Before a Hearings Panel of the Canterbury Regional Council

Under	Resource Management Act 1991
In the matter	of applications for Regional Council Resource Consents to take and use water in the Upper Waitaki River Catchments

BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF GRAEME PETER SPITTLE

1. My full name is Graeme Peter Spittle and as managing director of the Bellfield Land Company I hold national awards for excellence in stock production and farm management plans.

2. Bellfield Land Company is an applicant in these proceedings for the property of Quailburn Downs.

3. I am a fourth generation farmer, residing on my Southland property near Te Anau, with initial part ownership in an intensive sheep beef and cropping property occurring in 1974. Subsequently additional rural properties have been purchased and currently encompass Quailburn Downs which is managed by Hamish Richards (Dip Ag Mgmt)

4. Quailburn Downs was purchased in April 2006 with the medium term goal of achieving self sustainability. The addition of Riverside in July 2009 ,an adjoining unit of 270ha ,was taken as an opportunity to create further balance of both hill and flat country and thus improve the infrastructure owned in the Omarama area.

5. The overall property comprises 2470 hectares. It is split between the Quailburn and Henburn catchments and for the purposes of this hearing is situated below a number of significantly larger applications to irrigate in the upper catchments of the Quailburn and the Henburn. Our consent is essentially divided into three parts, which may be summarised as follows:

6. An area of 95 hectares which is part of our replacement consent which has already been converted to a centre pivot as detailed below

7. A further area of 95 hectares, being the balance area of our replacement consent, which we intend to convert to centre pivot;

8. A new area not covered in the replacement consent comprising 52 hectares – known as the Henburn irrigation site.

9. Currently this combined unit, referred to as Quailburn Downs, operates a merino sheep breeding and fattening enterprise. Beef cattle are purchased and fattened in conjunction with the sheep entity. Although ryecorn has been grown and harvested this has largely been unsuccessful due to unreliable rainfall.

10. Presently the property operates a 95 hectare 180 degree pivot with the intention to convert the remaining 95 hectares of replacement to pivot. To improve the total efficiency of water used, an extensive upgrade of the old irrigation system has recently been completed. This involved the removal of old water races, all wild flood outlets, boarder dykes, k-line and antiquated spray systems. Consent for a bore was granted to enable the installation of a totally new piped and troughed stock water reticulation scheme. All necessary requirements for an upgrade of the intake will be undertaken on the granting of this consent.

11. The proposed Henburn irrigation site is the lower of two on this catchment and is exposed to the North West prevailing wind – with high rates of transpoevaporation occurring as a result.

12. In respect of the Quailburn irrigation site this is situated towards the most southern point of the Quailburn Stream on light stony soils.

13. Whilst Quailburn Downs has participated in the commissioning of the WQS for the benefit of all irrigators we are somewhat nervous in being a smaller existing irrigator situated below some very large applications where the stocking rates for those properties are likely to change significantly – I understand this is the reason why our mitigation measures will result in an element of constraint on our farm management practices into the future. Quailburn is not changing its stocking type – it will remain a sheep (merino) /beef property. We need the balance between sheep and cattle in order to manage feed levels overall. Cattle are much better at breaking down rough or rank pasture – principally on the non irrigated parts of our property – to allow sheep to thrive in this environment.

14. Although water quality will be monitored over both our proposed and existing irrigation sites I have no control over the water quality prior to usage and this potentially creates some major problems in respect of my responsibility in ensuring that all water quality standards are adhered to.

15. Like most MacKenzie farmers, I don't want to see water quality deteriorating markedly. The streams are a major asset to our properties in both a visual and in an economic context and we want to ensure that these assets are preserved. In the spirit of co-operating with all farmer applicants we have worked within the WQS thresholds which Melissa Robson has provided for our property – but it does seem somewhat ironic that the measures which we are now having to

contemplate are resulting because other properties are contemplating a significant change in stocking rates and stock /management practices

16. In an effort to meet the required WQS threshold levels, via the overseer programme, cattle numbers have been reduced from the proposed 300 to 120, the application of nitrogen limited to only establishing young grass, inability to grow either grain, grass seed or forage crops and much of the lucerne used as winter feed to be fed out only on undeveloped hill country. The threshold levels in the WQS, were changed downwards on three separate occasions, thus the need for the property to constantly change existing management and stock policies all of which have been in place and sustainable for many years.

17. I have carefully assessed these mitigation measures and consider that they are workable – even though it will require changes to the way we farm at present. For example the need to feed out on undeveloped hill country will involve a change to bring stock off the irrigation area to feed out and then bring them back on for winter grazing

18. All ewes will have to be fed on either undeveloped flat and/or hill country. The exposure to the winter elements is therefore much greater than utilising developed and warmer flat land. The ability to save the higher hill country over the harsh part of the winter is restricted and the logistics in taking feed out will involve considerably more time and greater logistics to get it there. Further tracking on the property is likely to be required.

19. In ensuring that local receiving environments are not affected by either our existing or proposed irrigation plans we have drafted mitigation measures (See FEMP), where practical, to firstly introduce new technology as a means to achieving these goals. This involves the use of GPS mapped fertiliser spreading systems, a commitment to upgrade the remaining replacement irrigation to spray along with buffer zones from streams, application of fertiliser outside of late autumn winter months, riparian planting and fencing.

20. Although Bellfield Land Company is applying for the renewal of an existing consent, and a small increase in new consent area, we have updated old systems and met the necessary environment requirements I find it difficult to understand why this particular property has severe limitations placed against its

operation. Positioned at the base of the Quailburn catchment the property is greatly influenced by farming and development enterprises in the upper region.

21. The system for allocating nutrients set out by the WQS on an irrigable area basis was indeed simple and practical to administer however anything but equitable in its outcome and thus places unnecessary constraints on Quailburn Downs.