

IN THE MATTER

HEARING DATE

AND

of the Resource
Management Act 1991
(RMA)

IN THE MATTER

of Proposed Variation
6 to Chapters 4 of the
Proposed Canterbury
Natural Resources
Regional Plan (NRRP)
– Chapter 4 – Water
Quality

TO BE HEARD BY

Environment
Canterbury

14th April 2010

**Statement of Evidence of Richard Christie on Behalf of Ravensdown
Fertiliser Co-operative Ltd**

14 April 2010

Introduction

1. My name is Richard Christie. I am a General Manager - Strategic Development with Ravensdown Fertiliser Cooperative Ltd based at the company's Head Office in Christchurch. I have been in this role since 1998. Part of my responsibilities include reviewing district and regional plans throughout New Zealand to ensure Ravensdown's operations are appropriately provided for, and to ensure fertiliser products can be used by our shareholders in an environmentally responsible manner with the minimum of regulation. With Ravensdown, I have lead the development and commercialisation of the nitrification inhibitor, eco-n, and have been directly involved with the development of the Code of Practice for Nutrient management (2007) due to being a member of the FertResearch Technical Group for the last ten years.
2. My previous relevant experience includes holding the positions of Planning Manager with the Southland Dairy Co-operative, and Regional Policy Analyst for Federated Farmers in Otago and Southland with a focus on RMA plans at the local level. In that role I also acted as Executive Director for the Fertmark Programme. For two years from 2006 to 2008 I was seconded for 60% of my time from Ravensdown to the role of Executive Director of the South Island Dairying Development Centre, based at Lincoln University, and involved with commercial best practice dairy demonstration farms at Lincoln and in Southland. I hold an Agricultural Science degree and a Masters of Business Administration.
3. I provide the following statement of evidence in support of the submission lodged by Ravensdown Fertiliser Co-operative Ltd (Ravensdown) to Proposed Variation 6 to Chapters 4 of the Proposed NRRP that have been addressed in the Officer Report, for Submitter 11 and Further Submitter F132.

Outline of Evidence

4. My approach today is to deal only with the issues relating to agricultural land affected by the proposed rules in Variation 6. Matters that affect our Hornby operation will be dealt with separately by Mr Chris Hansen and Mr Matthew

Ellen in their evidence. My evidence will be relatively brief as most of our submissions around agricultural land are dealt with similarly and negatively by the Officer's Report.

Evidence

New Policy WQL13 Protection Zone 1, specifically Point 9 (Rural Production Land) and similar statements in other policies. Also Explanation to Policies WQL13-19, Points 3 and 5.

5. Ravensdown in Submission 11.1 sought controlled activity or restricted discretionary status rather than prohibited status for activities that did not meet the performance standards.
6. The Officers Report rejected this submission due to risk and vulnerability of groundwater.
7. I believe that the approach taken in Variation 6 is extremely risk averse in allowing no new development or intensification of existing land use, even with very low probability of adverse potential effects. The precautionary principal has been misused. The agricultural land surrounding the city, and falling principally in Zone 1 is losing all its future potential. Farming is always adapting to changing markets and produce demand. To be constrained to existing activities will eventually render the land uneconomic. This constraint is being imposed on farming while the proposed Variation does not seem to clearly establish where any groundwater is vulnerable or explore the alternatives open to the city to protect or secure its reliable potable water supply. I am not suggesting the city should immediately change its water take system, but for areas were groundwater is vulnerable, options such as deeper wells, fewer small shallow wells, and in the much longer term water treatment (as practiced by nearly every other city) are tools it has available. These options do not appeared to be considered and assessed when compared with the constraints Variation 6 will place on both rural and city properties.

8. Ravensdown in Submission 11.3 sought the deletion of Policy WQL12(2)(b) (iii).
9. The Officers Report rejected this submission. One reason given was that the land uses over the recharge zone are currently of low intensity which is the primary reason why the quality of groundwater is so high. Although not a hydrologist, my reading would suggest that the primary reason for high quality water found in the Christchurch bores is not that there is low farming intensity behind the airport or out through West Melton, but rather that the aquifer receives substantial recharge from the mountain fed Waimakariri River.
10. The Officers Report also comments that if land use was to increase in intensity, then water quality would decline. This position is taken in a number of the Officer Report responses to our Further Submissions (such as to F123.41, F123.42 and F123.54). There is an un-quantified position from the Officer Report that any intensification will result in water quality decline and that mitigation is ineffective.
11. This position is unjustified. It limits all future options, takes no account of current or developing technologies and again is so risk adverse as to be unbalanced. The resultant policies and rules create, in my view, a range of uncertainties about land use change. I note that the new Policy WQL13 (9) says that rural production land use must not be intensified where it increases the potential for contamination. If a West Melton lifestyle block moves from grazing ponies to grazing sheep (or visa versa) is that deemed as intensification, and how will that be known? Will the level of imported feed be monitored? Even when the “intensification” is more obvious, such as a move to bull beef rearing with more supplementary feed, why should this change in activity require a non-complying resource consent? This is not, in my view, an effects based approach as required by the RMA. Even with a change to irrigation, there are a number of management options that could make the new farming system less prone to nutrient loss to groundwater than the previous farming practices. This includes the use of nitrification inhibitors, better effluent management, continuous soil moisture measurement

and tighter feed and fertiliser management through nutrient management plans.

12. Despite the rejection of Ravensdown submissions, the potential for the successful use of mitigation technologies and best practice is recognised in the new Policy WQL13 in Point 8 where existing rural production land “*must minimise the potential for contaminants to reach groundwater by instituting all practical management measures.....*”.
13. Ravensdown, in Further Submissions F123.55, F123.56 and F123.20 to 24, supported Federated Farmers North Canterbury and other parties in seeking amendments to Point 3 of the Explanation and Principal Reasons to Policy WQL14, relating to pesticides and fertiliser to state: *"The application of pesticides and fertilisers in both the urban and rural environments associated with intensive land use activities (e.g. horticulture) can have significant consequences for groundwater contamination. Over application and improper application, in conjunction with irrigation and/or significant rainfall events, can result in contaminants being readily flushed into the groundwater system."*
14. Again the Officer Report recommends our further submission, and the original submissions, be rejected. This was based on fertilisers and pesticides always reaching groundwater.
15. I find the Officer Report position unacceptable. In the text to which modifications were sought, it is clear that the problems relate to over application and improper application. No tolerance is given for good management. Neither is it understood by the Officer Report that pesticides need not get to groundwater. In fact the detection rate of most agrichemicals in groundwater, even with exceptionally accurate detection equipment, shows no reading. And again there is no sense of scale around risk. There continues to be this unjustifiable position that no change in contaminant levels, no matter how minute, can occur. As Mr Hansen points out, the RMA is not about ‘no risk’, but is about identifying risk and managing effects accordingly.

16. I consider that the amendment proposed by Ravensdown allows for recognition of good practise and the ability to manage activities so as to avoid adverse effects. As such I **seek** for the Commissioners to adopt the relief sought by Ravensdown in its submission.

17. In conclusion, in my view the use of non-complying activity status for any increase in intensity of agricultural landuse is unjustified. I recommend that a clearer definition of what constitutes intensification is given, some scale is given (land area) and restricted discretionary activity status is applied in the applicable zones, with discretion restricted to the potential effects on Christchurch's drinking water supply.