

Consultation Document - Next Steps for Fresh Water

I have read the report with interest. It seems to be technically and process oriented. I have no vested interest in water issues other than a concern for the quality and protection of our fresh water. As a layperson in this respect I do not have any comments on the specific issues or questions identified in the report but would like to comment on some principles relating to freshwater, as follows:

1. Water is essential for life and must be regarded as a public good. It cannot be owned by any person or private interest group and requires careful governance, allocation and regulation by elected government to ensure its fair availability to all, and to ensure management and quality on behalf of the public interest.

As an increasingly globally scarce resource NZ must expect increasing international demand for and pressure on its fresh water. Accordingly its conservation and allocation must be carefully managed and attempts by private or foreign interests to control water resources resisted.

2. On the issue of iwi involvement in decisions on freshwater management; while this might be provided for, this should not be to the detriment of the broader democratic process or limit the rights and interests of others in this decision making. Similarly on the issue of cultural connections to water bodies these could also extend to other groups or communities and should therefore be provided for as well.

3. As the Report identifies in New Zealand the environment is the economy. It notes our special reliance on freshwater for many recreational, agricultural and horticultural activities and have actively promoted our " clean green" image for tourism and primary production. To say that our rivers and lakes need only be of wadeable quality is a complete abdication and contradiction of basic water quality standards and the public interest. (The Report mentions our world renown in sports such as kayaking, canoeing, fishing, etc, well, you wouldn't want any crews to fall out into the water). A suitable standard might be to say that rivers and lakes should be of swimmable quality 90 - 95% of the time to allow for the impacts of flood events and other emergency situations.

4. It is clear that intensive dairying is a major source of pollution. Perhaps it is time for the dairy industry to adopt a low intensity (in use of water, supplements and fertilisers) approach that reduces pollution and that can contribute to maintaining our " clean green" image. It is also very likely that the dairy products of a demonstrably low intensity, sustainable and environmentally friendly industry could attract a premium price in the more discerning markets; rather than aspire to a high volume approach there should be a focus on specialist markets.

Another question to consider is what quality of water do dairy farmers and other uses require for their activity and simply specify that any runoff or effluent resulting from that activity be of the same quality it was received as. Costs of pollution and remediation should be internalised.

4. With the impacts of climate change and the increasing likelihood of more prolonged droughts, any water storage proposals will have to be designed to provide for reserve storage and security of supply for long term shortage events, rather than for even more irrigation, which would become even more marginal and vulnerable in extended periods of drought.

A. J. Bevin

