BEFORE THE CANTERBURY REGIONAL COUNCIL

UNDER	The Environment Canterbury (Temporary Commissioners and Improved Water Management) Act 2010
AND	
IN THE MATTER	Submissions and Further Submissions on Proposed Plan Change 5 to the Canterbury Land and Water Regional Plan

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Evidence of Benjamin Timothy Ensor on Behalf of
JG & LM Murchison (Submitter No 67179) and **JWK Hoban & Ors** (Submitter No 67198)

Dated: 22nd July 2016

INTRODUCTION:

1.1 My name is Benjamin Timothy Ensor.

1.2 I gained an A Bursary at High School. I have worked in the agricultural industry all my life, starting as a shepherd soon after leaving school, and working my way through to the stock manager's position on a 7000 SU (stock unit) sheep and beef property. During this period I worked on numerous sheep and beef properties, throughout the North are South islands. In 2000 I returned home as the Managing Director of my family's 12000 SU farming business. In 2008 this business was settled between my siblings, and I am now farming on my own account.

1.3 I am farming in partnership with my wife Jane Catherine Ensor. We own two properties in the Cheviot district. 'Jedburgh' a 700ha hill country property located on the coastal range directly to the north of Gore Bay. This property has been owned by my family since 1973. And 'Willow Grove' a 120ha flat irrigated property on the south bank of the Waiau River at Spotswood, ten minutes north of Cheviot.

1.4 Jedburgh is a breeding operation, running a Romney Texel cross ewe flock, and an Angus cow herd. Willow Grove is a mixed dry stock finishing, and cropping operation. Finishing all our own progeny, as well as bought in stock, and growing cereal crops for sale. Ninety hectares of this block is irrigated by way of three hard hose guns, the water is taken from a spring fed stream hydraulically connected to the Waiau River.

1.5 I am a member of the Hurunui Waiau Zone Committee. I was Chair of the Hurunui Waiau Nutrient Working Group. I have been instrumental in the development of the recently formed Cheviot Irrigators Group. (An audited self-management collective under the Hurunui-Waiau River Regional Plan). I am part of the leadership group setting up the North Canterbury Land Care Group, (a collective for low emitting farmers, to demonstrate and promote Good Farm Practise).

1.6 Our farm is located within the area covered by the Hurunui-Waiau River Regional Plan. However we have submitted on Plan Change 5 because we are hoping that if a practical and sensible planning regime can be developed in Plan Change 5, that Environment Canterbury will apply it to the Hurunui-Waiau catchments in due course. The issues we discuss in our evidence are typical of dry land farms/dry land farms with small areas of irrigation throughout Canterbury.

2. SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

2.1 My evidence supports submissions made by JKW Hoban and Others, and JG & LMW Murchison on the following matters:

(i) Nature of dryland farming & need for flexibility on our farm

(ii) Irrigation of our farm

(iii) Farm environment plans

(iv) Good Management Practises (GMP)

2.2 Prior to addressing these issues, I would also like to make some brief observations about the issue of land use and water quality in general and Plan Change 5.

2.3 Over the last two years I have spent a considerable amount of time representing the interests of dryland, and low nitrogen (N) emitting farmers in the Hurunui Waiau zone. These farmers are characterised by the deep respect they have for the land they farm, and the responsibility they place on themselves to be good stewards of the land, and to be able to pass it on to the next generation in good heart. While it won't have an effect in the Hurunui Waiau zone, Plan Change 5 is an opportunity to put in place a planning framework that deals with low emitting farmers in a way that is commensurate to their effect on water quality.

3. FLEXIBILITY IN FARMING

3.1 While we have 90ha of irrigation, our farming business is still predominantly dryland. This means the variations of production within and between seasons can be huge. The main driver of this is rainfall and temperature, affecting pasture and crop growth. For example this winter we have 5100su on, due to two years of drought conditions. We would usually be wintering around 7500su. The fluctuation of local and international markets also have a large influence on the mix of stock classes, and the area, and types of crops we grow.

3.2 Within our sheep and beef breeding and finishing operation we have between 10-12 different classes of stock on at any one time. This constantly evolves with how we see the markets and climate moving in the future, as well as balancing with our budgeted feed supply, and the natural carrying capacity of the land. Another example would be we have been growing barley, as a feed for the dairy industry. This market has disappeared in the last eighteen months, so that area will be planted in an alternative crop, or be used to finish more trading stock, or a

combination of both, depending on how we see the markets going forward, and what best fits our farming system.

