



Waitaki Irrigators Collective 2015 Year in review

From the Chair

Fraser McKenzie

I can report that 2015 has been another successful year for WIC.

WIC was created to provide a collective voice for irrigators who take water from the lower Waitaki River. The wisdom of its founders has never been more evident than with the results achieved during Environment Canterbury's Plan Change 3 process to amend the Waitaki Catchment Water Allocation Regional Plan.

The respect which the hearing panel (appointed to oversee the Plan Change) and other interested parties had for the evidence presented by WIC was clear.

We were able to negotiate from a position of strength as we were seen as a body that genuinely represents the vast majority of irrigators in the district. This also enabled WIC to be a credible voice when negotiating with both Meridian Energy and ECan.

While a number of WIC representatives were involved in the process, the leadership and tenacity exhibited by our Policy Manager, Elizabeth Soal, was probably the most influencing factor in our success. Well done Liz.

The company's aim is to provide for the reliability and surety of irrigation water for its members, and while the outcome of the Plan Change process is yet to be decided,

the position of irrigators is protected and may even be enhanced.

If the Plan Change goes through, the next stage will be a review of existing scheme and individual consents so they fall in line with revised Allocation Plan. Again, thanks to Liz Soal, ably supported by former WIC director Matt Ross, there is agreement in principle between WIC, Meridian Energy and ECan as to how this process will roll out.

While Plan Change 3 has been our major focus in 2015, there have been a number of other initiatives and activities, as Liz advises on her report, which have further enhanced the aims of WIC.

Financially, we have required additional funding this year to cover the increased workload, but with WIC representing all irrigators, the cost of expert witnesses and legal counsel have been minimised.

Finally, our success will only be achieved by sticking together and focusing on the big picture. It is the role of not only of WIC's directors, but scheme directors, their shareholders and independent irrigators, to ensure their corporate and/or personal agendas do not impact on the collective will that has been generated so successfully to date. The environment we work in is becoming increasingly complex, the interest in and awareness of issues surrounding freshwater management is becoming the focus of an ever-growing and demanding public audience. We can only effectively meet these challenges as a unified, collective group.

Fraser



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From the Policy Manager

Elizabeth Soal

Looking back on 2015, the overall theme of the year for WIC would have to be plans, plans, and more plans - with most of our work focused around Environment Canterbury (ECan). I've outlined these issues in more detail in the "year in review" section below.

WIC was formed primarily to deal with issues around water allocation and our relationship with Meridian Energy. Those two matters certainly consumed the most time, energy, and resources this year.

Our work is now increasingly dominated by regulations being developed and implemented by local authorities in response to the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2014 (the NPS). The NPS directs all regional councils to set freshwater quality and quantity limits. This sounds simple enough but we are discovering that, regardless of the method used by the different councils, the implementation of these limits is fraught with difficulty. Although most of the regulations apply to dryland farmers as well



as irrigators, the regulations present more complex challenges for those with water.

The Irrigation New Zealand conference is coming to the Waitaki in April next year, and I would encourage you all to attend and participate. The conference generates a lot of interest nationally, including from the media, so it is our chance to showcase the many benefits irrigation brings to our districts.

WIC wants to support its shareholders as much as possible in working towards consenting in the future. We have started developing a new programme that will make it easier for our schemes to

demonstrate that they are good stewards of the water they use and to guide how we work with other stakeholders. More information will be provided to you about this early next year.

I've now been with WIC for five years and I still enjoy working for and alongside all of you as much as I did when I started. Irrigation is all about communities and it's been a privilege to help you support yours. Have a happy and safe Christmas and New Year.

Liz

The year in review

Otago Regional Council

WIC has continued to work with the ORC towards implementation of the Memoranda of Understanding between WIC, the Lower Waitaki Irrigation Company, the North Otago Irrigation Company, and the Council. We hope that by working together we can support our members to farm well, whilst maintaining or improving water quality.

This year, the ORC developed its proposed Regional Policy Statement, which sits at the top of the planning hierarchy in the region - guiding decisions made on plans and resource consents. As well as providing input into the consultation draft of the Statement, WIC made a submission to the Council and presented it at the recent hearings. The focus of our submission was that the Council should recognise irrigation infrastructure as having regional and national significance (as is done in other regions and which affords it recognition and protection under other rules and policies); policies

around continual improvement in irrigation efficiency; and the need for the Council to continue to focus on investment, education, and guidance in order to support farmers to be compliant with the new water quality limits which come into effect in 2020.

Environment Canterbury

Working on issues in the Canterbury region has been a major focus of WIC's work in 2015 (as it was in 2014).

WAITAKI CATCHMENT WATER ALLOCATION REGIONAL PLAN CHANGE 3

After submissions were made last year, Plan Change 3 to the Allocation Plan was set down for hearings in June and August. On behalf of irrigation interests, evidence was provided by representatives from each of our member schemes and the independent irrigators. We also presented evidence from myself and experts on consenting and allocation (Keri Johnston from Irricon Consultants); planning (Louise Taylor from Mitchell Partnerships); the relative reliability of supply provided by the different proposed flow regimes (Ian McIndoe from Aqualinc Research); and the

economic implications of changes to supply reliability (Jonathan Davis from Living Land Consultants). Our case at the hearing and legal submissions were presented by Pru Steven, QC. WIC was in front of the panel for an entire day. We were asked many questions and have had to respond to numerous requests for further information and caucusing between the parties as directed by the Panel.

The process has been highly involved and required a lot of close working with Meridian Energy and ECan. We are hopeful that the Panel will issue a decision soon.

