

Statement of Sam Neill

The great open, iconic landscapes of Central Otago and the Mackenzie Country, the beautiful, tussocked terrain of the central South Island, are not only fundamental to our sense of ourselves as a nation, but an environment of World Heritage importance.

It is a privilege for us New Zealanders to visit, to holiday there [it is also our heritage], it is a privilege for our [now vital] overseas visitors to see, and it is an immense privilege to live and farm there. Those privileges must not be abused. We are all of us guardians of that land, but none more so than those that farm it. And might I say, it is a privilege and vital responsibility for you, the Environment Canterbury Commissioners, to consider the future of the region, and an awesome responsibility. I urge you to give this your full and measured consideration.

I am appalled to learn of the projected fate of the Mackenzie Country, that it may well fall increasingly into the hands of large-scale dairy agribusiness.

There has already been some compromising of the area, and many New Zealanders are shocked to see immense pivot irrigators, where once there was only open range tussock land. There must be no more degradation of the region.

It is self evident that this rugged, tough tussock country is unsuitable for dairying. I am opposed to the increasing farming intensification there, and the absurd notion, for instance, of shedding cattle for 8 months of the year, along with the consequent large scale infrastructure sitting in the landscape, as is proposed for several properties in the Lake Ohau area. Unfortunately, we have already seen the unhappy and environmentally deleterious results of such a venture in the Maniototo. The Mackenzie country is even more unsuitable.

There is absolutely no question this type of farming – dairy - will have an adverse effect on not just the majestic landscapes of the Mackenzie, but also on its water – its rivers, lakes and streams, as

well as its vital ecosystems and species.

The proposed use of those incredible, glacier-fed waters would be misuse, the consequent degradation - abuse

If profit concerns are material here, let it be understood that the Mackenzie is a priceless resource for New Zealand. There are very few places like this in the world. Indeed the Mackenzie is unique. *Dairy farming is ephemeral but the loss of that iconic landscape would be everlasting.*

These proposals may enrich a few, but they will certainly impoverish the rest of us, not just now, but for generations to come.

Sometimes the best thing for the land is to just leave it alone.