

All for Water, Water for All

Canterbury's water management needs to be addressed by combining a traditional "town and country" approach with a comprehensive and balanced strategy, says Garry Jackson

Whilst the rains of recent days might suggest otherwise, Canterbury's ongoing prosperity in every sector and in every community throughout this great region depends managing and supplementing nature's irregular and sometimes limited water supply.

Let's set the stage. New Zealand's GDP, and the exports that afford us our import hungry lifestyle from the latest cars, cellphones and plasma tvs to our daily lattes and fuel, are primarily generated by this country's land based economy. If you thought that this traditional reliance was declining, please think again in the light of the flight of jobs off shore as free trade agreements ramp up and distant call centres take over our 0800 lines.

What's more, NZ's traditional farming strengths will take on new meaning as the world faces up to the competing interests of biofuel production, continuing population expansion, socio economic growth in India and China and elsewhere, world wide climate change effects and more.....the planet needs NZ's strengths as an efficient and sustainable food producer more than ever.

If this has relevance for every New Zealander, and it does, then it has even greater significance for each Cantabrian. And I mean all of Canterbury, city and plains, town and country. That's because we are one Canterbury community, inextricably interlinked, always have been, always will be. And that strength, traditionally, has been the connection to our farming hinterland.

In all of this "big picture stuff", there's one district that sees this very clearly. Perhaps that's because our smaller scale makes it easier for us in Hurunui. Maybe it's also because "North Canterbury" has always seen itself as an integral part of this great province, from our reliance on farming, our days of "coming to town", our sons and daughters at school in the city, and unending opportunities for the city to experience wonderful small town A&P shows, the Culverden Country Fete and lots more.

In early August, a very important series of public meetings are occurring around Canterbury, outlining the outcomes of the Canterbury Strategic Water Study (CSWS) to interested parties and stakeholders. The CSWS isn't a specific irrigation project. It is a high level study, unanimously enabled, encouraged and embraced by the Canterbury Mayoral Forum (every Mayor, and the Chairman of Environment Canterbury), researching the issues of reliable water supply for Canterbury's future development, and the associated possible storage options that may need consideration in pursuit of that goal.

In its own right, the Canterbury Strategic Water Study, developed over the period 2002-07 with extensive funding support from central government, is a critically important review for Canterbury going forward. As part of this latest consultation stage from August, the CSWS broadens its scope to draw in feedback on wider, water related, matters.

For Hurunui, the public discussion about the CSWs takes on even greater relevance, because its conclusion of a possible storage option in the upper Hurunui River system mirrors (at a high level) separate studies by the local landowner driven project, the Hurunui Community Water Development

Project, funded to date by the Sustainable Farming Fund and the landowners themselves together with local energy company Mainpower.

So where does all this leave a local authority such as Hurunui District Council?

The lessons of the some other large water schemes, and the well trodden pathways of public reaction, from talkback radio and newspaper letter columns on one hand, to the halls of Environment Court on the other, are all testimony to the debate that “irrigation for dairying” produces.

Our Council’s strategy, and our pathway, is very different. One of the often criticised aspects of local government is our inability to think and plan strategically, and our failure to connect to what communities want in their everyday lives.

I’d like to think that Hurunui is a Council that truly understands what strategic thinking is, and how to deliver it. In our case, it is through the sometimes maligned long term council community plan (LTCCP) process.

In our forthcoming 2009 – 19 LTCCP, the Hurunui District Council will take this strategic approach one stage further, with the development of a comprehensive and dedicated chapter for the “Hurunui Water Management Strategy”, covering five key components. These include our approach to drinking water quality standards throughout Hurunui; water storage options for the growth and development of our land based productive sector and our associated communities; suggested local initiatives for water conservation and efficiencies such as possible specific Hurunui building code requirements; our program (already underway) of working with agencies such as Landcare Research to position Hurunui at the forefront of research into ongoing knowledge and relationship factors between water and land use types and practices; and lastly but certainly not least, the whole subject of river quality, environmental effects and recreational activities, for both Cantabrians and tourist visitors alike.

Before we even start, I know now that within this LTCCP chapter, and irrespective of our best efforts, we won’t have all the answers, and maybe we won’t please everybody. But I firmly believe we will demonstrate is a sincere and very earnest attempt to set a standard of a balanced viewpoint, and a genuine commitment to use the LTCCP process for thorough dialogue, consultation and feedback.

Within this Hurunui Strategy, in its draft format ahead of public submission in early 2009, we will take a leadership position to state our encouragement for the Hurunui Community Water Development Project to continue its investigations and studies that could potentially lead up to its eventual resource consent application.

We do so in the full context of the opening words in this column with regard to the importance, in NZ and Canterbury’s interests, of the ongoing development of land based, grass fed production of food, fibre and wine, and concurrently in the light of what we accept as our responsibility as Council to achieve a position of balance across the five key component subjects identified earlier.

My concluding point is perhaps the most crucial, and it draws on the realisation that we are one Canterbury. In the hearts and minds of all of our interconnected communities, rural, urban, city and township, I suggest there is really only one set of community outcomes that all councils across

Canterbury are chasing; simply defined, they are prosperity for all, health and wellness, safety and security, a clean and fresh natural environment, and a sense of future for our families. No single outcome is more important than any other, and they are all integral to each other.

Is there a common link? I think there is: water for all, all for water.

In Hurunui, we are now picking up on the great work of the Canterbury Mayoral Forum, and its Canterbury Strategic Water Study, and we are committing our best efforts deliver those outcomes in balance, relying on a strong sense of linkage and common purpose between all of us as Cantabrians.....the same sort of linkage and common purpose that bonds Hurunui's Glenmark Rugby Club into the proud history and performance of our "red and blacks".

That's Canterbury, town and country, rural and urban, at its best.

- Garry Jackson is the Mayor of Hurunui District Council.