Introduction to the farming family and the property

1. I am and we farm in partnership – with and our son . We have owned and operated our ha hill and high country coastal sheep and beef property on Banks Peninsula since April 1988. Two smaller neighbouring properties being purchased to improve the viability of the operation several years later.

2. is situated 85kms from Christchurch in a small inlet to the left of , in Holmes Bay. The property off the Holmes Bay, Port Levy Road is 4kms on shingle road from the beach area of Pigeon Bay.
3. The property occupies much of the lower Holmes Bay catchment and rises from near the shore to the rugged skyline, the highest point being 621m above sea level.

4. Lower slopes are relatively gentle, the land steepening with altitude and culminating in a series of high rock escarpments, steep rocky outcrops and rounded ridges. At the top it straddles the long ridge crest running between Pigeon Bay and Port Levy.

5. Drainage is via a system of narrow gullies and intermittent streams running down the channelled slopes. Many of these gullies have significant indigenous vegetation ‘clothing the sides’. These areas provide ecological corridors and buffer areas. They also provide corridors to many of the significant ecological sites on the property. Our stock watering system is almost totally provided by a gravity feed pipe and trough system in each paddock. Water is also stored in water tanks and lined ponds.

**Brief Farm statistics**

6. [Redacted] has [Redacted] stock units – a sheep and beef property with three distinct areas of land:

- [Redacted] ha of rolling downs which are subdivided into [Redacted] paddocks - all have been cultivated and are in high performing grasses or in forage crops.
- [Redacted] ha of steep grassland in [Redacted] paddocks that are aerial top dressed regularly according to the right conditions including soil testing right climatic conditions.
- [Redacted] ha of tussock grassland located in the Wild Cattle Hill area.

**Early clearance of indigenous vegetation on [Redacted]**

7. [Redacted] was once covered with significant indigenous vegetation from side to side. The lowest point of cover was the 1920’s and despite forest clearance for farming, logging to build the City of Christchurch and the Lyttelton railway tunnel and the devastating past history of extensive fires recorded in [Redacted], the property today is now characterized by second growth indigenous vegetation, giving it strong natural character. The native vegetation includes
regenerating forest, tree land, scrub, open shrub land and silver tussock grassland.

**Ecological assessment of**

8. In November 2008 we had a survey of our property - Significant Ecological Assessment of ‘Balarres’. We had ecologists carrying out an ecological assessment on our property - sites of significant indigenous vegetation have been identified. These are the best sites and vary in size from ha to ha.

9. The ecologists said that ‘under current farm management, the natural values of the property are holding their own or improving in condition’. In the long term they say ‘tree lands, gullies and bush patches routinely used by stock may not be able to healthily persist without some protection- therefore some fencing will probably be required or spelling of areas from grazing to allow bursts of regeneration, to ensure the trees and bush patches persist well into the future’.

**Conservation Trust Covenant**

- The Conservation Trust was established in 2001 and works with landowners to legally protect important biodiversity and landscape values in perpetuity. It requires landowners to manage land for conservation purposes through the covenanting process. Establishment of a covenant includes fencing the area, ecological survey and undertaking the legal requirements to register the covenant on the land title. Landowners retain full ownership of their covenant and manage it with advice from the Trust provided through an ecological management plan developed for each covenant.

11. We have an area of ha that has been fenced stock excluded and formally protected with a Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust covenant. This covenant is within one of the larger significant ecological sites assessed by the ecologists. Some smaller areas have also been fenced with some of these areas having their own natural barrier that’s why they continue to thrive.

**Maintaining patches versus whole property**

12. Our shrub land appears to be thickening up into scrub in places that will provide opportunities for natural tree establishment over time. The ecologists have noted that ‘maintaining a network of areas of native vegetation throughout the property and linkages between them, will probably maintain the natural character, flora and fauna
more effectively than amalgamating conservation effort around a few particular sites’.

Essential – indigenous vegetation we can’t do with out

13. We have indigenous biodiversity in our agricultural landscape and we aim to sustain those native plants and animals.

14. Our biodiversity is essential it is not something we can do without or an optional extra – it is vital for the health our property 

the Canterbury New Zealand and indeed the planet.

15. Native birds are common - bellbird, kereru, riroriro, brown creeper (pipipi), fantail, silvereye, kingfisher, harrier, pipit, paradise Shelduck, pukeko and welcome swallow. Rifleman has also been found.

16. The insect life is rich and varied. We can look out the window and watch the red admiral butterfly in the garden, see a kingfisher swoop for a cicada, lift the compost and observe the wriggling life, watch geckos in the washing basket in the garage, skinks scuttle across the outside table or look at the clay bank and watch the insects at work etc. We can walk through the paddocks and watch a cloud of moths and butterflies take off.

17. The birds use the whole property in fact the catchment as their flight path – if you have a garden [the farm] for all seasons you can expect to have an amazing variety of birds and insects.

Our greatest threat weed and pest invasion

18. Weed and pest invasion is our greatest threat. Weeds of ecological concern are relatively few. Wilding pines maybe a threat to the step rocky habitats, but could easily be eliminated. Elderberry is wide spread in low numbers but has the potential to proliferate. More potentially threatening are the buddleia, sycamore, cotoneaster and grey willow all present in our valley particularly along stream edges and others such as old man’s beard, banana passionfruit vine, Chilean flame creeper and Darwin’s barberry constantly under watch. Garden escapees are a major threat and maintaining vigilance and nipping infestations in the bud will ensure these do not become serious problems.

