

Mackenzie Guardians Presentation to the Upper Waitaki Hearing - 9 December 2009

Presenter : John Smithies, Chairman, Ohau Conservation Trust[OCT]www.ohau.org.nz

Statement

Mr Commissioner, Panel and Presenters

My name is John Smithies and I have lived in South Canterbury, North Otago and in fact the Southern end of the South Island for the whole of my life... six years ago retiring to the Lake Ohau Valley.

On behalf of the OCT I need to tell the Hearing what I bring to this debate. I bring **the comments of an observer**... unsullied by scientific opinion, or argument based on personal gain and political expedience.

What is the Ohau Conservation Trust? The OCT was brought into being with the help and guidance of the Department of Conservation. Five Trustees and something in the order of 40 Supporters continue to work on the protection and enhancement of the Lake Ohau environment. Significant results have been achieved by the application of hundreds of hours of voluntary labour backed by almost constant fund raising. Wilding tree control and restoration planting being two examples of work upon which attention is focused.

As well as the Trust's valuable association with the Department of Conservation , formal MOUs are also established with Environment Canterbury and Waitaki District Council.

The purpose of this address is to assist in opposing the rampant exploitation of the Mackenzie Basin as is typically evidenced by the water extraction applications central to these Waitaki Water Extraction Hearings. By any aesthetic measure who can say the results of the dairy expansion already carried out in the Mackenzie Basin are preferable to a sustainable and nurtured tussock landscape?

The vision created with roadside and distant structures, for example pump sheds, look like they have been designed in a darkened room with a blunt carpenter's pencil and are thus symptomatic of a mindset at odds with a high country landscape.

No effort has been made to establish harmony with the landscape. As for pivot irrigators... we are all familiar enough with the visual impact they have.

I have already imparted the OCT's collective opinion of what is happening to the Mackenzie, the negative visual impact of which is driven by profligate big business and not helped by the encroachment of wilding trees on adjacent land. This excites the sensitivities of overseas tourists. I have been exposed personally to expressions ranging from a passing remark to horror at what is happening to this wonderful region.

Earlier I pointed out that I am not qualified to comment in scientific terms. I along with my Trust colleagues simply bring to this Hearing comments on the results of what we see happening in the Mackenzie and we are worried. At worst we fear total acquiescence on the part of the adjudicators or maybe compromise on a not so bad day. Either result will be judged a bad day by folk concerned with the way our country is showing signs [not only in the Mackenzie] of allowing this visual vandalism to advance in the name of progress.

To return briefly to the OCT. I ask you to imagine the impact on Trustees and Supporters, while focusing their conservation efforts in the Ohau Valley, they look over the fence to see downgrading of the landscape brought about by dairy farming

expansion. This situation sadly gives rise to the sentiment that they are fighting a losing battle hardly mollified by twice receiving awards [2008 and 2009] for the protection of natural tussocks and grasslands.

Supporters participate in the Trust's voluntary work programme while on holiday from all parts of New Zealand and abroad and I believe and hope that through me they can have a voice.

While I have your attention on the subject of tussock grasslands I suggest that they have evolved in this region for a purpose. They give a beauty to the landscape and provide a sustainable ecological infra-structure. The OCT has been cleaning up past mistakes. Let's not add to it.

To conclude....and I address everyone Submitters and Applicants. How would you like to write a letter now to be opened in say 40/50 years by your children or grandchildren? This letter I suggest would state what position you argued in this complex debate. Would they, like our generation say what a horrendous trail of landscape and environmental disasters that lot left behind.

Thankyou Commissioner and Panel. If it is your wish I would be happy to answer any questions.

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