

**BEFORE THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSIONERS**

**UNDER** the Resource Management Act  
1991

**IN THE MATTER** of the Proposed Canterbury  
Land and Water Regional Plan

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**EVIDENCE IN CHIEF OF PETER ERICH ROBINSON ON BEHALF OF  
NORTH CANTERBURY, NELSON/MARLBOROUGH AND CENTRAL  
SOUTH ISLAND FISH AND GAME COUNCILS**

**8 APRIL 2013**

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**QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE**

1. My name is Peter Erich Robinson.
2. I am a North Canterbury Fish and Game Councillor and Chairman of the New Zealand Council of Fish and Game. I am also a member of the New Zealand Salmon Anglers Association.
3. I am an avid salmon angler having fished every season since catching my first salmon 47 years ago at age 11. I mostly fish the lower reaches of the Waimakariri River due to the proximity to my home in Pines Beach. However I have been a visitor to other salmon fishing rivers in North Canterbury and have accumulated experience and knowledge of the salmon fisheries referred to in my evidence.
4. I presented evidence on behalf of the New Zealand Salmon Anglers Association on the hearing for the Central Plains Water application.
5. I presented evidence at the Special Tribunal hearing for a Water Conservation Order for the Hurunui River.
6. I presented evidence for the Hurunui Waiau Regional River Plan hearing in 2012.
7. I also presented evidence for the recent Hurunui Water Project hearing in 2013.

**SCOPE OF EVIDENCE**

8. My evidence will address the following;
  - a. Angler amenity from East Coast South Island Salmon Rivers.
  - b. Features of North Canterbury Salmon Rivers I am familiar with as have been identified in Schedule XX.
  - c. The rivers and lakes most important to me as a salmon fisherman.
  - d. Degradation and changes I have personally observed in the identified salmon rivers and catchments.
9. The seasonal wild Chinook salmon run that occurs between November and May every year is a marvel. Salmon ova were introduced from North America over 100 years ago and readily acclimated to the alpine fed East Coast rivers of New Zealand's South Island and they have persisted ever since, providing a fantastic world class sports fishery accessible to anyone holding a license.
10. My personal evidence will describe the features I am familiar with, the rivers and lakes that are important to me and the degradation that I am aware has occurred.
11. I shall begin with a general overview of the angler amenity derived from salmon fishing in Canterbury; then discuss the salmon fishery's current situation in my opinion. I will also give a personal view of each main river starting at the top of the North Canterbury region and then travelling south, catchment by catchment.

**ANGLER AMENITY**

12. The culture that exists among salmon fisherman is a special part of our Canterbury way of life. It is a highly valued and much enjoyed natural sporting resource and an iconic New Zealand pastime,

followed by generations of anglers. It brings a number of dedicated men and women together often shoulder to shoulder to chase this challenging and at times elusive quarry. This pastime is rewarding for the angler by often providing beautiful natural surroundings and a closeness to nature that is good for one's health.

13. The ability to harvest a portion of the salmon run also provides a welcome addition to the fridge or freezer and is often enjoyed by friends and family outside the angling community. For most, the seasonal catch is low, yet it is the excitement and anticipation of potentially catching a large healthy fish during the season that sees a very large number of license holders turnout.
14. The four main salmon fisheries in the North Canterbury region by run size are the Rakaia, Waimakariri, Waiau and Hurunui. I have classed the Ashley as a past salmon fishery.
15. Records show the salmon fishery, like all salmon fisheries world-wide, is highly variable in run size and subject to natural cycles. However, due to probably to a combination of factors the fishery has suffered a decline in size over the past 20 years. Today's runs are estimated to be 25% of their former size up to the late 1980s at which time they were overexploited by trawlers at sea. Stocks recovered for a brief period in the mid 1990s. A collapse occurred in 2000/2001 thought largely as a result of marine conditions and while stocks have recovered from this in line with natural cycles, they have not reached the peaks of 20 years ago.
16. Some of the factors limiting recovery are believed to be:
  - a. Sea temperature rise;
  - b. Freshwater abstraction resulting in reduced river flows and thereby habitat for fry;

