

**IN THE MATTER**

of the Resource Management Act 1991

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER**

of an application to vary the Water  
Conservation (Buller River) Order  
2001 pursuant to s216

**MICHAEL ANTHONY TALLEY,  
GRAEME PETER MALONE, JAMES  
RORY RYDER AND GUY  
ALEXANDER MANNERING** as  
trustees of **THE MAJAC TRUST**

**Applicants**

**APPLICATION TO VARY WATER  
CONSERVATION ORDER**

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**EVIDENCE OF MICHAEL HOPKINSON**

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## **RIVER EXPERIENCE – KAYAKING AND RAFTING IN NEW ZEALAND AND OVERSEAS**

1. My name is Michael Hopkinson. I am the owner and director of the New Zealand Kayak School which is based in Murchison on the Buller River. I have owned and operated this business since 1992.
  
2. I started kayaking in 1963 in England. I raced in kayak slalom for seven years before taking up river running. At the time many rivers around the world had not been run in kayaks or any other craft and I was fortunate to make the first descents of many rapids in Austria and Switzerland. This led to a series of kayak expeditions that became the model for future exploration, including the following:
  - In 1972 I was on an expedition that made the first descent of the upper Blue Nile in Ethiopia.
  - In 1976 I was on an expedition that made the first descent of the Dudh Khosi River in Nepal. This river flows from the flanks of Mt. Everest and was hailed as the “Everest of Rivers.”
  - In 1978 I was a member of the British Karakorum Kayak Expedition attempting the first decent of the Braldu river which flows down from K2 in Baltistan.
  - In 1987 I was part of an expedition that made the first descent of the Karnali River, the largest river in Western Nepal.
  - In 1990 I was part of a team that made the first decent of the Indus river in Baltistan using rafts and kayaks.
  
3. I have also paddled in Canada, the USA (including the Grand Canyon), Australia, China, and Borneo. In 1986 and 1996 I participated in an 18 day expedition down the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River in the USA using kayaks and rafts.
  
4. From 1984 until 1989 I was the Director of the Castle Hill Outdoor Centre, owned by St. Andrews College. Castle Hill Outdoor Centre runs residential outdoor pursuits programmes for a variety of schools and other organisations. One of the activities offered was rafting and I ran a weekly school rafting programme on the Rakaia River with occasional forays onto the Waimakariri and Clarence rivers.

5. In 1994 I worked on a promotional video for the Middle Fork of the Salmon River in Idaho during the course of a 10 day rafting trip.
6. In the last four years I have taken part in four family based rafting expeditions in the United States. I have rafted the Main Salmon River in Idaho twice on multi day trips, the Green River and the Dolores River in Colorado again on multi day trips (26 days in total).
7. Since 1983 I have played a part in exploring many of the rivers on the West Coast of the South Island of New Zealand. I have kayaked the Gowan River on a number of occasions and rafted the Gowan on 10 October 2005 as part of my preparation for drafting this evidence.
8. Overall, I have 42 years experience running rivers both in New Zealand and overseas. While a large part of my experience on rivers has been kayaking, as set out above, I also have considerable experience rafting rivers both in New Zealand and overseas.
9. I have been asked by the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society to consider Majac's application to vary the Buller Water Conservation Order ("WCO") in relation to the Gowan River and advise whether the proposal would affect the rafting values protected by the WCO.
10. I have been provided with a copy of the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses in the Environment Court Practice Note (31 March 2005). I have read and agree to comply with that Code, and I have complied with the Code in preparation of this evidence. Except where I state that I am relying upon the specified evidence of another person, my evidence in this statement is within my area of expertise. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions which I express.

### **SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE**

11. Based on my experience exploring rivers in New Zealand, and also overseas, I consider that the Gowan is an outstanding river for rafting in New Zealand. It provides an exciting trip from Lake Rotoroa in Nelson Lakes National Park along a fast flowing

river, surrounded for the most part by native vegetation. The Gowan River is part of one of the few unmodified opportunities to raft from the source to the sea in New Zealand.

