



**Media information**

**25 November 2013**

**Water summit attracts  
wide community interest**

More than 200 people gathered in Masterton last week to explore the opportunities and challenges of harnessing Wairarapa's water in a sustainable way.

Organised by the Wairarapa Regional Irrigation Trust, the full-day Wairarapa Water Summit saw seven Cantabrians and others share their knowledge and experience at global, national, local and on-farm levels.

"The idea was to learn from people who have been there and done that with water, and who are now facing new challenges," trust chairman Bob Tosswill said. "Each region is unique but the issues and processes in developing a regional irrigation scheme and sustainable land and water use are fundamentally the same."

The event was held against a backdrop of Greater Wellington Regional Council-sponsored investigations into a multi-purpose water storage and distribution scheme for the Wairarapa valley, underpinned by the development of a new regional plan. The local content of the new plan will be developed locally by five community-led catchment committees called 'whaitua'.

Summit themes included growing markets for NZ agricultural products in Asia, outlined by ANZCO chairman Sir Graeme Harrison, and the economic and social benefits of irrigation. Others were collaborative decision-making about land and water management, the environment, land use change, multiple uses of water and precision farming under irrigation.

Irrigation NZ chairman and speaker, John Donkers, was impressed by the interest shown from across the community. "Mayors, district and regional councillors, farmers, business and community people from rural and urban areas were all there to understand more. It was good to see an appreciation that the gains from irrigation are broadly based, not limited to individual farms."

After outlining the boost that irrigation has given his district, Ashburton mayor Angus McKay told Wairarapa farmers if they 'got themselves organised with irrigation' they would not need to send their lambs to Ashburton to be fattened during droughts every few years.

Timaru grower and Opuha Water director, Tony Howey, stressed the need for strong vision and leadership in establishing a successful water scheme. He shared his on-farm experience and that of numerous processing and service industries in South Canterbury.

As Greater Wellington puts together its Wairarapa catchment committee (whaitua), the first of five in the region, Land and Water Forum chairman, Alastair Bisley, called on the community to be open-minded, to think a lot about the ends, be flexible about the means and to think broadly. "Talk to the people you don't agree with. If you think you know the answer and you're not going to change then don't get involved, because everybody who goes into a collaborative process has to shift as they constantly hear new information."

Ngāi Tahu's James Caygill presented the iwi's whole-of-catchment approach in the Canterbury Water Management Strategy's 10 zone committees. He discussed the concept that economic, environmental and cultural values are not in tension, but derive from the same source - te ao turoa.

A lively dinner discussion led by Ashburton advisor Andy Macfarlane along with Ian Mackenzie of Federated Farmers, John Donkers and Tony Howey, explored why farmers would irrigate and the change in business thinking that was needed to do so.

Summing up the event, regional council chair Fran Wilde said the long-term nature and benefits of water storage were clear. "Time and work up-front is needed to get it right, particularly with regard to the environment. If we can do that then it will be phenomenal for everybody."