4. IRRIGATION:

4.1 We purchased 'Willow Grove' our irrigated block in 2009. The reason for doing this was to increase the resilience of our business by providing some certainty around finishing our stock, and to diversify the business through the finishing of bought in stock, and or grazing, and cash cropping. It has been very successful in these regards. It has also meant that we are now able to confidently enter into fixed price forward contracts to supply stock at a given time. We could never do this in a totally dryland system. This has been a great risk management tool for us. Irrigation has also enabled us to enter some new markets such as arable where you can now only secure contracts if you have irrigation and a secure water supply.

4.2 The irrigation has had some positive effects for the breeding operation; we are now not trying to winter finishing cattle on the hills. This has meant less damage to the soil structure, and less possible sediment run off in rainfall events. While these can also be issues on the flat land, we are much better able to manage these risks in this situation.

4.3 Our irrigation operation has not resulted in us being able to double our livestock numbers or anything of that sort; nor has it meant being able to convert a sheep and beef operation into dairy or dairy support. We do not have the water for that, nor is it something I wish to pursue. However what it has done has given us a more viable farming business by taking some of the risk out of dryland farming.

4.4 Our Overseer, nitrogen and phosphorous loss numbers for the hill block back this up. An Overseer budget done in 2014 (version 6.1.3.), showed an N loss of 8 kg/ha, and a P loss of 1.2 kg/ha. Both still very low.

4.5 I am very concerned at planning regimes which remove the ability of farmers to adopt and utilise irrigation for this purpose, particularly when it does not result in land use conversions and significant increases in N loss numbers. It seems very short-sighted; especially when we consider the predicted changes in weather patterns with climate change may result in the east coast being drier and even more drought prone in the not too distant future.

5. FARM PLANS

5.1 We have done a detailed farm plan for both blocks covering; nutrient management, soils management, livestock management, offal pits, irrigation management, riparian management, biodiversity. This is a very useful tool for incorporating GMP (Good Management Practices) into our farming operation; but primarily for communicating to others what we were already doing. Soil conservation works started on our property in 1974, with pole planting, debris dams, and fencing. This type of work has been very effective, and still continues to date.

6.2 We use various professional advisers including but not limited to, three different agronomists, depending on the crop or pasture species we are growing, Irrigation design consultant, fertiliser rep, farm systems consultant, and I am a member of a farm discussion group that meets regularly.

6.3 I don't think farm plans should be a requirement of a permitted activity for low emitting farmers as they need to be continually evolving with the changing circumstance to be effective, and once in legislation this is difficult. Industry is already doing a very good job of driving progress in this space.

6.4 If farm plans are required by regulation of low emitting farmers, the risk is that they will be seen in a negative way, and completed to a minimum standard, and 'filed' in the bottom draw. As mentioned in my opening observations, farmers want to do what is right for their farm and the environment. If farm plans are presented in a positive and educational light, by industry, and/or in partnership with council, they have a high probability of good uptake, and of focusing farmer actions on where they can make a positive difference to water quality.

7. GOOD MANAGEMENT PRACTISE (GMP)

7.1 I think it is a mistake to include GMPs in Plan Change 5. As part of the process in developing our farm plan I have considered all the industry agreed GMPs and their relevance to our property. My conclusion is that are they are very generalized, and simplistic. In my experience, to be effective GMPs need to tailored to the individual property, and circumstance that they are being applied to. Multiple, climatic, physical, production, and systems related factors have to be considered before the best action can be settled on, to achieve the desired mitigation on the ground.

7.2 An example of this is that fertilizer should not be applied during the months of June, July, and August. This is a simplistic way to try and avoid nutrient losses from fertilizer when the soil temperature is too low, and/or soil moisture is too high. The reality is that along the North Canterbury coastal strip there would be many instances when fertilizer application during the winter months would be within the bounds of good practice. Equally there will, at times, be periods outside of the winter months when soil moisture is high, and it would not be good practice to be applying fertilizer.

CONCLUSIONS:

8.1 The effect on water quality of low emitting farming does not justify a high cost of regulation.

8.2 Variability is an inherent part of any dry land farming system, and any planning frame work needs to allow for this

8.3 All farmers have an obligation, and almost without exception a desire to be using good management practices. However with in a dryland or low emitting context, an industry led, and educational approach is much more likely to achieve the desired results than a regulatory approach.

8.4 Relatively small areas of irrigation as part of a dryland operation, can have a very large positive effect on the profitability, and resilience of the business, with a relatively minor effect on water quality.

Benjamin Timothy Ensor