RESOURCE CONSENT HEARINGS

WIC joined farmers in the Hakataramea Valley in opposing an application for an "A band" water permit from the Hakataramea River filed by Infinity Investment Group Limited. WIC is opposed to the application due to the over-allocation of the mid-reach allocation zone of the Lower Waitaki (we argue that this should be resolved through the Plan Change 3 process which would increase the volumetric allocation), and also the effects on reliability of supply of our members.

We presented at a hearing at Environment Canterbury in Timaru in August, and the Panel declined the consent application. Infinity has now appealed this decision to the Environment Court, and the matter has been set down for hearing in March 2016.

THE LAND AND WATER REGIONAL PLAN

WIC have been parties to an appeal in the High Court in relation to the provisions in the Land and Water Regional Plan around controlled activity status for regionally significant infrastructure (this activity status would mean that resource consents must be granted for them by ECan, and potentially includes irrigation). This matter is soon to be finally resolved following a ruling from the High Court that this activity status is legal for water abstraction consents.

However, other changes have already been proposed to the Land and Water Plan through Plan Change 4 (what ECan staff call the "omnibus" Plan Change). This Plan change has significant implications for those with river frontage. WIC has filed a submission and we are now waiting for it to be set down for hearing.

THE FUTURE OF ENVIRONMENT CANTERBURY GOVERNANCE

The term of the Government-appointed ECan Commissioners ends in October 2016. WIC provided input to initial consultation process on what the future governance arrangements for the region would be. The Government subsequently released a Bill proposing a transitional governance arrangement for the 2016-19 period. The Bill proposed a mix of elected councillors (four from Christchurch and three from the rural constituencies) and appointed commissioners. WIC submitted that the mix be altered to increase the number of representatives for the rural constituencies, and for Zone Committee programmes to be given more weight in decision-making processes. We presented our submission to the Local Government and Environment Select Committee, and we now have to wait to see if any amendments are made to the Bill.

Rating of irrigation scheme infrastructure

Late last year, the Valuer-General issued a direction that irrigation scheme infrastructure should be valued in order to include it on district valuation rolls for rating purposes. The process followed by the Valuer-General and QV has been rushed - resulting in some inequitable outcomes and (we consider) unreliable valuations. WIC is working with Irrigation New Zealand to attempt to resolve this issue with the Valuer-General through the development of agreed valuation guidelines.

We are also lobbying the local authorities for the application of a rating differential policy to irrigation infrastructure to reflect the low value in services provided by authorities to the scheme infrastructure (this doesn't include services provided to scheme members or real property owned by the schemes – i.e. land).

Resource Management Act reforms

The Government has been promoting reforms to the Resource Management Act for some time. Last month, the Resource Legislation Amendment Bill was finally released. It (among other things) seeks to streamline consenting for simple matters, hasten plan-making and enhance 'plan agility', enhance iwi participation, provides a regulatory mechanism for mandatory exclusion of dairy cattle from waterways, and introduces an alternative collaborative planning pathway for councils.

Although a national matter, this Bill will have implications in the Waitaki. The Bill has been referred to the Local Government and Environment Select Committee for consideration. WIC will likely make a submission to the Committee on the basis of our experiences in the Waitaki.

Supporting the community and the environment

WIC has undertaken a number of initiatives to support the community and the environment. Two of our major projects involved producing films. We also supported the Lower Waitaki Take a Kid Fishing Day, and the Waitaki Riparian Enhancement Society's salmon hatchery.

BE WATER-RACE SAFE ANIMATED FILM

WIC has recently produced a short film on the dangers of water races (and the benefits of irrigation) for schools in the area. This has been well received, and is getting significant attention around the country



and even internationally. The International Working Group on Public Safety around Dams and Waterways (a formal committee of the International Commission on Large Dams) is considering using the film as an example of best practice in water safety. The film has also been endorsed by Water Safety New Zealand.

The project is the brainchild of Ross Bishop, Lower Waitaki scheme operations manager. Logan Adams created it for us superbly. A big thank-you needs to go to both of them. Thanks also to Louise McDougall for her work in getting the project off the ground.

The film can be viewed at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_kmEk3yzVI

TREES ON IRRIGATED FARMS SHORT FILMS

Last year, WIC received a grant from the Waitaki District Council to produce three short films around planting trees on irrigated farms. We enlisted the help of Harriet Palmer who has helped produce similar films for the New Zealand Farm Forestry Association, and

Rod Pike from Vox Video Productions in Dunedin to be the videographer. The films focus on planning planting, incorporating plantings with irrigation infrastructure, and riparian planting and wetland creation.

We also had input from Nicola Holmes, co-ordinator for the Kakanui Catchment Landcare Project - the group will be incorporating the films into the project. Thanks to the Ruddenklau and Smith, Keeling, and Ross families for participating in the videos.

The films can be viewed on the WIC website and Facebook page, and Waitaki District Council website, or on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvuHtCpVUEQ&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpEUXEZyM6U&feature=youtu.be>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8_b7ivNpPY



Families enjoying the Take a Kid Fishing Day



The WIC Board

- Fraser McKenzie: Independent Chairman
- Reuben Allan: Waitaki Independent Irrigators Incorporated
- Kelvin Weir: Maerewhenua District Water Resource Company
- Chris Dennison: Lower Waitaki Irrigation Company
- Geoff Keeling: Kurow-Duntroon Irrigation Company
- Robyn Wells: North Otago Irrigation Company
- Gert van't Klooster: Morven, Glenavy, Ikawai Irrigation Company
- Jock Webster, Independent Director

