

## Submission on the Rangitata Diversion Race Management Limited Consent Applications from Hilary Iles

As early as 1828 Von Humboldt after extensive travels around the world concluded that humans had caused long-term changes to the environment, “he named deforestation, ruthless irrigation and....the great masses of steam and gas produced in industrial centres” (1.) In NZ deforestation has been an issue since people first arrived. Intensive irrigation is a relatively recent phenomena. I have watched the transformation of the Canterbury Plains as I travelled from Christchurch to Geraldine over the last 10 years. What was formally dried pastures, grazing sheep with extensive shelter belts – trying to stop soil loss and provide shade, being transformed into huge mounds of smouldering trees (contributing to climate change) and bright green pastures from intensive use of nitrogen fertilisers. Now when you fly into Timaru you can easily see the obvious lack of biodiversity and the huge irrigated area, as farmers have jumped on the band wagon. Central pivots “might have become core to efficiency” Ben Curry (2) but they are “desert islands” for biodiversity – no trees here. Some farmers are replacing the pines with natives for shelter along the road sides and that is a great move. Also the whole fertilising of the foot hills is intensifying their use and affecting water quality at the source. The outcome of the consultation still gives farmers years to sort out their water pollution.

A consequence of all this is poor water quality and decreased flow in our rivers. Note the “OUR” rivers not the farmers – yet they are using and abusing this communal resource for free. And yes there has been public consultation around improving water quality but that consultation has taken 7 years whilst more consents were granted and degradation continued.

There are two fallacies farmers like to quote:

1. We are feeding the world. The world does not need milk powder. It’s a luxury item and in 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries is being advocated instead of breast feeding with the result of more infant deaths due to mixing the powder with dirty water. They certainly aren’t feeding NZ as milk and butter are ridiculously high prices– they are cheaper in the UK!!!

2. Every drop of water reaching the sea is a waste. The rivers have evolved over millions of years into a highly functioning ecosystem. High flood flows are needed for fish migration and for clearing weeds from the river bed. These weeds harbour predators which decimate our river nesting birds. The river beds have greater infestation of weeds since the start of irrigation – I know through doing the Orari river survey every year. The change has been amazing – in places you can only walk down in the water, many nesting sites have gone. ECan is having to clear some areas for the birds to nest.

Then there is farmer debt – who is making the profit? The big international companies who are developing dairy farms all around the world even within the Arctic Circle!! How long will the demand for NZ milk last?

Farm family succession is now a problem with the huge value of the farms– and overseas sales are more likely.

The big corporations are milking NZ.

And still more water is demanded with the new RDR proposal for the Rangitata.

The new proposal might be “take” at a higher flow level than the Rangitata South scheme but every “take” is cumulative and diminishes the water volume with downstream consequences.

It is worth climbing Little Mt. Peel so that you can see the extent of water currently being taken from the river – water ponds are everywhere – of varying size and complexity. The Rangitata River is a shade of its former self due to the water extraction.

In case you haven't guessed by now I am totally opposed to the whole scheme, it is morally wrong for the future of NZ and the planet. We do not need economic growth, or more milk or more farmer debt. What we need is a sustainable economy where climate change impacts are taken into consideration before profits. Glacier fed rivers will become a thing of the past. Canterbury needs to be farmed within its environmental limits. Was NZ a poor country before intensive dairying? No. Were the farmers poor before the milk boom? No. Was the economy struggling? No.

We need to draw the line somewhere and it should start here and now.

Thank you for reading my submission

View from Little Mt Peel on a hazy day



This isn't a particularly good picture as you cannot see the addition individual ponds beyond the large ones very clearly – look for the pale dashes!

1. The invention of nature. The adventures of Alexander Von Humboldt by Andrea Wulf p.213
2. Geraldine news p.5, 22.2.1218.