

**IN THE MATTER**

of the Resource Management Act 1991  
("the Act")

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER**

of applications by the Central Plains  
Water Trust (CPWT) and the Ashburton  
Community Water Trust (ACWT)

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**Statement of Evidence of Craig Robertson**

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**Introduction**

1. My name is Craig Robertson. I live with my wife Sally and three children, Harry, Jack and three-week-old Emma. Our farm in the Waianiwaniwa Valley is called Abner's Head. We have lived here for 10.5 years.

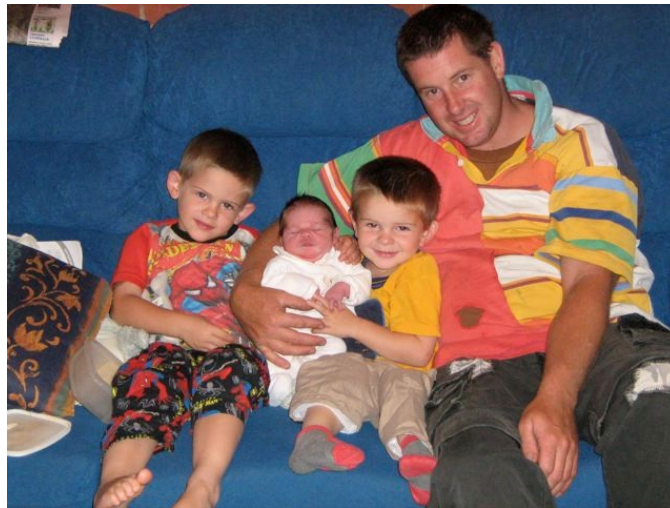


**Gateway to Abner's Head Farm in the Waianiwaniwa Valley.**

2. If the CPW scheme goes ahead, I will lose my farm, my house and my family's home. In this submission I will try to tell you why I think CPW should not be allowed to ruin my life and the lives of many other people in the same situation as us.

## **Living at Abner's Head in the Valley**

3. The farm consists of 600 acres in the Valley and another 600 in Courtney. Together with my dad, Murray Robertson, we farm sheep, beef and arable crops. In the winter, we keep the sheep and beef in Courtney, but in the summer, the animals stay in the Valley where it rains and provides them with lots of feed. With the good feed in the Valley, we get one third more wool production than in Courtney.
4. Living in the Valley is like being in a tranquil paradise. Every day we can hear birds chirping up valley and the children like watching the native wild life. Harry and Jack have the freedom to roam, play in their tree house and ride their pony, Ben. They love to go fishing in the creek, feed the sheep, swim in the creek, play in the fresh air, climb trees, and play with pet hedgehogs and the dogs. They like 'helping' me in the workshop and working in their own little veggie garden.



**Harry, Emma, Jack and Craig.**

5. We are in a sheltered part of the Valley – the Nor'wester's that scream down the upper end of the Valley are not a problem for us. In summer, it is fantastic and really warm. We do not get the freezing Nor'easterly winds that howl through Darfield. We do get good Nor'west rain though, up to 10mls, which gives us lush grass for stock.
6. In winter it is not much colder than Darfield. The cold is not really a problem anyway because the stock are in Courtney. The Valley has its own little microclimate that suits our farming situation well.

7. We have tried living somewhere else but could not stick it. A few years ago we signed a one-year lease out on the plains but within 24 hours we realised that we had made a mistake. We lasted 4 months and then headed back to the Valley. It was horrible in the middle of the flat, windy Plains. We were boxed in around the trees for the shelter and had no views. At Abner's Head, we can see Mt Hutt from our kitchen window and have green rolling hills all around.

### **The Farm Land**

8. One third of our land in the Valley is flat land and by that I mean that a header could be driven over it. This year we have grown kale for the first time and it has done really well. It is 2 feet higher than the kale out on the plains farms. In the past we have also grown spuds and some hay.



**Kale crop on our Waianiwaniwa Valley farm.**

9. The soils are low in phosphate but are very, very fertile. We never have to irrigate. This is the reason why my parents bought this land. It was the same price to buy here than to irrigate on the plains.
10. We have one tractor shed, one workshop, one hay shed, two wool sheds, one of which could be one of the oldest shearing sheds in Canterbury, and two implement sheds. If this scheme goes ahead they will all be inundated by water.

