

BEFORE THE CANTERBURY REGIONAL COUNCIL

UNDER the Environment Canterbury
(Temporary Commissioners and
Improved Water Management)
Act 2010

IN THE MATTER of the proposed Hurunui and
Waiau River Regional Plan

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF MURRAY JAMES RODGERS
ON BEHALF OF
THE NORTH CANTERBURY FISH AND GAME COUNCIL**

12 October 2012

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1. INTRODUCTION

Qualifications and experience

- 1.1 My name is Murray James Rodgers. I am a graduate of Canterbury University (MA, Economics) and a Fellow of the NZ Institute of Management. I grew up on farms in Western Southland, and South Canterbury.
- 1.2 My working life comprised several years with the Mount John Observatory at Lake Tekapo where I met my wife in 1962, then some ten years with IBM and Fletcher Timber in various management roles. I became self-employed as a management consultant in 1980 as the means of fulfilling my family's wish to live in Christchurch. The next 26 years of work in recruiting and organizational change included consulting to local and central government, large and medium sized commercial organizations, and not-for profit organizations.
- 1.3 I was able to provide a stable lifestyle for my wife and our two daughters, and from time to time pursued my enjoyment of the Canterbury hinterland and other parts of New Zealand as a trumper and fly-fisher, with others of like mind. My family came to share my love of our rivers, streams and mountains, but not catching or killing trout. I have written two books on these experiences (*Magic in the Mountains*, published by Penguin Books 1993 and *Running with the River*, published by Hazard Press, 2003), both of which refer extensively to experiences of fly fishing on the Hurunui River.
- 1.4 I retired from management consulting late 2006 to continue my commitment as chairman of the Water Rights Trust. I resigned as Chairman, August 2011, and continue as a Trustee of the Water Rights Trust. I was on the Steering Group for the Canterbury Mayoral Forum from 2003 throughout the period of its commitment to developing a water management strategy for Canterbury. In 2009 I published a third book, *Canterbury's Wicked Water; politics, progress and prosperity imperilled*, which explores the conflict between the drive

for economic growth and preserving the best of our natural heritage. Since becoming involved in Canterbury's water issues in 2001 I have written and had published numerous articles in The Press, (at least a dozen) and delivered more than a hundred lectures seeking to inform members of the public of the dangers we face as a region if we fail to resolve our water issues and what needs to be done. I have been frequently interviewed by The Press and on radio. I played a leading role in the "Hands off the Hurunui" march a couple of years ago, in which around 1500 people participated. I believe the Water Rights Trust has been influential in shaping some of the current policy around the future management of the resource, through our lobbying, and participation in the Canterbury Water Management Strategy. An article titled *Canterbury's hidden treasure* (slightly modified version from that published in The Press 15 Oct 2009) is contained in **Appendix 1**. This evidence is based on my personal views, and does not necessarily reflect those of the Water Rights Trust or the Canterbury Mayoral Forum.

- 1.5 I presented evidence at the Special Tribunal hearing for a Water Conservation Order for the Hurunui River.
- 1.6 I confirm that I have read and agree to comply with the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses. This evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying on facts or information provided by another person. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express.

Scope of Evidence

- 1.7 My evidence will address my knowledge of the Hurunui River and why I think it is important to maintain the upper reaches of this river in their natural state. In particular, I will discuss my angling experiences on the Mainstem and South Branch.

2. ASSOCIATION WITH THE HURUNUI RIVER

- 2.1 My trout fishing experiences began in the late 1940's when I accompanied my late father through his early learning experiences with a fly rod – having graduated from rifle (big fish only!), to spear, then worm fishing to become a highly accomplished dry fly angler. In my pre-teenage years, I drew enormous pleasure from accompanying him to places like the Ouaria River, the Lilburn River, the Borland Burn, the Wairaki River – all tributaries of the Waiau River (Southland) - and occasionally along the banks of the Waiau itself. When we moved to South Canterbury, as a teenager I became familiar with the Pareora, Opihi, Orari, Opuha and Tengawai Rivers. But it was the Ohau River between Twizel and where the river flowed into Lake Benmore that captured my imagination and came to engender the same sort of excitement as some Southland rivers used to do. The killing of the Ohau River was a great personal loss to me and also to my father, but we accepted that at the time as part of the price of progress. Dad then pursued a different sort of angling on Grays River on the eastern side of the Mackenzie Basin (nymph rather than dry fly), until Mum's death in 1984 – from that time on, he never returned to the Mackenzie Country.
- 2.2 I will never forget the first day I spent on the Hurunui River on the Mainstem above the Sisters Stream. The sense of isolation from the winding gravel road through the gorge, and the magnificent vista of the river valley again stirred for the first time in many years a sense of childhood excitement that had been dormant for quite a long time. Such feelings have been an extremely positive part of my life, and the places that give rise to them are few and far between. I have enjoyed angling on a wide range of New Zealand's rivers, some of which are difficult and costly to access.
- 2.3 The Hurunui River does not match the likes of the Worsley and Glaisnock Rivers, which flow into the western fiords of Lake Te Anau – for their outstanding rugged scenic beauty, sense of remoteness, and populations of large brown and rainbow trout. For me, these rivers which I've accessed on four occasions throughout my life are the