- c. Reductions in water quality, in particular increased nitrogen and phosphorous levels;
  - d. Silting of spawning and fry raising habitat due to the effects of intensive agriculture; and
  - e. Fry losses due to inefficient fish screening associated with increased run of river water takes.
17. Fish and Game have undertaken an enhancement programme of stocking rivers with hatchery raised fry as a form of mitigation but this will only help to support the wild run which is irreplaceable. With sound policies, management and goodwill, the effects of human influenced factors can be reduced significantly.
18. Despite the diminished run size, for the anglers of Canterbury and those who visit from all over New Zealand and around the world, the East Coast South Island salmon run continues to provide a highly valued sporting experience.

### **Waiau River**

19. I have a limited personal experience of this salmon fishery as I have infrequently fished there over the years having made perhaps 6 – 7 visits, the last being this year when I hooked two salmon in one day.
20. I agree with the regional value Fish and Game have given this river in Schedule XX in regard to the lower reaches below Hope River.
21. I have fished for salmon at the Leslie Hills Bridge and at the upper end of the middle gorge section below Waiau Township.
22. Anglers commonly use jet boats to access the isolated reaches of this river. These anglers, who are often locals, meet with a high degree of success. On my last visit in February I was reliably informed one jet

boat party had caught and landed 10 salmon in one day in the water between the gorge above Cheviot through to Waiau Township. The farmer, through whose property we accessed the river, told us his mother had taken 14 salmon from the pool below her house last season.

23. I have fished the Boyle River in the headwaters for trout. The bach owners I met there informed me that late in the season salmon can be seen spawning as far upstream as the Nina tributary.
24. I am aware the river has had a reduced flow since the 1970s construction of the Waiau Irrigation Scheme where water is drawn from the river into a canal system at Mouse Point. I understand salmon smolt and adults regularly become entrapped in the canal and sometimes need to be salvaged and returned to the river.
25. My personal observations are that the Waiau River is still a reliable and relatively productive regional salmon fishery.

#### **Hurunui River**

26. I have been a regular visitor to the Hurunui River since the mid 1980s particularly for salmon fishing at the mouth of the river.
27. I agree with the Fish and Game Schedule XX values noting the outstanding classification for both the upper and lower reaches.
28. The Hurunui salmon fishery while only being the fourth in quantity of fish is outstanding due in part to its accessibility and the fishable nature of its features and course. I predominantly fish the Waimakariri as it is near to my home, but will also make a number of trips to the Hurunui in any given season.
29. The mouth of the Hurunui provides anglers with an outstanding amenity. A reliable and established salmon run occurs each season

starting at the river's mouth between December and late March. The medium size of the river and its unique physical features provide an intimate angling experience in an outstanding and unmodified natural location. The mouth of the river emerges from between cliffs cloaked in native bush before entering a picturesque lagoon and then through a short channel to the sea. Nowhere else in New Zealand can the salmon angler chase his quarry at a river mouth while being serenaded by bellbirds in such an idyllic location. It is a truly magical experience to row across the lagoon before dawn and then enjoy the sunrise.

30. Access is possible along much of the river's course meaning salmon anglers have many opportunities to pursue their quarry.

### **The Ashley River**

31. I agree with the regional value Fish and Game have given this river in Schedule XX.
32. The Ashley river salmon fishery has suffered significant degradation.
33. Up to the mid 1990s the Ashley River had a small but regionally important salmon fishery that was enjoyed by anglers particularly when the nearby alpine fed Waimakariri was in flood and consequently unfishable. The Ashley catchment is more East Coast than alpine and the river is more prone to local easterly or southerly rain events than alpine. As a result it is often clear and fishable when the Waimakariri is not. I have many fond memories of fishing this river and miss the variety once provided by the Ashley, due to its smaller size and more intimate nature. As the Ashley misses out on the influence of spillover from prevalent West Coast rain events it is prone to low flows or drying out during low rainfall periods on the Canterbury plains.

