

# CENTRAL OTAGO ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIETY INC.

## Further submission re Water Quality Plan Change 6A at Alexandra 26 Sep 2012

As this is the first time the Central Otago Environmental Society has appeared before the Regional Council, I will take a moment to describe the Society. It is an incorporated body with charitable status which, at last count, numbered 80 plus core members, reflecting a cross-section of the Central Otago community. In essence, Society members subscribe to the notion that we all share collective responsibility to be good stewards of our environment including our landscapes, our natural resources and our heritage. I hasten to point out that one doesn't need to be a COES member to hold to that belief – as evidenced by the Society's wider support group, sometimes numbering thousands, which rallies on specific issues.

You may be reassured that the Society is not a vehicle for individual or personal views – submissions such as those we have made regarding Plan Change 6A, are first drafted by a volunteer, circulated for editing and approval amongst an elected executive group, then posted on the Society's website so that members and supporters are informed. To this point, there have been no complaints or concerns about any position the Society has taken on specific issues.

The Society's submission regarding Plan Change 6A reflects not only its members' views, but also the wider public's belief that the future sustainability of our communities relies on securing the supply and quality of Otago's water. So on their behalf, I congratulate the ORC on its determined attempt to establish water quality standards and to implement measures which might restore the health of the many water bodies which, within the space of one lifetime, have been visibly degraded.

Whether or not it was intended in quite this way, Plan Change 6A effectively draws a line in the sand regarding water quality – an expectation of improvement; I daresay, one from which the wider community, will not allow you to retreat.

That said, the Society in its submission, expressed concerns that an effects –based strategy which apparently leaves the business of managing water quality up to farmers and foresters alone, is unrealistic and now, given the apparent weight of opposition opinion, may even be unworkable. The Society is concerned that imposing catchment wide discharge limits ignores the actual physical differences between catchments and within catchments. As an example, the upper Dunstan Creek which bounds my own smallholding, is as near to pristine as one might hope. It follows logically that its quality must be preserved by way of a much higher standard of potential discharge than applies to the lower reaches of the Manuherikia River into which it flows.

The ORC appears to shy away from any notion of controlling land use but logic dictates and the evident state of our streams proves, that what we do to the land, affects the quality of our water. For certain, farmers must face the challenge of better managing their activities, even changing those activities should they be inappropriate – but in the Society's view, they must not be left to do that on their own. Without assistance, support

and supervision, many will fail and disregarding the wasted effort and social costs, our water will be none the better for the attempt.

The adverse effects of current practices have still to work their way through the environment so it may well take several lifetimes to restore the quality of all our streams. Meanwhile the immediate and most urgent priority must be to halt any further degradation. The quickest and most effective way of doing so will be by way of our territorial authorities combining their powers and resources to oversee all future proposed changes to land and water use, from a water quality perspective.

The Society considers that the transition to a new water management regime will necessarily require continuing management and oversight. Setting future compliance dates and waiting for results is an insufficient and inadequate control so we advocate setting intermediate objectives and time tables as essential components of an on-going monitoring and assistance programme. As well as measuring and reporting progress, such a programme will also provide timely identification of looming problems and where additional advice and support might be required.

Indeed, attempting to implement the Plan Change without out a monitoring and assistance programme is very likely to set some farmers up to fail. In closing, I return to my earlier point that farmers must not be left to face the inevitable challenges on their own. COES considers that this Plan Change is necessary as a consequence of our collective failure to sufficiently care for our environment ; it follows that we all must bear the effort and costs of remedial action, in order to secure our future.

Graye Shattky  
for COES