

**BEFORE THE MINISTER FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT SPECIAL TRIBUNAL**

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Mangement Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER of an application to amend the Water Conservation (Kawarau River) Order 1997 under section 216 of the Act

**EVIDENCE OF KEITH JOHN RILEY ON BEHALF OF THE NEW ZEALAND
RECREATIONAL CANOEING ASSOCIATION
Dated this 6th day of May 2009**

Statement of experience

1. My evidence concentrates specifically on the recreational value of the NevisRiver and its unique nature and place among New Zealand white water. In preparing this as an expert witness I attest that I have read the expert witness code of conduct (Section 5; Consolidated Practice Code 2006) and agree to abide by the code for the purposes of this matter.
2. My name is Keith John Riley. I have been kayaking white water both here and overseas for 18 years. I have completed around 16 descents of the Nevis River, as well as pioneering numerous first descents of some of New Zealand's hardest whitewater. I hold the NZOIA Kayak II Award and have been working as a professional kayak instructor for 13 years. I am currently employed as an Outdoor Recreation Tutor at Tai Poutini Polytechnic, where I teach the Kayak, Mountain, Rock and Tramp programmes. My experience in the adventure world also extends to mountaineering and rock climbing, having been involved in numerous expeditions to remote and challenging locations both in New Zealand and overseas.

Scope of Evidence

3. My evidence will address:
 - a. The character and status of the Nevis River for kayaking
 - b. How the Nevis River compares with other NZ rivers.
 - c. How the introduction of a hydro scheme and recreational releases would affect the kayaking values.

Character and status of the Nevis River for kayaking

4. I understand that the Kowarau WCO currently recognises that the Nevis River has "outstanding" kayaking. My understanding of what "outstanding" means in this context, according to the instructions I received from Ms Baker, Counsel for Fish and Game, is that something is found to be "outstanding" if stands out on a national basis, after having been subjected to a rigorous, comparative analysis.
5. New Zealand is regarded internationally as a 'mecca' for Whitewater Kayaking. NZ's status as one of the top international kayaking destinations is predominantly a function of the quality and quantity of our challenging whitewater runs. The West Coast has the Kokatahi and the Waitaha rivers. Queenstown has the Nevis River. These rivers are revered by kayakers, they are the Mt Everests/Mt Cooks of New Zealand Whitewater.
6. The Nevis River is regarded as a test piece. A classic, stretch of difficult whitewater that will test the skills, endurance, judgement and teamwork of any kayaking party.
7. The Nevis consists of several kilometres of Class 4 rapids, interspersed with numerous Class 5 rapids. Portaging around these Class 5 rapids, although time consuming and hard work, does enable a more cautious kayaker to partake in the Nevis River experience.
8. To successfully descend a river such as the Nevis, a kayak team will need not only the technical skills to run the rapids, but also to be proficient at river rescue, boat and bank scouting, and should things go not according to plan, first aid, kayak recovery, and wilderness survival skills. They need to choose appropriate river flows and weather forecasts for their descent.

Comparison of the Nevis River with other NZ rivers

9. The Nevis River is unique in New Zealand for several reasons.
10. One is its setting in the radical landscape of barren brown and red tussock, mountainous rock escarpments, dry winds and scorching sun. As well as offering a different back drop from the hard West Coast runs, this creates a unique 'log-free' run. On most rivers, trees are one of the most serious hazards a kayaker will encounter, log jams and tree strainers have been responsible for many river related fatalities. The lack of trees within the Nevis Valley ensures safer and more predictable rapids, this in effect, creates the only New Zealand whitewater test piece than can be run with little fear of unexpected or changed rapids due to trees.
11. The second is its run-ability. Although every rapid on the Nevis River has been successfully paddled, it has not yet seen a complete portage-free descent. Many expert kayakers are striving to meet this challenge, testing the waters at varying flows, learning the intricacies of every rapid, memorising the lines and honing their skills. The development of kayaking as a sport will ensure that this challenge is soon met. All other 'test pieces' in New Zealand contain rapids that are simply not paddle-able. Irrespective of how skilled future kayakers get, these rivers will not see a complete descent.

Effect of potential hydro scheme and recreational releases

12. To descend the Nevis River is to travel through a truly remote and undisturbed wilderness. Nevis Crossing to the Nevis Bungy is an area that seems outside the far reaching developing hand of man. I have always felt privileged to enter this region that feels completely void of human impact. Adventurers the world over hold these areas in the highest regard, any hydro developments within the Nevis Valley would seriously undermine the pristine and untouched wilderness experience we value so highly on a national and international scale.
13. One of the joys of free flowing rivers is flow variation. The same river can offer a multitude of different white water challenges depending on flow. Some rapids become harder, some easier, some change completely. Controlled releases would remove the adventurous element offered by varying flows.
14. Difficult whitewater like the Nevis is commonly paddled by small teams of 4 to 6 members who know each other well and have a common understanding of river

running and river safety. Controlled releases will create a small window in which the Nevis can be paddled. This will concentrate large numbers of kayakers, not only detracting significantly from the wilderness experience, but creating potential safety issues with teams crowded on the river, and perhaps choosing to run the river more because it's flowing than the fact that they are ready for the run.

Conclusion

15. The Nevis River is unique in its setting and character. The quality of the whitewater is outstanding. An unmodified Nevis River Valley is of national and international significance and is valued by kayakers around the world.
16. Expert kayakers are the only group who regularly travel through the Nevis Valley below the Nevis crossing. We are a minority trying to protect an area few people know even exist. We are more familiar with this area than any other group, there is no other valley like the Nevis River. The experience we have in the Nevis would be significantly changed if a dam and hydro scheme was allowed.