

Form 30
Submission on publicly notified application for water conservation order
or for revocation or amendment of water conservation order

Sections 205 and 216, Resource Management Act 1991

To Special Tribunal – Kawarau River Water Conservation Order

C/- Alex Miller, Ministry for the Environment

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Name of submitter: Chris Dore

This is a submission on an application from the New Zealand, and Otago Fish and Game Councils for an amendment of a water conservation order for the Kawarau river (awarded 1997) in respect of the Nevis River.

The application seeks the following amendments to the existing WCO on the Kawarau River as awarded in 1997, in respect to the Nevis River:

- 1 Adding a prohibition on both damming, and the diversion of the Nevis rivers waters
- 2 Deletion of clause 7 of the order

3 To include conditions on water takes, and irrigation allowances so as not to breach a minimum flow at two sections of the river (at Wentworth, and Nevis Crossing)

The specific parts of the application that my submission relates to are:

I wholeheartedly support every aspect of the proposed amendments to the present WCO as put forth by the New Zealand, and Otago Fish and Game councils.

My submission is:

I have long shared an intimacy with many rivers and streams of the South Island High Country, first and foremost as a passionate outdoors recreationalist, and secondly as a professional outdoors guide.

The South Island is internationally renowned for its wild and pristine valleys sporting sparkling, back country rivers, where tramping, fly fishing and kayaking, amongst other activities are enjoyed by a multitude of international participants.

Sadly, the number of untouched, undammed and unpolluted high country rivers are dwindling.

The Nevis provides many with an accessible high country arena, available to any with a suitable vehicle, and a sense for adventure. The first highlight of the Nevis adventure is the drive in. Whether from the Garston, or Bannockburn end, one is immediately aware of the elevation, thanks to the steep, long uphill climb. The views from either road are astounding, whether looking down upon the Pisa range and the upper Clutha valley, or back towards the Southland plains and mountainous peaks of Fiordland.

My favourite viewpoint is as the summit is peaked from the Bannockburn end, looking down into the stunning, and vast expanse of the Nevis Valley. Who knew such a jewel remains hidden from view, just behind the much-photographed Remarkables range, towering above the international resort of Queenstown. Golden tussock abounds, studded by intriguing rock formations, windswept and shaped by the weather of the passing centuries. Nowhere else in fact, have I seen such formations – like statues keeping guard over the valley floor.

After admiring the empowering hills surrounding the valley, one is drawn by a sliver of grey, as the river carves its way down through the valley floor, travelling unimpeded into the lower gorge, to meet the mighty Kawarau below.

One's first close up of the river is at the base of the road, at an area named the Nevis Crossing.

Grade 5 white water below the crossing provides for the adventurous kyakers who abound in nearby Wanaka and Queenstown, one of the only such waters in the area. Trophy sized trout await for the ardent angler (a rarity these days in New Zealand), and a challenging track running through a largely untouched, pristine high country valley draws 4wd and mountain biking enthusiasts from around the globe.

Personally, I have been fishing the Nevis River for only the past decade, and yet feel an intimate knowledge of not just this river, but also the valley surrounds.

Many of my friends have been enjoying this valley for a lot longer than I, but for both accuracy, and an informed first hand account I will speak now of my personal experiences.

I visit many rivers each year on both a recreational and professional basis, and so I know when a river sports outstanding values as a trout fishery. Because of this, I would say I visit the Nevis valley maybe a dozen times each year as a minimum.

In the Nevis, aesthetic qualities abound, and not just within the stability of the streambed, and remarkable clarity of its waters, but in the nature of the valley itself.

On the lower flats, historical remains of the gold mining days lay scattered across the valley floor, the most complete to be found in the Otago region. Such remains are reminders of the days when 500 odd people inhabited this stark, desolate landscape in the quest for riches, and a better life. Each and every item shares a tale I bet, and are great conversation starters when stumbled upon.

In the Nevis one gets a true feeling of isolation, even when within a close proximity of the car. The wide open nature of the valley seems to absorb many of the sounds created by other users of this resource, and a rolling expanse of golden tussock grasses, climbing to high, mountainous peaks really set this place off visually. The Nevis is a truly awe-inspiring valley, with the river cutting a meandering swathe right through the centre.

Now to the river itself.

The Nevis River is an important playground for anglers, kyakers, recreational gold fossickers and families endeavouring to get away from it all. Its stable gravel bottom, particularly in the area above the crossing provides many slow, refreshing pools in which children swim, boat and play, under the watchful eye of a parent of course. Cut banks provide shelter for a number of trout and other fish species, including eels, brook trout, and a rare, native bully isolated in habitat to the Nevis River alone.

After fishing many waters throughout NZ I must say the Nevis is first class.

Its golden gravel streambed and cool, gin-clear waters meandering through rocky gorges and undercut, tussock banks provide optimal habitat for a number of truly large trout. There are not many places in the South Island anymore where one can visit with a realistic hope of finding brown trout in excess of the much revered, 10 lb mark, but the Nevis is one of them. The others sadly, no longer share the wealth of scenery the Nevis provides, or are currently in decline due to the after effects of irrigation, residential development, pollution or damming.

I have personally witnessed, and captured over a dozen true ‘trophy’ fish from this river, each returned unharmed, with some individual and readily identifiable specimen caught twice, or even thrice. One never finds a large number of trout in this river, but they are there, and the thrill for many here is in the chase.

I believe the abundance of large fish in this river is a result of the abundance of prime spawning gravels in the low gradient riverbed immediately upstream of Nevis Crossing. The gorge provides shelter and cover for these trophy sized trout, whilst the stable flows and abundance of fine, clean spawning gravels upstream provide optimal habitat to promote spawning, and safety from the elements to juvenile trout. To dam the Nevis risks preventing access to these valuable spawning waters, and as the river itself receives little recruitment from the Kawarau below, over time this will decimate fish stocks.

Regardless of the action, or success of the day, the natural beauty of this river, and its undeveloped surrounds make for a top day. We need to preserve the aesthetic values of this valley, and this includes an unmodified, wild river flowing through the tussock lined, valley floor. We already have enough lakes – it’s our high country rivers that are in danger.

We need to preserve the wild and scenic values of the Nevis Valley. This includes the untamed flow of one of the South Islands remaining untouched high country rivers. We need to officially recognise the Nevis rivers outstanding values, as a backcountry fishery, as a high country valley, and as a place of historical significance. You cannot reverse the effects of development, only reminisce over what once was...

Do we really *need* another Lake Dunstan – *right next* to Lake Dunstan?

I seek the following decision from the special tribunal:

I would like the Tribunal to recognise the outstanding values of the Nevis River, as identified by Fish and Game in the above application.

I would like to see a prohibition on the damming and diversion of the Nevis’ flows, and the addition of minimum flow conditions to protect the Nevis River.

I wish to be heard in support of my submission if my work schedule allows.

Chris Dore

12 September 2008

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Note to submitter

You must serve a copy of your submission on the applicant as soon as reasonably practicable after you have served your submission on the special tribunal.

The special tribunal may require you to provide further information on your submission.