34. Agricultural demand for water exacerbates these low flow and dry periods to the extent that the Ashley River is now a shadow of the fishery it once was.
35. In the past the Ashley River was one of the finest trout rivers in Canterbury and supported a small but productive salmon fishery. In the 1970s I have seen salmon spawning in the headwaters in Lees Valley in the Townsend River and have seen and caught on trout gear many smolt running to sea in the late summer below the main road bridge.
36. Salmon would run the river at least as far as the headwaters and I have also observed spawning in the Okuku River tributary.
37. In the early 1970s it was not uncommon for successful anglers to catch as many as 20 salmon in a season in the lower reaches of the Ashley. Anglers could also expect to catch salmon in pools near Rangiora and upstream to the gorge. Due to its size and gentle nature the Ashley was a great river for young anglers to fish successfully and learn the craft.
38. As recently as the 1995 season I know of several anglers who caught a number of salmon at the mouth, some of which were in excess of 30lbs.
39. Unfortunately the Ashley is now more frequently dry for sustained periods in reaches from above Rangiora to the sea and this has led to a collapse in the salmon and sea run trout fishery over the last 20 years.
40. In 2013 Fish and Game salvaged hundreds of fish from drying pools including large numbers of trout and at least one adult migrating salmon along with a number of salmon fry. I believe this indicated that



after several years with higher than average summer flows the Ashley fishery was rebuilding to its default state and would once again support a healthy trout and salmon population. Alas the dry conditions this year meant two dry weeks cut off the all important sea to mountains connection and dried out the habitat with disastrous consequences. Meanwhile the adjacent irrigated paddocks stayed lush and green.

41. The current factors of water abstraction combined with the naturally occurring dry summers with low rainfall in the headwaters mean the Ashley is now a salmon fishery of the past.

### **The Waimakariri River**

42. I am very familiar with the Waimakariri salmon fishery having lived beside it, on it and in it for 51 of my 58 years. It is the most important river system to me personally. I have caught salmon every year since 1967 and have more recently spent many hours carrying out restoration and enhancement work in the off- season. This work has given me an understanding of the importance and state of the spawning habitat.
43. I agree with the Fish and Game Schedule XX values as outstanding.
44. The Waimakariri is the most popular salmon fishery in New Zealand. This is due in part to the river's proximity to Christchurch and the reliability of the peak salmon run predominantly in March each year.
45. The accessibility of the lower reaches means the stretch from the motorway bridge downstream to the mouth is heavily fished.
46. Fishing in the braided riverbed upstream of the motorway bridge up to the gorge is popular and accessed by four wheel drives and jet boats.

47. The Waimakariri is a true alpine salmon river with salmon spawning in cold stable alpine spring fed streams that feed the following tributaries:
- a. Turkey Flat Creek,
  - b. Cora Lynn Stream,
  - c. One Tree Swamp,
  - d. Cass River,
  - e. Grasmere Stream,
  - f. Cass Hill Stream,
  - g. Lower Farm Stream,
  - h. Bullock Track Creek,
  - i. Poulter River tributaries,
  - j. Cox River,
  - k. Grant Stream,
  - l. Spring Creek,
  - m. Winding Creek,
  - n. Broken River,
  - o. Hacketts Creek, and
  - p. Kowai System.
48. In the lower reaches spawning also occurs in the Upper Kaiapoi, Silverstream, Cust River and Cam River. Fish and Game have established artificial runs in the Kaiapoi River at Silverstream and Otukaikino River at Isaacs. While these runs are a successful and welcome addition they are only supplementary to the wild runs.
49. Despite some abstraction, the Waimakariri has sufficient flow to allow the upstream and down stream passage of salmon. However more abstraction has been approved with the Central Plains Water Scheme

which will further dewater the river and reduce flow and instream habitat.