11. Our stock consists of 1200 ewes, 65 breeding cows, 28 steers, 24 heifers, 90 calves, 60 deer and about 120 goats. We have a fair bit of forestry land too. There are about 25 hectares of *Pinus radiata*, and a wee stand of oak trees of about an acre. These are over a hundred years old and would have been planted by the Dean's family. There is also some ash, sycamore and poplars (30 m high). In our backyard there is a big macrocarpa over 100 years old and three massive pine trees 1.2 meters in radius. The boys play in those trees and that is where the birds live that provides us with constant birdsong.

### **Our Home**



**Robertson's House in the Valley.**

12. The house we live in is 140 years old. It is triple brick, with a rimu framework, kauri floors and mantelpieces, and has one original fire and one original match line ceiling. The house was empty for about 25 years before we move in so it was pretty derelict. It was home to wildlife and trees.

13. Before we moved into the house we had to rebuild the back section of the house. We tried to rebuild it as it was originally built. The house has three bedrooms, dining/living room, kitchen, bathroom and large laundry. The gardens have many old trees, shrubs and flowers and Sally has worked hard to improve the gardens in the short time that she has been here at the cottage.



**Refurbished kitchen.**

14. The trees around our house would be about 140 years old. There are plum trees, cherry and walnuts all around the house. It would be a pity to see them all go underwater after all these years. We have an extensive play area for our boys, it is safe, wide open and easy to watch from the house.

15. This is the photo that Sally saw of her new home in New Zealand. Sally and I met while I was working in the UK. We decided to get married but Sally came over to New Zealand after I had returned home. I had been going on about this fantastic house and Sally said she wanted to see pictures of the house – this is what I sent. When she saw the photo she thought “... can I cancel my ticket to New Zealand, I’m not living there!”



**“The Shack” in a derelict state.**

16. When Sally arrived in NZ, I had to go away so my mother took her to see the house. There she saw an overgrown, broken down home, her very first dead possum, sheep shit all over the floors and an unliveable house. Sally was

pleased that she still had her return ticket... she could still go home if she decided to. But she didn't.

17. Sally is pretty tough though because a few days after first seeing the house, she returned to the cottage and got stuck into fixing up the bathroom. Once the renovations began, it became easier and soon the house was looking habitable. Our first romantic bath together saw us filling the bath with buckets of hot water carried into the bathroom. But ...with a lot of sweat, tears and determination we have whipped the house into shape and now have a comfortable, warm house for our family. Sally can laugh about it now, and she says the only way she will leave her home now is in box.

18. My wife Sally does not come from a farming family but she loves our farm in the Valley. She loves the wide-open spaces and she knows that the kids are safe. It is a quiet, remote place and even if the children did go out on to the road, there is no traffic for her to be concern about. When they visit their Grandparents in Courtney out on the Plains, Grand-dad always worries about road safety.



**Jack playing in the backyard.**

19. Our house has a long and colourful history. There are many stories about the people who used to live here and also about the ghosts who have stayed. Word has it that there is a ghost who sits in a rocking chair on the front porch shooting mice and rats with a shotgun. My friend came while I was building a new deck and said 'I could sit out here in my rocking chair and shoot at the people I don't like... '. That was a bit spooky because I had never talked about our rocking chair ghost!

## **Personal**

20. Sally and I both enjoy hunting. Sometimes Sally is a better hunter than me. She took up hunting when she met me and has become a really good shot. It is something we enjoy doing together. We have used the farm for clay pigeon shooting events and have also hosted a long bore range for the deerstalkers; there are always lots of rabbits to shoot.
21. At first it was hard for Sally to settle here in New Zealand with a new family, and being in a new country, but now would not leave it for the world. She took to farming a remote area really quickly and has never regretted her move from the UK. She is passionate about saving the Valley for her children and grandchildren.
22. Farming in the Valley is challenging yet it is a hell of a lot of fun getting an adrenaline rush every day because of the terrain. Working our land is always exciting because the terrain is not very flat. It takes a lot more skill and preparation than working on the flats. Mistakes are extremely costly so we just do not make them. Rolling a tractor can mean killing yourself and I have too much to lose to take that kind of chance. Because I know what the risks are we use small tractors and farming gear. I have worked hard to learn the lie of my land and I know how to work it. Steep land requires care.



