

Tabled at Hearing 27/02/2013

Statement of:

Mr Anthony Blunt

In Support of:

Combined Canterbury Provinces, Federated Farmers of New Zealand (320)

Banks Peninsula Branch of Federated Farmers North Canterbury (309)

Federated Farmers of New Zealand High Country (293)

In the matter of:

Submission on Proposed Canterbury Land and Water Regional Plan (2012)

Section 42A Report Volume 1 –Section 9 Wetlands, Vegetation and Soil

Introduction

My wife Angela and I farm Steepdown, an 800 ha sheep and beef property on the Kaikoura Inland Road. It is made up of 80% steep hard hill country, 10 % medium rolling, and 10% flat terraces. The farm has numerous small creeks, streams and a large local river flowing through it. I have lived and worked on this farm for most of my life.

Area LH2 – validity of maps

I am very concerned about the validity of maps of 'Area LH2' and the further map presented in the staff submission, and proposed controls on crucial farm activities relating to these maps.

Approximately three quarters of flat land in Kaikoura District is within Area LH2 or Area LH1, but the reality is that most of the erosion risk is on the hill country, some of which is very steep.

Some of my place is in LH1 and is flat country, i.e. 90% of my flat land. There are no erosion issues on this country that I or my forebears who also farmed this land are aware of. The proposed controls on cultivation and earthworks on this land will limit its productive potential.

The staff recommendation to remove Area LH1 and extend controls over all land in Canterbury as also very onerous – effectively it calls for all farm activities (which depend on cultivation) to be strictly controlled or consented.

Riparian Margins

The proposed restrictions on cultivation in Riparian Margins under Rule 5.148 will cause problems for hill country farms because the RMA definition of 'water' can cover a significant portion of the landscape. Restrictions on use of flatter areas can have serious implications

for hill country farms, because they are often a small part of the farm and the only area that can be farmed at a higher intensity.

Some farms will be worse affected than others. On our farm, the area where we come close to creeks would be not provided for by the 500 m² exception in Rule 5.148(a). Our flat areas are particularly badly affected and this is likely to limit the use of this land, which forms a very important compliment to our hill country.

One neighbour has a 1 km creek on the flat, and will be severely affected. On other, hillier ground, the density of small creeks and waterways, means that it is often very hard to avoid cultivating within 10 to 20 metres of a creek and keep the area in grazing.

Proposed restrictions on cultivation near creeks apply to every situation equally regardless of cultivation methods (i.e. direct drilling vs ploughing), soil type, slope, or practices that follow cultivation.

On our farm for example we prefer to spray and direct drill rather than plough because it prevents erosion, loss of soil, soil moisture, and loss of nutrients to waterways and we think that what we do is very low risk. Despite this we, and others like us are treated on an equal basis as a farmer undertaking intensive winter grazing near creeks, on sloped land with poorly drained soils.

Burning vegetation

Land management fires (burning) is a low cost method of restoring pasture that is subject to regenerating woody plant species, or clearing wilding pines. In the high rainfall climate where our farm is, scrub and woody weeds grow back very quickly and grazing alone will not keep land clear.

Spraying by helicopter is an additional method of controlling regenerating scrub, but it is much more expensive and often needs to be followed up with a burn to clear the residual dead material. Restrictions on burning or spraying to clear regenerating scrub will likely result in subject areas going out of production because it will be too expensive to keep land clear.

Economic and social consequences

Farming profitably, becomes more and more challenging as costs rise on average faster than farm incomes. The proposed rules have not taken into account the on-going cost income squeeze and risk from market volatility.

Further restrictions on burning vegetation, or activities in riparian areas or on 'Area LH2' add cost and reduce our ability to manage risk. Our markets and climate are increasingly volatile, yet the cost of doing business consistently increases at a rate higher than inflation. For example in my fathers time he employed 2 to 3 full time staff, now I do all the farm work myself because we cannot afford permanent staff.

Large areas to the south of my farm are no longer farmed and have gone back to scrub because the country is no longer grazed and/or burnt, has gone back to scrub, and is no longer possible to farm profitably with the costs and risks of modern day farming.

If more land goes out of production, everyone one will lose as land that is no longer farmed is inevitably invaded by weeds like hawthorn, gorse, broom, wilding pines, and briar rose.

A localised approach

I support the Federated Farmers submission seeking that parts of the Plan that pertain to soil erosion be withdrawn, with outstanding issues addressed within the Water Management Zones.

A large proportion of catchments in the Kaikoura Zone are mountainous or in natural cover and pressures from farming are low in all but a few lowland tributaries. In our area (the Inland Road Valley), water quality has been identified as being exceptionally good and there is no need for further intervention to achieve water quality standards.

The Kaikoura area does not have the same water quality issues as the rest of Canterbury, so it is not appropriate that we are subject to focused interventions designed to manage more at risk areas.