19. Thirty years ago we removed odd feral goats and today we continue to be feral goats. A number of other animal pests
are managed at low levels on the property thanks to community based eradication programmes. has a possum eradication programme and a rabbit control programme funded by rural ratepayers and some general funding from Environment Canterbury.

20. The Possum programme a Community Initiated Programme has built on previous successful programmes for the eradication of Tb in possums. As a result possum numbers are at lower levels today. We also carry out targeted trapping for possums in the year we are part of the operation and of course ‘our family is good with a gun’. Any extra pest control would benefit the native flora and fauna.

Improving our knowledge - right plant right place to farm

21. Productive pastoral farming is integrated with conservation of natural values, sheep and cattle getting the benefit of the shelter but being stocked under a regime that allows retention of the native trees, shrubs and tussocks.

22. We are keenly interested in and knowledgeable about the natural features of our property, and farm with that in mind. We are proud of our conservation achievements to date and are keen to do more, as well as being willing to set an example.

23. The knowledge and information that we have gained has come about by being involved and working with our local conservation group the Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust, the Banks Peninsula Pest Liaison Committee, ecologists, existing documented natural history knowledge of the property and so on.

24. We have been involved in the many planning processes since 1997 with the Banks Peninsula District Plan, the Christchurch City Plan and just recently the Christchurch City Council Replacement District Plan. We have been involved in Task Force mediation and the Environment Court. The ground continually changes we will stand tall and continue to be involved.

25. It is this personal involvement and interaction with our farming community and those with a common vision and an understanding of the issues that allows us to consider how we manage our property. Personal relationships are vital.

The Draft Natural Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity
26. The Draft National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity threatens our ability to continue to farm the property. **We believe** that if we are required to - fence and exclude stock from our areas of indigenous vegetation will affect the viability of our property.

27. Yes we can manage production and conservation to ensure that the **extent of indigenous vegetation continues to grow and improve and we can fence further areas as funding becomes available and when the boundaries allow for easy access and fencing.**

**A way forward and what we want**

28. As the owners of our property we want to continue contributing to a very healthy environment for ourselves the catchment the wider community and the planet.

29. We want to be able to implement new land uses - to use new technology to adapt to climate change and reduce our carbon footprint within our property. Perhaps it may be as simple as retiring land and using the natural regeneration process, replacing forestry following harvesting with indigenous vegetation planting corridors of indigenous vegetation.

30. We want to be able to continue to renew pasture and plant crops to reduce methane emissions - moving with new ideas. Planting crops that are more palatable also assists with conservation in that stock put less pressure on significant indigenous vegetation. There are also examples of native grasses because they are of poorer quality create a natural barrier.

31. We want to see greater acknowledgement of what we contribute to the environmental health of our special place Banks Peninsula - the flora and fauna the economy and for the benefit all New Zealanders.

32. We require councils to secure staff with the right skills and the right attitude to work with us at a farm level to achieve the best outcome for the protection of our indigenous biodiversity.

33. Agencies and organizations need to be working with us in catchments and regions to ensure that we have integrated programmes for a range of issues e.g. providing connecting corridors across boundaries, weed and pest control including new weeds, water storage dams for stock water, ways of preventing fires and extinguishing fires.
34. We need to see opportunities to discuss and understand the issues in a non-confrontational environment with agencies and organizations and the community. The Conservation Trust along with its covenancing ability has played a major role in providing a platform for us to discuss and explore options.

35. We want to understand what the National Policy Statement rules around protection of indigenous biodiversity really mean. Is the protection today just to identify but tomorrow a rule to exclude stock. It is not practical or realistic to have all stock excluded from indigenous vegetation.

36. We need to be a part of any processes in the next step in the identification of sites. We need our significant sites to be identified to go through a rigorous process and agreed to by landowners, what it means to have them identified - that it does not allow automatic access by anyone and everyone. That permission to enter needs to be agreed to.

37. In the CCC Replacement District Plan only just adopted we have 2 sites listed with no requirement at this stage to exclude all stock. Combining these 2 sites as identified to exclude stock would mean ___ ha of the total property ___ ha with a fence ___ kms long. The areas identified are the higher rugged land area and run along the skyline and on the lower boundary by a county road.

38. Our whole farm would need to be re-fenced, new tracks and laneways developed, present piped and troughed stock water systems shifted and new yards built. Even the woolshed may need to be relocated. The cost is well over ____. The fencing job is challenging and difficult because of the terrain and today it is even difficult to find fencers capable of doing the job.

39. We need to be treated fairly and know that we are going to get support to enhance and manage the special areas.

40. We want to see considerable increased funding allocated for the management and enhancement of indigenous biodiversity from the whole community including the government, local and regional government big business and so on.

41. We want to be part of the decision making processes including involved with research and science programmes and projects, weed and pest programmes, district planning and catchment planning and monitoring programmes.
is a unique environment and it is its people, the understanding they have of the issues and the ability to work together for the ‘benefit of all us’.

The success is people to drive and lead the programmes and projects. We all enjoy what we are doing and will celebrate our successes.

‘Alone we can do so little together we can do so much’

Helen Keller

The open landscape is typical of our property. The Significant Ecological site runs along the rocky outcrops.