

SPOKEN STATEMENT – Leigh Griffiths

1. I am Leigh Griffiths and I am employed at Environment Canterbury as General Manager of Field Operations. I have the responsibility and oversight for flood and river resilience, Regional Parks, forestry, biosecurity and navigation safety. This division oversees more than \$40 million of work, involves 120 internal staff and a range of external contractors.
2. Regional Councils have a responsibility to ensure people, property and land are kept safe from floods. Flooding is New Zealand's most frequent natural hazard and primarily due to climate change and the risk is increasing year-on-year. We saw the devastating effect flooding can have on people, property, and critical lifeline infrastructure during 2023 cyclone Gabrielle that hit Hawkes Bay and the upper North Island. In Canterbury we are also still recovering from significant flood events in 2021.
3. Our workload is increasing as more communities ask for dedicated support for ongoing flood issues which touch on all internationally recognised PARA principles, which are Protect – Avoid – Retreat – Accommodate. This integrated approach means we critically look at each issue holistically and work towards the best solution long term – noting that means other solutions may be needed in the short term.
4. Flood protection is a matter of national interest and being prepared for events not only means forward planning of new or upgraded infrastructure but also ensuring critical maintenance of channels, berms, and assets is always carried out. Routine maintenance of our existing flood protection schemes and assets, and localised improvement projects, are primarily funded through local rates where financial commitments are agreed over multiple years. Flood recovery and some recent improvements have been co-funded by central government and we continue to seek additional funding from central government to bolster protection to the community from damaging floods. This funding is variable, and projects typically require immediate action, so having as many permissions in place ahead of time is important.
5. The Regional Council continues to shift towards a more integrated approach to river enhancement works addressing flood, erosion and drainage management, biodiversity, biosecurity, cultural and other community and recreational enhancement. The recent government funding enabled significant on-the-ground delivery of projects with this integrated approach, including extensive native plantings and weed control.
6. These renewal resource consent applications are a critical tool to enable essential on-ground works throughout the Canterbury region. We have proposed adaptive and stringent mitigation to ensure any effects are appropriately managed. Additional positive outcomes directly related to the renewal of these herbicide consents include improvements to natural braid character, reduced fire risk, removal of predator habitat, and increased habitat for braided river birds.
7. In recognition of its critical importance to the community, Canterbury's planning framework has been set up to be largely enabling of flood protection works with a reasonable proportion of our works being permitted subject to stringent environmental Codes of Practice. I am aware some of the activity before you today is also a permitted activity and this process seeks to authorise the parts where resource consent is required.

8. The costs associated with obtaining these resource consents are substantial. Given the mitigation measures proposed and the significant amount of rate payers' money that has gone into obtaining these renewal permissions, it is my opinion that it is imperative that a 20 year duration is granted.
9. Regional Council takes its responsibility to reduce risk to life and protect the environment extremely seriously. We carefully plan our work programmes and deliver work for our communities. Not adequately maintaining flood protection infrastructure leads to a lack of business confidence, creates ongoing health and psychological trauma for flood-affected communities and creates anxiety of an uncertain future. Flood events in New Zealand are increasing in frequency and scale, and it is our professional and regulatory duty to be prepared and ensure we use every tool available to deliver this critical work.