**Hill country farming.**

23. If the scheme goes ahead we would lose our livelihood and the life we have working our challenging but fertile land. They would take most of our productive land and we would not be able to work the bits that are left. We

would not be able to have any stock because our flats would be gone. Our farming operation would basically be killed.

### **Consultation**

24. With what we THINK CPW wants, our entire farm would not be viable if we had to lose our good land. We do not actually know for certain what part of our land they would take because no one from CPW has ever spoken to us. To this day, we have never received a formal letter telling us that our land is required for the scheme. Others got a Dear Landowner letter, we have had nothing. We have had no phone calls from CPW trustees or company representatives. They have never been to our farm to speak with us.

25. We only knew about the Waianiwaniwa Valley reservoir option because I read about it in the paper. I went to the early meetings where my name was recorded. They did not contact me. Since then, I have been on TV and the radio talking about the scheme but I still have not had any official letters about what land they will take.

26. I would never sell this property. There is no way we are ever going to leave here. There might be a Notice of Requirement on my land but I have not been told about it by anyone so stuff CPW – we will carry on and do improvements as we need to. Every year I do not do any improvements means I get one year behind in development. If I wait for CPW to contact me, I will be waiting forever! We will just carry on doing what we are good at – sustainable farming.

### **Objections to the scheme itself**

27. I think the Scheme is totally backwards. What is the point of putting canals through older people's property and also through the front of new houses on the plains? They moved to the country to have a quiet life but now will have this disruption. Piping would be better for everyone.

28. We are not against irrigation, but I think it is ludicrously stupid to put all that water onto the Canterbury Plains. To irrigate dairy units properly, it takes more than 15mls/week/ha whereas the other half of our farming operation in Courtenay we use 8/9mls/week/ha at most. The dairy farming season is from

Oct-May so not only do you use more water to irrigate, you use it for a much longer irrigation period.

29. With the price of water and dairying being higher, the cost of supplementary feeding will rise too. Feed has to be grown somewhere but land will be too expensive to buy for feed so where will it be grown? Imported from China? Putting all our eggs in one basket is an economic nightmare. Good supplementary feed land will disappear to new dairy developments.
30. We also have concerns that no archaeological surveys have been done on site to see what coal mines, clay pits or historic sites would be lost. We have never been approached by anyone from CPW about sites on our land.

### **Impacts on my family**

31. Sally and I have found it really hard to protect the kids from the negative talk around 'flooding' the Valley. They do not really understand what that means and have their own ideas about 'flooding' – getting a big garden hose and covering the house with water. At one point we had to stop even mentioning the scheme because Harry, our 4 year old, was losing the plot. The emotional stress in the family was getting to be too much so we had to try to explain to Harry what would happen in simple terms that a child could understand. He was so obsessed about it, eventually we had to sit down with him and tell him we were not going to speak about it anymore.
32. We try really hard not to talk about the scheme in front of the kids but Harry was picking up things from other people. At pre-school mat-time he said of Pat Morrison, "he's going to kill us and flood our house". The teachers said that he would talk a lot about it at pre-school. It is a big burden for a little boy to bear.
33. For the sake of the kids we try to put the CPW scheme to the back of our minds and do our best not to think about. Sometimes it creeps in though and I feel the stress coming out, so I just tell myself to forget about it. It may look like we do not care but that is the only way we have come up with to deal with it with the kids. We have even had to ask the grandparents not to discuss it in front of kids.

### **Conclusion**

34. We ask the commissioners to decline the consents and to withdraw the notice of requirement. I will not give up the land I have worked hard to improve, to supply water for dairy farmers who are trying to farm on inappropriate soils.



**Craig Robertson**  
**Abner's Head**  
**Waianiwaniwa Valley**