



6 June 2006

Dear Sir

AM and SM McNeill (6 June) claim that Central Plains Water (CPW) is now a “think-big project of benefit to only a few.” This is not the case. For a start, Canterbury’s rural sector accounts for 60-70% of Christchurch’s economic activity and Canterbury farmers spend around \$750 million every year on goods and services provided by Christchurch businesses.

Secondly, if the CPW scheme does not go ahead, surface water will continue to be allocated from the Rakaia and Waimakariri Rivers to individual farmers or small groups of farmers (up to the allowable flow levels established by their respective National Water Conservation Order and Regional River Plan). The CPW scheme offers an alternative to this status quo where, in addition to providing irrigation water, it will provide a range of environmental and recreational benefits that can only be delivered by a large scale, centrally managed, community scheme.

The McNeill’s are also incorrect when they suggest that the scheme fails to acknowledge low flows in the Waimakariri River. The river’s minimum flow levels are fully protected by the Waimakariri River Regional Plan, set at 41 cumecs (m³/second). However its annual average flow is 130 cumecs and its median flow is 89 cumecs. While CPW has applied to ‘take’ up to 40 cumecs this is not continuous and simply represents the maximum amount of water the scheme could take at one time, when the river’s flow could support that take, i.e. flowing above the minimum 41 cumec level. The scheme’s average take would only be 9 cumecs.

The Central Plains Water project is a visionary and ambitious scheme designed to use Canterbury’s water resource to maximum efficiency. Importantly, and unlike the think big projects of yesteryear, the proposal is open to debate and input from the public via the Resource Management Act.

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