epitome of my fly fishing experience, and required significant logistical planning to find common free time among participants (five days minimum), integrated with appropriate weather and river conditions. The Karamea River, above the bend, also ranks highly in my mind in a similar way.

- 2.4 I have also fly fished the headwaters of the Rangitiki (once), and Mohaka (four times) Rivers, the Rangitata River above Peel Forest, the Durville and Sabine Rivers (Lake Rotoroa), the Maruia, Upper Grey and Hope Rivers and a great many others. While each river has its own unique qualities, the Hurunui River at least matches these rivers in terms of angling quality, and the sense of the wild that arises out of the relatively untouched landscape. The overwhelming advantage of the Hurunui Mainstem, South Branch and the range of lakes in the general area is their close proximity to Christchurch, making them comfortably accessible within a one day trip. Just as important is the increased value of the Hurunui complex arising from the loss of so many of our once highly valued lowland streams from the pressures of intensive farming. This means that anglers who once would choose a lowland stream for a day's fishing are now more inclined to come to the Hurunui.
- 2.5 John England, a city lawyer of my age, shared the Hurunui with his father in the same sense as I'd shared the Ohau with Dad. Our fathers were in Italy in the artillery during WW2 though I don't know whether they knew each other. Trout fishing for Dad became the means of escaping albeit briefly, whatever traumas still troubled him from his war years. He never shared them, but they were there constantly. On the river he was a different man – becoming fully absorbed by his art. By coincidence, the year that John last fished the Mainstem was the same year I started to fish the Hurunui. **Appendix 2** contains a letter from John which gives insight into the degree to which the Mainstem was used in his experience.
- 2.6 Since 1983, I visited the Hurunui Mainstem typically four to six times each summer over the following twenty years. A decline in my physical

capabilities has meant that my visits in recent years have become more spasmodic.

2.7 Nowadays, it is necessary to start very early to gain first access onto the stretch of the Mainstem you wish to fish – it pays to be on the river by sun-up. Over the last ten years, it would be unusual not to encounter other anglers and/or guides with their overseas clients on some stretch of the river.

2.8 Because I grew up to regard trout as primarily a source of food, the 'catch and release' convention has never been a strong part of my angling ethos – though under pressure from my angling mates, I have let the odd one go. Typically, once tucker is in the bag, I prefer to walk and look – that seems to satisfy everyone, more or less. I have rarely returned home from the Hurunui Mainstem without having secured dinner. A three pounder makes an ideal meal, hence I've never been an avid hunter of big fish, just for the sake of it. Though I have inadvertently tangled with them, quite often. And they do provide a fine battle. The Hurunui has a good share of big fish (by my definition, over six pounds). Over the years, the population of brown trout seems to have held pretty constant, although increasing angler pressure on the river may have made them a bit harder to catch. Or maybe, I'm losing my touch. Typically, late in the season (March/April) sees a high population of small fish (less than a pound, and below the legal length limit to be killed). A dry-fly angler begins the education of these trout on the dangers of indiscriminate greed. (I caught and released 14 on one day three seasons ago).

3. **MAINSTEM**

3.1 The Mainstem of the Hurunui has captured most of my angling effort. The volume of water in the Mainstem lends itself to casting blind, as opposed to spotting your fish, and that in turn demands an ability to read the 'high probability' reaches, waiting expectantly for a splash, an arced back, or a blue nose over the fly signalling a take. The trout population in that part of the river is such that no more than two kilometres of water need be covered in a day's effort – combing pool

by pool. Usually, I have stopped well short of that. **Appendix 3** contains photos from that part of the river.

4. **SOUTH BRANCH**

4.1 While the Mainstem captured most of my effort, I've also enjoyed the South Branch, from time to time both by walking from Lake Taylor, and also by driving. Once, we sought to work our way through the gorge and returned to find the sump nut removed from the car. It seems the farmer did not want us to use 'his' river. We resisted the temptation for confrontation and from then on simply accessed the South Branch from Lake Taylor whenever we were of a mind for that part of the country. Because there is a locked gate part way up the track from Lake Taylor that requires a fee to access the key, we have tended to walk, but this adds significantly to the length of the day. Ease of access has been a prime determinant in my relatively light use of the South Branch, compared with the Hurunui Mainstem.

