

**BEFORE THE SPECIAL TRIBUNAL ACTING UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY ON BEHALF OF  
THE MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**

**In the matter of**     The Resource Management Act 1991

**And**

**In the matter of**     An application for a Water Conservation Order on the Hurunui River  
pursuant to 199 of the Act

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**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF TOM COSTELLO ON BEHALF OF HURUNUI  
WATER PROJECT LIMITED**

**Dated: 23 March 2009**

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1. My name is Tom Costello. My wife and I farm a 400 ha property 10 km west of Hawarden. We currently have irrigation on 30 ha of the property with the rest being dry flat land. We produce lamb, wool, mutton and beef. We have farmed the property for 25 years and previous generations of our family have farmed in the area over the last 140 years.
2. We are opposed to a Conservation Order being put on the Hurunui River as this will remove the opportunity to further develop the Hurunui River for irrigation purposes.
3. We see the possibility of irrigation through the district as being extremely beneficial to the success of future generations. Without a doubt developing a large scale irrigation scheme will be a major burden on us and the owners of the surrounding properties who would bear the responsibility of funding the scheme. The reality is that initially the cost of being provided with water is likely to be greater than the total income we currently make off the land.

The last decade has been drier than previous ones. It has been more difficult to maintain production at expected levels. This could be the effect of climate change or a repeat of a pattern that happened in the late 60's to early 70's. When we have a drier year we are forced to stop producing finished stock and also have increased spending on feed supplements (approximately \$400 a day). What this achieves is in fact just a slower rate of decline. Not only is it costing to feed our stock but we are also faced with selling stock at lower weights. Therefore, to a farmer with a scenario which involves higher expenses and lower income, irrigation would seem the most logical way of improving the situation.

4. We are under increasing pressure to intensify our farming operation so that we are able to compete with those farming in areas that are not consistently under threat from drought. We need to produce a product that is of a consistent high grade and not having a reliable water source to ensure pasture growth makes this extremely difficult. In my opinion, to ensure future generations can continue to farm this land, having the ability to utilise the Hurunui River for irrigation purposes is highly important. If a water conservation order is placed on the Hurunui this will mean that no further water could be taken from the Hurunui for irrigation which, in my opinion, is short sighted and only serves the wants of a small group of people.
5. Our Community over the last 12 years has had 40% of its businesses shut down. Sports clubs are dwindling. The local rugby club has gone from 9 teams to 3 and the cricket club has folded recently. There is strong evidence to suggest that this is due to the absence of young families who would ordinarily be employed on farms and the lack of a strong economic base.

6. A 300 ha sheep and beef farm in our area will currently employ only the owner and have farm working expenses of under \$120K which filters mainly through the Canterbury community. By comparison an irrigated dairy farm of 300 ha would involve at least 3 families and have farm working expenses of \$1.5 million which would inevitably end up in the Canterbury community.
7. If we had the opportunity to irrigate, economic feasibility would dictate what we would do. If meat prices are competitive we would not need to convert to dairying. Having the ability to irrigate will simply give us more options.
8. We are not aware of any deterioration of the Hurunui River over the last 10 years. We use the river for our own recreation, regularly boating in the Hurunui gorge above Hawarden. Flows are linked to rainfall. The recent flow of 13 m<sup>3</sup>/s (a level where the river struggles) prior to rain in February was the natural flow, as at that flow all irrigation takes are off. I also understand that the water quality of the lower Hurunui has been improving recently as a result of better farm management techniques. Such techniques have also been discussed and will be implemented as part of the Hurunui Water Project. I therefore see no reason for a conservation order to be placed on the river to protect the recreational values of a minority group when the environmental values of the Hurunui are not declining and the livelihood of the farming community in the area is at stake.
9. I also cannot see why maintaining a flow of above 30 m<sup>3</sup>/s in the upper 37 km of the river, as proposed by the Hurunui Water Project, would not be beneficial to all users.
10. It is my belief that placing a water conservation order on the Hurunui River will have serious consequences for the future of the farming community in this area. I do not believe that protecting the recreational values of the river for a minority group should take priority over the livelihood of those in the farming community and those that receive the benefits that flow from the agricultural sector. In my opinion the Hurunui is in a healthy state and does not need any additional protection through the implementation of a conservation order.

T Costello