

PC7 Hearing opening – AMWG Mark Webb

Tena koutou

Good afternoon Commissioners

With permission please, I would like to give a brief summary of my evidence

I am a Fish and Game Officer for Central South Island Fish and Game and have a long relationship with the Opihi Catchment. This includes assisting with development of the variable minimum flow regime for the mainstem of the Opihi at Saleyards Bridge in the mid 1990's. This was associated with development of the Opuha Dam. That flow regime remains in place to this day in the ORRP.

Fish and Game's priority has always been use of the environmental component of Lake Opuha storage to provide flows and flow variation to enhance ecological health, fish passage at the river mouth and recreation. And during extreme events, to maintain connectivity of flow in the Opuha River and Opihi River downstream from the dam.

I am also the F&G representative on the Opuha Environmental Flow Release Advisory Group or OEFRAG that was initially established by the ORRP to manage the transition between monthly minimum flows.

This group has now evolved to a wider role in recommending to Environment Canterbury, variation in minimum flows to make best use of Lake Opuha storage during low flow events, most notably that of 2014/15.

Over the 2014 summer and the slow recovery in Opihi Catchment surface flows and lake storage through to the spring of 2015, it became clear to OEFRAG that introducing measures to save storage when the lake was at 385m, and already approximately 50% depleted of storage, was too late.

Lake level on its own was not sensitive enough to enable timely introduction of restrictions on abstraction and environmental releases from storage, to prevent or minimise the dam being empty, and the lower Opihi River ceasing to flow. Management of storage needs to be considered at the first signs of limited availability.

I believe the AMWG proposed Alternative Management Level 1 and Level 2 Regimes, provide a better balance between early intervention to conserve storage, and use of storage to provide natural spring and autumn flow variability, and at low flow levels to maintain ecological health particularly river connectivity.

A consequence of the AMWG proposed regimes compared to PC7 proposed regimes, is that conserved storage is more likely to be available later in the season to maintain connectivity in the river under the AMWG regime.

During prolonged or intense low flow events, connectivity is the highest priority for maintaining ecological health of the river. My 28 October Update of Evidence discusses this issue in more detail.

Thank you. I am now available for any questions.