

# Tabled at Hearing 08/05/2013

LWRP Hearing submission

1. My name is Jean Forrester and my husband Robert and I farm a 228ha flat and rolling farm in the Omihi Valley and a 405ha hill block in Hawarden. We have three children who are all working on other sheep and beef farms in the Hurunui District.
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3. Robert grew up on a hill property on the banks of the South branch of the Waipara River. He remembers the Waipara River always having slime in it during the hot dry summer months. Robert was 10 years on in 1966 and this was before any fertilizer was applied to the hills. The river was slimy then.
4. I grew up in the Omihi Valley and can remember eeling in the muddy, slimy ponds especially in the summer when the Omihi Creek was dry and the eels were captured in the deep dark smelly ponds.
5. Our farm in Omihi is a dry land sheep and beef farm and we supplement this with rearing 4 day old bull calves to 100Kg and some hay baling contracting.
6. Most years our lambs and cattle are finished on our farm but some years, when we have a dry spring or autumn, we have to graze stock out and buy in supplements and sell store stock. This affects the financial performance of our farm.
7. The seasons in the Omihi Valley in the last two years have generally been better than in some years because of timely rains in the spring and autumn. In our 33 years of farming we have farmed through some terrible dry years that play havoc with farmers' sanity, stock welfare and bank balances. The HWP seemed to be a good way to drought proof our farms, improve the financial performance and take away the uncertainty of dry land farming.
8. Contracts for meat companies seem to be the way of the future. We have supplied the same meat company for many years', with most of our lambs, but a contract is quite hard to sign as two weeks of hot, nor west weather can turn our farm from green and lush to a dust bowl. If this continues for long periods you start to destock quite quickly. Not a good way to farm profitably.
9. We try to drought proof our farm by growing Lucerne and brassica crops to feed our young stock to keep them growing to saleable weights as quickly as possible. These plants along with plantain and chicory work well in dry periods but if the drought is prolonged and the weather is really hot they really struggle and look and produce disappointingly.
10. We run around 10su/ha but possibly more if the ewes are counted at 1.3su because of the number of lambs they have.

11. Lambing % last year, which is ewes to the ram, lambs sold and retained for ewe hoggets' was 160% for our ewes and 130% for our hoggets'. In the last few years the hoggets seem to have become the new 2 tooth (2 year old sheep). This shows how much sheep farming production has improved in the last few years.
12. I think we could target another 20% more lambing from our ewes and getting another 20% more lambs sold prime (killable weight) from their mothers at .5 to 1 kg heavier. If we had irrigation and could double our stock units, sheep farming at this level would compete financially with dairy farming.
13. If the irrigation scheme goes ahead it will also improve the profitability of un irrigated farms as in drought years there will still be a market for stock from the dry farms on the irrigated land.
14. If the Waipara River catchment is red zoned this may not be allowed to happen and I feel the way the plan is setup encourages mediocrity. In fact it seems to be the only way to farm with the restraints this plan has on farming. Can farmers afford this to happen and can NZ afford this? I don't think so. In our 33 years of farming our major driver has been to have a sheep that can produce to a high standard and even though we look after them really well, we try to breed a sheep that can do this in a drought prone area. That same sheep would produce more if it was feed to its' maximum in times that are important for production. The two most important times are spring for feeding lambs on ewes and autumn for flushing ewes so they have more lambs.
15. Fertiliser practices on farms have changed over the last few years. Farmers in our generation were all told the importance of P and N in the 1970's and 1980's. We were told to apply it annually by professors at universities, fertilizer reps selling their products and articles in farming magazines.
16. On our farm in the last few years we have been monitoring our soils especially when it comes to fertiliser applications. We thought our P levels were high enough, that urea wasn't a good idea if we did not get enough rain which was most of the time, and that we needed to try and build up more organic matter. Our soil tests show more than adequate P levels of between 21 and 49. We only use small amounts of Phosphorus and Nitrogen when we drill feed crops. Last year we put on a mix of Lime, Sulphur, Mg and Se. Even though there was no P in the mix P levels have increased. Lime is supposed to make unavailable nutrients more available by balancing the soil pH and allowing natural soil processes to occur.
17. This year we have used Bio Help a soil plant stimulant that is meant to help improve the organic matter in the soil and improve the activity of the micro fauna in the soil and this will help release the nutrients already in the soil.
18. More farmers appear to be trying other ways of fertilizing their farms by using lime, soil conditioners, seaweed and various other products. Dozens of companies are trying to sell these products and there is a minefield of information. Most companies tell farmers they are wasting their time using every other product except theirs.

