

BEFORE THE Canterbury Regional Council
independent hearing panel: David
Sheppard (Chair), Raewyn
Solomon and Rob van
Voorthuysen

IN THE MATTER OF The Resource Management Act
1991 and the Environment
Canterbury (Temporary
Commissioners and Improved
Water Management) Act 2010

AND

IN THE MATTER OF Variation 2 (Section 13
(Ashburton) of the proposed
Canterbury Land and Water
Regional Plan

**EVIDENCE OF MICHAEL READ FOR COMBINED CANTERBURY PROVINCES,
FEDERATED FARMERS OF NEW ZEALAND**

Dated 15 May 2015

Evidence statement from Michael Read: Hearing for Variation 2 (Ashburton) Canterbury Land and Water Regional Plan

My name is Michael Read, my brother Stephen and I are the 6th generation in our family to farm in the Lower Hinds District.

Our farm is spread over 4 locations following the banks of the Hinds River. Our most western block backs directly onto the Hinds Township, and from there we zig-zag between the Northern and Southern banks of the river as far east as New Park Road, 7 km from the Coast. The versatility of the soils along the Hinds River allow us to farm a wide range of crops and livestock which include:

202ha intensive mixed arable including store lamb trading

161ha horticulture

40 ha winter dairy cow grazing

Because of the versatility of the soils surrounding the Hinds River there has been many different land uses seen over the 6 generations my family has been here. The strength of our farm and other long term farmers in the district has been in our ability to alter the land use over the years as markets inevitably change.

A recent example of this farming flexibility is a piece of land my father brought in the 1990's. The previous owner ran the property as a sheep farm but poor returns in his industry left him with little option but to change his farm use or to sell the farm. He chose to sell. My father brought the farm and incorporated it into his arable operation. However the soils were not suited to arable farming and it continued to return poor results.

As the dairy industry began to thrive in the 2000's my father saw an opportunity to change the land use to winter cow grazing and we have been growing winter forage on that block for the past 10 years. This land has become some of our most productive on the farm due to our ability to take positive action and change how the land was farmed.

A future example of how our farm may be adversely affected if N losses were locked to a 2009-13 average is around changing our farm uses within our current farming system. I am farming a very specialised horticultural crop that appears to have extremely low N losses compared to our other crops and especially other farms in the area. The crop is Black Currants.

Over the past 10 years we have been converting arable land to growing black currants. This is essentially lowering our N losses on the farm by up to 25 -50% (at a best guess because overseer doesn't accommodate black currants). The reason we are converting more land to black currants is because we have had to make a considerable capital investment on infrastructure around harvesting the fruit for export markets. By planting more area we are keeping our black currant investment viable by getting full utilisation out of the equipment and the contracts we have worked so hard to get.

However if the black currant market weakens in the future I may need to convert some of the Black Currant land back to arable which would be impossible without some N loss flexibility. The low N loss of the black currants would limit my farming options to a system that would not be maximising the potential of the land which would make servicing the large capital debits I have on the farm unsustainable.

I would like to think that no decisions would be made in haste about fixing N Loss limits to a particular farm when the modelling system that is being used is so unreliable for a non dairy

farm such as mine. If anything I would like to think that we would be rewarded for reducing our "N Footprint" over the past 5 years as we move towards farming in a more environmentally and economically sustainable way.

But I fear that by having reduced the N losses on my farm through the 4 year period of the N Loss Snapshot that I would be severely penalised compared to those farmers who have created the high N Loss problem in the beginning by converting land to unsuitable farming uses.