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**News release**

### **Water Study Organisations Apply for Resource Consent**

The two publicly funded bodies investigating large water enhancement schemes to the north and south of the Rakaia River have joined forces to apply for resource consent to take water from the river.

Acting in their capacity as parent councils to Central Plains Water, Christchurch City and Selwyn District Council have joined with the Ashburton Community Water Trust to file a resource consent application today to take 40 cubic metres of water per second from the Rakaia River. The two Councils have also filed a further resource consent application to take 40 cubic metres of water per second from the Waimakariri River.

Central Plains Water was established by the two Councils in March last year. Chairman Doug Marsh said the joint application was a good example of how the two sides of the river could work together for the benefit of the whole region.

“We each started to seriously consider the benefits and environmental issues associated with water enhancement opportunities at around the same time early last year.

“Under the National Water Conservation Order, which is the statutory framework governing the use of the Rakaia River, we both developed possible schemes that would have used all of the water still available under the Rakaia Conservation Order. We both realised that a co-operative scheme to harvest water from the Rakaia River would comply with the National Water Conservation Order while allowing for irrigation and water enhancement.

“The applications come following extensive community consultation and in anticipation of continuing feasibility studies into water enhancement. In total, almost \$2.5 million in public funds is budgeted for the feasibility studies being undertaken in Mid and Central Canterbury. Applying for resource consent to take water from the Rakaia and Waimakariri at this stage will ensure the feasibility studies can be properly concluded, allowing that investment to come to fruition,” he said.

According to Doug Marsh, Central Plains Water is still working with many different groups – including environmental, recreational, cultural, river interest and the communities around the proposed reservoir site – on detailed feasibility proposals for the use of the water.

“This is an application only to take the water. Before any scheme can proceed, we will need further applications to use the water. Once we reach satisfactory outcomes with our stakeholders on if and how the water should best be used, further resource consent applications will be made. If we are not able to reach a community consensus, the applications to take water will be withdrawn. The final decision on any water enhancement scheme rests with our parent Councils ,” he said.

A scoping study published by Central Plains Water in December 2000 concluded that it is feasible to build a scheme taking water from the Waimakariri and Rakaia Rivers to irrigate 84,000 hectares in the Central Plains. An economic impact report published at the same time estimated economic benefit from such a scheme has the potential to add an extra \$600 million per annum to the Canterbury regional GDP and could create up to 4,000 new jobs. Central Plains Water is due to report the results of its feasibility study to the Selwyn District and Christchurch City Councils in February next year.

A consultant's pre-feasibility report for the Ashburton Community Water Trust published in May 2001 identified the opportunity to take water at times of higher flows from tributaries in the Rakaia, Rangitata and Ashburton catchments. This water could be channelled to one or two storage reservoirs in the Stour Valley and Ashburton Gorge and used to extend irrigation to 153,000 hectares of farmland in Mid Canterbury, of which around 70,000 is already irrigated.

Central Plains Water is jointly funded by Selwyn District and Christchurch City Councils. Ashburton Community Water Trust is an independent body established by the Ashburton District Council. Both are charged with finding ways to enhance environmental and social values while providing for economic security through sustainable water management.

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