19. We have been told by a soil specialist that we have enough P in our ground, even though some of it is unavailable, to keep the farm going for 60 years. Unfortunately we will not be around to see it if this is correct.

20. Robert and I have been aware for a few years now that our farms' organic matter could be better. We are trying to improve the organic matter issue. Our soil appears much healthier when it is not affected by drought. We would love to be able to irrigate our soils.

21. The Late Mr Tom Baxter started a rainfall graph half way through 1954 and his son Alec has continued to record the rainfall in Omihi:

- Average rainfall in the Omihi Valley for the last 58 years is 663.75mls or 26.55 inches
- The graph shows a dry period from 1955 to 1973 19 years. Average rainfall 600.44
- A wet period from 1974 to 1987. 14 years. Average rainfall 801.23mls
- Combined average rainfall from 1955 to 1987 was 685mls
- Another dry period from 1988 to 2007. 25 years. Average rainfall 583.85ml
- Possibly a wetter period from 2008 to 2012. 5 years. Average rainfall 742.4mls
- Combined average rainfall from 1988 to 2012 was 610mls

22. The amount of rainfall in a year does not always tell the full story as large amounts of rain in the winter and none in the spring along with weeks of nor- west wind can cause many problems for the following seasons.

### **Involvement in the HWP Scheme**

23. I became involved in the Hurunui Irrigation Project Trust (HIPT) about 6 years ago. The Omihi Valley was not in the proposed area of the scheme as farmers in Omihi had not contributed any money. The Hurunui Water Project (HWP) seemed to be the only option to get water for the majority of the irrigable land and it still remains the only option for our catchment. The farmers in our area contributed enough to become part of the scheme. Farmers have contributed to this scheme because in many cases it is their only chance of water and they have done so without any guarantees. This is a big ask especially in dry years and years of low prices.

24. While working with the HIPT the farmers in the group developed a best farming practice agreement that farmers had to sign into before they could get water. This agreement covered such things as fertilizer levels and best use of fertilizer, soil moisture monitoring and best use of water, riparian planting and keeping cattle out of waterways.

25. When shares were sold to the farmers in HIPT, a farmer liaison group was formed. The farmer liaison group was formed as a communication link between farmers and HWP.

26. In these two committees I was privileged to see some really motivated people with a passion for farming and the community working to try and get a scheme that would enhance this district both financially and environmentally. There were many discussions about good farming practices and affordability of the scheme.

27. What will happen to the Omihi Valley if the Waipara catchment is red zoned?

#### CONCLUSION

28. The Omihi Valley part of the Waipara river catchment, is a low rainfall area which is prone to drought. The streams that run through our area of the valley always dry up and in some dry years have never run. In other years normally in the winter they can become raging floods.
29. I feel that as farmers that have both grown up in this district, we care about our land, soils, stock and district. Even though we don't get it right every time mostly due to lack of profitability in dry land farming we care about our farm and live to farm.
30. I feel concerned for our district if the Waipara catchment is red zoned. I feel that it is not farming but natural conditions in the area that contribute to the high periphyton levels.
31. I do not think that a group of people with little knowledge of farming in this area should be able to develop a plan that if adopted will have far reaching negative effects on our district and our land. I feel that drought, dust and lack of profitability due to drought are the major problems in our district. If the Waipara catchment is red zoned due to naturally occurring conditions a grave mistake will have been made by a group of people that do not understand the area. I understand if the HWP gets enough water consented for storage, they will eventually be able to flush the Waipara river and this could mitigate some of the naturally occurring slime problem.