12. The proposed hydro scheme involves the modification of the natural environment and the natural flow of the river system and would significantly detract from the amenity values of the rafting trip. The proposed telemetry system has some potential merit for balancing the use of the flow of a river for rafting with a hydro scheme. However, I have serious concerns that the telemetry system will preclude any increase in the use of the Gowan for rafting and is essentially untested to my knowledge in New Zealand

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMERCIAL RAFTING AND PRIVATE RAFTING OVERSEAS**

13. In this section I describe the significance of the growth of commercial rafting overseas based on my experience. In summary, private and commercial rafting are activities that are growing rapidly in other parts of the world and providing substantial opportunities for private recreation, as well as contributing to economic development.
14. To take one example in Jackson, Wyoming, eight rafting companies licensed by the US Forest Service take 100,000 people down the Snake River, a ten mile stretch comparable to the Buller and its tributaries, in a 10 week period. The eight companies employ over 400 people and use over 100 commercial vehicles including large public service busses. The rafting industry is estimated to bring in \$30 to \$60 million dollars US into the town's economy. The figure varies depending on which formula for related expenditure on accommodation and meals is used.<sup>1</sup>
15. A major spin off from the commercial sector is the growth of private rafting by ordinary families. In the town of Jackson it is possible to hire and purchase river rafts. The US forest service estimate of private users of the Snake River is 30-50,000 people per summer.

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<sup>1</sup> Source for figures: Heather Ewing, Manager of Barker- Ewing rafting and the US Forest Service, Jackson, Wyoming.

16. Similarly, the Salmon River system is so popular with private (family) rafters that access to the multi-day runs on the Middle Fork and the Main Salmon is by ballot each spring. Forty thousand plus applicants apply for the eight permits per day allocated to each river during the May-August season with the majority being for the month of July when flows are dropping.
17. The situation on the Grand Canyon is even more serious where the waiting list for private permits for the two launches per day allowed to private individuals as opposed to commercial rafts has grown to 17 years! So complex has the waiting system become that the Park Service has terminated the system with a view to bringing in a ballot once the present waiting list has resolved itself.
18. In Nepal the number of rafting companies rose from zero in 1976 to 140 immediately prior to the recent Maoist political activity.<sup>2</sup>
19. In 2002, 2003 and 2004 I was Director of Rigging for an Adventure Race in Borneo. Part of the job involved working alongside the local raft company, Riverbugs. They ran 30 rafts on the river and in 2004 had just finished a short term contract which involved 4000 Korean clients rafting.
20. In New Zealand, the commercial rafting industry has not yet grown to the size of the operations in the United States, or other parts of the world. However, in my view, there is potential for growth in the Buller Catchment for increased commercial activity, as well as private rafting trips. If this occurs, to be internationally competitive, it will be important to retain the values that make a successful rafting experience, which include scenic values and river flow. The Gowan currently has both scenic values and flows suitable for outstanding rafting.

### **VALUES OF THE GOWAN FOR RAFTING**

21. Raft trips are essentially journeys and the more dramatic the scenery that the trip encompasses the better. The launch point for the Gowan, the put-in, is on Lake Rotoroa, - one of the gems of the Nelson Lakes National Park with outstanding wild and scenic views.

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication with Dave Allardyce, owner of Ultimate Descents Rafting Company based in Nepal.

