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Further progress for proposed Central Plains Water irrigation scheme

Another significant milestone for the proposed Central Plains Water scheme was achieved today with the lodgement of land use consent applications with Selwyn District Council.

The land use application covers the use of land for the main headrace canal, the intake canals, the distribution race canals, and the dam site and reservoir. Also included in the consent application is an application to Selwyn District Council to designate land identified for the main headrace canal, the dam site and reservoir.

In November 2005, Central Plains Water Limited was the fifth irrigation company in New Zealand to be granted requiring authority status by the Minister for the Environment. A requiring authority has the ability to apply to local councils to 'designate' or set aside land that it needs to set up infrastructure.

Pat Morrison, chair of Central Plains Water says, "Our approach has always been to apply only for designations for those components of the scheme that must be in a set location such as the dam, intakes and headrace canals but not the distribution races.

He said that gaining requiring authority status is a normal step in the process for any major infrastructure development proposal where construction may not immediately take place. "In effect we are seeking to secure the opportunity to use land needed for the scheme once we have the resource consents. Gaining the consents may take up to two years.

"For designations, Selwyn District Council is required to initiate a submission and hearing process that is just as rigorous and transparent as the more familiar resource consent process. At this point the public can make submissions on the application in exactly the same way as they do on resource consents," says Pat Morrison.

Selwyn District Council will appoint independent commissioners to hear the land use applications. The commissioners will decide whether or not resource consents and designations should be granted and, if so, what terms and conditions will apply to them.

Central Plains Water's application to Environment Canterbury for resource consents to take, use and discharge water became 'notifiable' earlier this year. This means Environment Canterbury is satisfied that the company's application contained sufficient information for people to be able to make submissions for or against the scheme.

Pat Morrison said he expected a joint hearing for both applications will occur before the end of the year.

"Even though we have lodged our land use consents we are continuing our extensive consultation process. One of the consequences of our lodging with Selwyn District Council is that landowners, whose land we have identified as being required for the scheme, will have information on their LIM stating there is a land use consent and/or designation application in place," says Pat Morrison.

"It is therefore essential that affected landowners are fully aware of our plans. We have written to them this week encouraging them to attend one of a series of drop in meetings we will be running for the next two months to enable people to get further information."

Central Plains Water's application has some flexibility to accommodate changes to the design scheme as a result of this consultation.

The scheme's technical experts continue to work on mitigating concerns that arose during the last round of consultation. The objective is to find a balance between enabling sustainable use of the scheme, and, where possible, avoiding or mitigating any adverse effects," says Pat Morrison.

Pat Morrison says Central Plains Water has already made significant changes to the scheme's design. Some of the main changes include

- shifting network races away from areas with close subdivision, such as near Darfield and Kirwee
- routing a significant portion of the distribution network around the back boundaries of properties rather than along road frontages
- substantially reducing the size of the headworks facilities following a request to review sediment management details
- eliminating sediment settling ponds
- relocating the two Waimakariri intakes intake channels, sediment sluice, fish screen and control structures so that they are further away from developed farmland, thereby reducing the amount of farmland affected.

"The scheme's objective is to improve the security and prosperity of Central Canterbury via a water enhancement scheme that provides increased agricultural and horticultural diversity, while enhancing ecological and recreational resources," concludes Pat Morrison.

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