4.2 Again, the angling available in the South Branch is superb, and offers the opportunity for spotting fish rather than casting blind in the larger, more turbulent Mainstem waters. So the South Branch offers a different style of fishing, and has become popular among fishing guides and their clientele, which means the fish are likely to be more 'angler alert' and therefore more difficult to catch. The fish I have caught have typically been in the five to six pounds range, falling outside the ideal meal size. (Two trout meals in a row is more than enough). The valley of the South Branch is broader and more free of matagouri, kowhai, beech and other bush vegetation that characterises the Mainstem river. Its charm has a different quality. However, the track between Lake Taylor and the South Branch winds through beech forest on the southern side of the pass. It is very picturesque, and the view across the flat tussocked valley as you break out from the bush is stunning. The South Branch is more frequently discoloured than the lake-fed Mainstem, and is therefore less available for dry-fly angling.

4.3 I have had the privilege of introducing others to the Hurunui complex, including my brother who has the distinction of being a one-armed angler and my younger daughter. (While appreciating the attractions of the sport, she maintains the view that visiting such unkindness to trout is barbaric – a view shared by her sister and mother, though all three enjoy trout as their favourite fish food, providing they don't have to witness the catch). I taught a good friend to fish on the Hurunui, who in turn introduced others to its magic. A distinctive feature of the Hurunui waterways is that both sides of the Mainstem and South Branch can usually be accessed by wading from one side to the other, providing you are careful in choosing a suitable place to cross. That has a bearing on the scope of water able to be accessed, and allows for anglers to have a yarn over lunch.

4.4 Catching trout is but one of a wide range of experiences that come with the sport. The nature of interaction with the people accompanying you on the river has a powerful bonding effect. That is why I value the times spent on the river with my father so highly. Today, my closest friends are those of the river.

5. **PRESERVATION OF NATURAL CHARACTER**

5.1 You will hear of the quality of trout fishing in the Hurunui complex from other submitters, but for me that is not the primary reason to leave it unscathed. To have such a relatively pristine resource, so distinctively wild and scenic within a couple of hours drive from Christchurch is a wonderful treasure that should be available through the generations to come. It is a very special place. I am looking forward to the time when my grandchildren (two boys and a girl, so far) are old enough to be enriched by the Hurunui River. But not a river that has been mutilated. They have every right as Kiwis to be able to experience what has meant so much to me and others who visit those marvellous environs.

5.2 We must bear in mind that we cannot keep growing our economy indefinitely based off our natural resources. It seems much more

sensible to take the longer view and fence off the special parts of our environment now, rather than exploit them in ways that are irreversible.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Our country desperately needs a much clearer, more integrated vision of where we are heading economically, socially and environmentally. I consider myself to have been extremely privileged to have grown up in this part of the world, and my duty to do whatever is necessary to help protect the right of other Kiwis to be able to enjoy such rich experiences.
- 6.2 New Zealanders of the future deserve a river of the quality of the Hurunui to be maintained in its natural state. A dam on the South Branch and/or a weir at the outlet of Lake Sumner to control river flows through the Mainstem would unnecessarily destroy the unique qualities of these outstanding waterways.
- 6.3 I consider that the special qualities of the Hurunui River system above Surveyors Stream should be protected from development.

Murray Rodgers

12 October 2012

APPENDIX 1

Canterbury's hidden treasure

(slightly modified version of that published in The Press 15 Oct 2009)

For countless millennia, the Hurunui River has flowed in its present channel from Lake Sumner to the sea, collecting the South Branch a few kilometres below the Lake, and other smaller tributaries along the way. The main-stem of the river is swift, typically clear from its lake fed source, and alternates between quiet placid reaches and boiling rapids. It flows through tussocked flats, into a series of tight gorges and valleys, liberally covered with beech, kowhai and matagouri. The South Branch always carries a tinge of glacial silt, and with heavy rain quickly becomes a dirty brown, discolouring the river below the South Branch junction. Nestled in the hills that separate the mainstem of the river from the South Branch are numerous small lakes, with clusters of bush here and there along the shorelines. These lakes are home to trout, eels and a rich variety of bird life.

