden and providing them with a superior feed supply with increased nutrients needed for their growth.

### **Environmental mitigation**

17. We have studied many farming practices and feel we will definitely be able to progress and implement our FEMP. As we have explained, a number of the measures that are proposed are part of what we are already able to achieve. We know that monitoring nutrient application, discharge and water application are all part of maintaining a healthy irrigated farming unit.
18. We support other irrigation consents in this catchment and the Mackenzie Basin as a whole because we have seen firsthand the advantages of a well managed farming approach to applying water in times of need. The community is growing from the improvement in economics due to the Benmore irrigation scheme and we have no doubt that it will continue to do so with the approval of our (along with others) consents.

### **Conclusion**

19. Overall we have invested a huge amount of money and effort in this onerous and lengthy process which we would not have done had we not thoroughly researched all alternative options for our farm.
20. We have spent a considerable amount of money on an expert team who have advised us that irrigating in the Mackenzie Basin is possible through state of the art farm management plans and ongoing auditing and monitoring. We accept that this is now the reality of modern farming. It is evident just from looking at the Basin that times are changing and the traditional ways of farming are no longer realistic.
21. We appreciate that a high benchmark has been set in terms of maintaining water quality but understand that by continually meeting these benchmarks it will create a sustainable farming unit that will set up our farm for generations to come. We have come into this process with our eyes wide open and we appreciate the obligations that are in front of us if the water is granted. At the end of the day securing water is our only option.