22. The lake enables a gentle introduction to rafting and safety procedures.
23. In New Zealand the great “Source to the Sea” journeys have already faded from living memory. It is no longer possible to navigate the Pukaki from Mt. Cook to the Pacific Ocean or the Clutha from Mt. Aspiring to the Pacific Ocean because of hydro electric power schemes, or the Wanganui from Mt. Ruapehu to the sea.
24. The journey down the Gowan river is a fast, exciting class two run which eventually leads to the confluence with the Buller River where it is possible to continue the journey for a day trip down the Gravity rapids or a three day trip to the Tasman Sea: from the source to the sea. The outstanding variety of changes in scenery exemplify all that is best in the New Zealand experience, high peaks, pastoral valleys, river gorges in almost pristine state and large tracts of west coast rain forest. The Gowan River in its natural state is an integral section of this journey.
25. Willow trees and fallen beech trees are a current hazard on the Gowan, but they are not a significant permanent hazard as removing fallen trees from the Buller and its tributaries is a common operational measure.

#### **Usage of the Gowan River**

26. Commercial usage of the Gowan was extremely popular in the 1980s and 1990s with raft companies based in Nelson, Blenheim and Motueka running the Lake Rotoiti to Owen River stretch, including the Gowan on an almost daily basis throughout the summer. There are currently no commercial trips operating on the Gowan that I am aware of.
27. However, I would expect that as has happened overseas, the rafting industry is likely to grow in the future in the Buller Region and in New Zealand and that the most recent usage of the Gowan is not necessarily a reliable indication of the likely use in the future.
28. It is also my opinion that when the New Zealand public becomes cognisant of private rafting as has happened in the United States, then it is very likely that all our major

river systems will become popular venues for multi-day rafting trips. However, these systems are few in number and such journeys could only be undertaken in the Buller Catchment from either Lake Rotoiti or Lake Rotoroa, the Clarence River, the upper Grey, the Ahaura and the Karamea in the South Island.

29. At present the number of private rafters is limited to people who have imported equipment from overseas and it is still not possible to walk into a rafting shop and walk out with a raft, a rowing frame and a pair of oars. Such shops abound in the USA providing rafting equipment both for hire and sale.

### **EFFECTS OF MAJAC'S PROPOSED HYDRO SCHEME**

#### **Effects on amenity values of rafting the Gowan**

30. Amending the flow regime of the WCO to accommodate the hydro-scheme will impact on the aesthetic values of the Gowan for rafting, which is an integral part of the whole rafting journey. The river will no longer be in its natural state as a result of Majac's proposed hydro-scheme. After the magnificent scenery of the Nelson Lakes National Park and before the mighty rapids of the Buller, rafters would witness a large concrete wall at the intake structure, intake screens, a tailrace structure, as well as likely glimpses of a head race canal, the penstock, powerhouse, and HT power lines, in an otherwise relatively unspoilt environment. The Gowan will no longer be a river in its natural state. Much of the aesthetic value of any river trip is the perception that somehow the river is as close as possible to its original pre-civilisation state and that a "timeless journey" can be undertaken.

#### **Effect of the telemetry system**

31. I have paddled on various man made canals over the years in England, East and West Germany and Australia and on scores of rivers that have are dam controlled. I have never seen or used a telemetry system. Whilst the telemetry system sounds feasible, it seems structured to facilitate present day rafting numbers and in no way is designed to accommodate multiple river trips as could occur in future years as has happened in the United States. If in the future Nelson grows to be a town, of, for the sake of argument, half a million people then hydro schemes such as this which promise rafting water availability 24 hours a day with access to the general public will hardly run at all. If the availability of the full flow of the Gowan was reduced from current availability for any

reason, then this is would be a significant impact on the ability to enjoy the Gowan for rafting and it is likely to prevent future use if the water flow is not always available.

### **CONCLUSION**

**32.** The Gowan is an outstanding waterbody for rafting, because of its wild and scenic values and constant rapid flow of water. The proposed hydro scheme would not maintain the values of the Gowan for rafting because:

- The rafting experience would be significantly degraded by the introduction of the intake structures.
- The proposed telemetry system has significant uncertainties in relation to reliability of flow if rafting increases, particularly as it has not been tested anywhere else in the world to my knowledge. It is likely to prevent any increase in usage of the Gowan for commercial or private rafting trips.

Mick Hopkinson  
25 October 2005