The Hurunui River system pulsates in its flow to the seasonal rains in the mountains. It is a microcosm of the pulse of the planet. Animal and plant life have become accustomed to the varying flow of the river, and the rise and fall of Lake Sumner. A couple of narrow wire footbridges now span the river, near the Jolliebrook and Sisters tributaries to allow dry access from the road side of the river to its eastern banks, though you can normally find your way across at various places by wading if you are careful. A few cattle and sheep forge pathways through the matagouri to graze the tussocks.

The road into this place is part of its charm – narrow, dusty, and winding up and around craggy rock outcrops as it tracks the blue, racing river through the gorge. You need to drive carefully as you pick your way across the numerous fords up the valley. The abrupt entry to this rugged road 60 minutes out of Christchurch adds to the sense of isolation. As you move deeper into the valley, each vista that emerges from around a bend is even grander than the one before. It draws you in.

The Hurunui River has become a place of recreation for many thousands of people in Canterbury and further afield. The river provides the opportunity for parent and child to share in the natural world – not observing dispassionately as you might in a museum, but enjoying nature in the cut of the nor'wester, in picking your way through a spiny thicket, in feeling the cool slosh as you plunge across a braid, or in lying on your back watching the myriad cloud patterns through the web of matagouri and the rugged hills and mountains that encompass the valley. All in the knowledge that what you are experiencing right now is pretty much as it always has been.

Some are happy simply to wander its banks, sensing colours and patterns of the water and the flight or scuttle of birds. Others battle current and boulder in search of a trout or seek the exhilaration of the waves in a canoe. Yet others plunge into the swift cool currents and let the river carry them down the rapids. Others again pitch a tent, looking to experience the diurnal moods of the river. The stars stand out like beacons on a moonless night and with the black profile of clumps of trees and the gentle rushing of the river, it is a timeless, magical place.

Now under threat from industrial development, the Hurunui River system has become part of an unfolding tragedy that has already seen Canterbury lose the majority of its lowland streams to the effects of intensive farming across the Plains. We have allowed Lakes Ellesmere and Forsyth to become badly polluted, and our pure

groundwaters in many parts of the region threatened by contamination. Last summer, toxic algal blooms rendered many rivers unsafe for human contact.

The proposal by Hurunui Water Project (HWP) to dam the outlet from Lake Sumner to the mainstem of the river and to place a dam across the valley of the South Branch of the river to provide irrigation water for down country farms is unnecessary. These modifications will destroy the rivers outstanding natural character and permanently remove from Cantabrians another major recreational resource. For Lake Sumner, the Hurunui River below the lake and its South Branch are among the few remaining examples along the East Coast of the South Island of how we once were.

The Canterbury Water Management Strategy (CWMS) refers to options being considered to provide farmers with water that do not require the destruction of this wonderful gift of nature. But the CWMS must be ratified and mandated by new legislation by Government. This will take time, and may be trumped and rendered irrelevant by HWP pursuing its agenda through the courts under existing legislation.

So, while we seek to enrich our productive base, the people of Canterbury are becoming impoverished in other ways. We desperately need to shift our aspirations and behaviours towards achieving the best of both worlds: a healthy economy while protecting our environmental treasures.

Murray Rodgers,

Chairman, Water Rights Trust; Author, *Canterbury's Wicked Water*

APPENDIX 2

57 Leinster Rd
Merivale
Christchurch

10/9/03

Dear Murray

Some 3 or 4 weeks ago I set sail on "Running With the River" but quickly became disillusioned. Those first chapters were brilliant with a number of ideas I was irritated not to have thought of first. And so I decided to put it to one side until I went on holiday 2 or so weeks later – to enable it to be read with the care it deserved.

By some strange coincidence I was on the deck of an "over-the-water" bungalow on Akitua Island when I reached the chapter written at the very same spot. The day before I had spent part of an afternoon on the bonefish flats on the island next to One Foot Island – without success, but with good prospect until both fish I spotted turned for deep water at the last moment. Fortunately the possibility of sharks had not occurred to me!

Coincidences aside, Murray, it is a great book. I love the passages about your father and brother, your "mates", the Ohau and Hurunui, the justification (or otherwise) for fishing and many others. It seems so strange that while you were fishing the rivers of Southland and the Ohau with your father, I was fishing the Hurunui with mine – often, nay usually, with the stretch from Sisters Streams to the outlet to ourselves. I have not fished it since Dad's death in 1983, and the Maruia, Riwaka and Motueka Tributaries have taken its place. But I will do so again.

Enough, very simply Murray, it is one of the definitive NZ fishing books. It couldn't be English; it couldn't be American. It is thoughtful and entirely enjoyable. Very well done.

Yours sincerely

John England.

APPENDIX 3





