



Wairarapa Water Use Project

Media information

28 September 2010

**Strong farmer interest
in water**

A survey to help assess current and future land use in the Wairarapa valley and the related demand for irrigation water has found that 54% of respondents would be interested in irrigation if water was available at an affordable price.

More than one quarter of respondents had considered a change in land use over the last five years with those running larger properties more likely to consider changing. The most common reasons for not changing land use were lack of water and a perceived lack of financial viability.

The survey, delivered to rural residents in the Wairarapa valley from Mount Bruce to Lake Ferry, was commissioned by the Wairarapa Water Use Project to provide background information for assessing the viability of a regional irrigation project.

Responses were received from a broad range of farm types from hobby and lifestyle farms to properties over 1,000 hectares.

Sixty two percent farmers on properties over 500 hectares would install or increase irrigation if water was accessible.

Nineteen percent of survey respondents currently irrigated part of their properties or nine percent of the total land area for this group. Of these, half identified some restriction to accessing water. Those who irrigated reported an average increase in net financial margin of 35% as a result.

Wairarapa Regional Irrigation Trust chairman and farmer, Bob Tosswill, said the survey was an initial attempt to gather data about current and future land use and gauge interest and enthusiasm for irrigation.

“The results certainly indicate that farmers are looking for ways to enhance their land use and water is the key to this. We don’t have all the answers yet and have a lot more work to do to engage with the land users as a group, just one of several sectors in the community involved,” said Mr Tosswill.

Community engagement was the first priority agreed by the high-level leadership group established last year to oversee the development of a regional water and irrigation project which has the ability to transform Wairarapa’s future.

The leadership group represents the three Wairarapa district councils, iwi groups Rangitāne o Wairarapa and Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, Greater Wellington Regional Council, the Wairarapa Regional Irrigation Trust, the Environment and Recreation interest group and Grow Wellington.

Currently about 8,000 hectares of the Wairarapa valley are irrigated. The Wairarapa Water Use Project proposes to increase this to approximately 30,000 hectares.

Mr Tosswill said the purpose of the project was to maximise the productive capacity of the Wairarapa valley land, and the subsequent economic return through water storage and irrigation opportunities which also provide for environmental, social and cultural needs of the community.

Under the irrigation proposal, water would be ‘harvested’ from rivers at times of high flow and stored for release during dry periods. The Tararua Forest Park will not be used for storage and rivers themselves will not be dammed.

The survey had 210 valid responses and a margin of error of plus or minus 5.5 percent.