50. Degradation I have witnessed includes increased water abstraction such as the WIL irrigation scheme, resulting in diminished flows, in particular sustained periods of minimum flows due to abstraction in dry years.
51. Abstraction above minimum levels causes truncated periods of receding flood flows. These periods are important for salmon migration in the Waimakariri as adults are dependent upon these receding flood flows to move upstream.
52. Degrading of water and instream values has occurred in the upper reaches due to an increase in intensive farming practices leading to nutrient enrichment and silting. Silting of spawning streams in particular is a major impediment to ova and fry survival. Cattle in One Tree Swamp and run-off from feed break paddocks, after heavy rain, in Hacketts Creek are two examples.
53. Gravel extraction operations in middle and lower reaches and the Ready Mix Ltd wash plant discharge between the bridges creates silted cloudy water conditions during the fishing season particularly at low flows.
54. On a positive note, the recent (July 2012) cessation of Silver Fern Farms and Kaputone Fellmongery discharge from the Old Main Road Bridge has had a significant positive effect in cleaning up the lower reaches. With no direct point source pollution discharges now entering the Waimakariri catchment the lower river is cleaner than it has been since I started fishing.
55. Fish and Game supported by the New Zealand Salmon Anglers Association have undertaken significant habitat restoration projects in

the Waimakariri catchment including fencing spawning areas to keep cattle out of the streams.

56. These organizations have also carried out ova planting and fish releases to boost stock numbers, which I have been personally involved in.

### **Rakaia River**

57. I agree with the Fish and Game Schedule XX values classification of Outstanding.

I have limited experience of fishing the Rakaia River however I have been involved with work at the Fish and Game hatchery at Montrose in the upper Rakaia Gorge.

58. Like the Waimakariri, the Rakaia is a true alpine river and spawning occurs in stable spring fed streams that feed tributaries in the mountainous high country. For example the Hydra waters, Double Hill Stream and Glenariffe Stream.
59. My involvement in work at the Fish and Game hatchery at Montrose has highlighted to me the importance of cold (7 – 10 degrees celcius) stable high quality water for successful salmon procreation. Fish and Game has established an artificial salmon run in the Montrose stream by releasing smolt. While these artificial supplements are helpful in raising numbers of smolt and returning adults, they are in no way intended as a replacement of the wild naturally occurring run.
60. The Rakaia is the biggest river in North Canterbury and salmon migration is more gradual than in the smaller rivers where salmon take advantage of receding flood flows to gain access to the deeper cooler headwaters in bursts of activity. This gradual migration means fish are spread throughout the system allowing anglers access to them along the river's length.

- 61. The river flow has been degraded as a result of water abstraction including run of river schemes and wells adjacent to the river reducing instream flows. The flow is still adequate although this abstraction results in longer periods of low flow and truncated flood recessions.
- 62. Development of intensive agriculture in the headwaters has led to water quality issues with increasing siltation, as evidenced in the Glenariffe stream.
- 63. As a Fish and Game councillor I have been active in promoting remedies to this degradation including fencing cattle out of streams and establishing riparian strips on the Glenariffe Stream to protect in stream habitat.

### **Conclusion**

- 64. The salmon rivers as described above provide anglers with a highly valued naturally sustaining sport fishing resource. Salmon are well established in these rivers having been introduced over 100 years ago. For me this form of recreation has been a passion of mine since an early age and I feel we are all responsible for protecting it.
- 65. Although the fishery has suffered some decline over the last 20 years, efforts are being made by Fish and Game who have a statutory responsibility to manage maintain and enhance the fishery, along with those who care to reverse some of the human induced influences that have contributed to this decline.
- 66. These influences include: water abstraction that artificially controls and reduces river flows, fry losses due to ineffective fish screening; and both water and habitat degradation due to increased intensive agriculture, leading to more run off of nitrogen, phosphorous and silt into sensitive salmon habitat.

67. If not adequately controlled, these influences can have devastating consequences for salmon as is evident in the case of the Ashley River, whose demise as a productive fishery cannot be solely attributed to natural causes.
68. These highly valued rivers and their salmon runs deserve protection to safeguard their future, for present and future generations.

**Peter Erich Robinson**

**8 April 2013**