The Hurunui District Landcare Group (HDLG) was established as an incorporated society in September 2016. With a membership of 140, predominantly unirrigated (dryland) farmers, and a committee of 15 farmer members, the group now represents 110,000ha of farmland in the Hurunui District (Approx. 20% of the farmed area in the Hurunui).

In addition, HDLG is the umbrella organisation for Cheviot Irrigators Group, though the two have separate governance groups and maintain their independence. The purpose of integrating the groups is to share resources and is recognisable of the fact that most CIG members are predominantly dryland farmers with a supplementary irrigation component.

For the past few years the purpose and focus of the HDLG has been to:

- Facilitating and promoting “good management practice” on farms, and
- Providing a voice for dryland farmers in the Hurunui District

The HDLG has successfully done this through:

- Facilitating the development of Farm Environmental Plans (FEP) for our members farms (in conjunction with Beef + Lamb NZ). Over 80% of our members now have an FEP.
- Reviewed 1/3rd of our members FEPs to ensure they are quality plans that will deliver improved outcomes for the environment. This is an ongoing program.
- Completed a detailed survey of all our members that has provided HDLG with an understanding of what our farmers are doing and the challenges they face.
- Provided a template for other catchment groups around the country to emulate; Sharing our learnings and experience.
- Worked with Environment Canterbury and the HWZC to improve understanding of dryland sheep and beef farms.

In addition, over the last few months Josh Brown from HDLG has been providing farm specific information around the Governments One Billion Tree scheme and Environment Canterbury’s SCAR program. This is with the intent of helping our members access funding that is available and to implement environmental enhancement projects on-the-ground.

Following on from these successes, HDLG recently ran several woolshed meetings with our members to get feedback on our future direction. At these meetings, our members expressed a need for support to help them face the numerous social, environmental and policy changes ahead. Our members also requested more information and support around carbon/ETS/GHG information and what that might mean for their businesses.

That feedback has prompted HDLG to change tack, widening our outlook but focusing our purpose. The HDLG now aims to:

*Empower our farmers, and wider community to address the change they are confronted with in order to build a resilient rural community.*
Part of this shift reflects that while we have been very focused on water quality over the last few years, the conversation has broadened to include:

- Climate Change/GHG/Carbon
- Changing social licence
- Farm succession
- Mental wellbeing

Our members are now looking for support in a wide range of areas that are often interconnected.

It is from this feedback and with our new purpose in mind that we have developed a project proposal to better serve our members and the wider rural community. This project is summarised on the following pages.

This project proposal is currently with MPI as we are applying to their new Extension Services Fund. It is still very much a working document and we will be meeting with MPI mid next week to further discuss detail and answer their questions.

**We invite the Hurunui Waiau Zone Committee to provide feedback on our proposal and ask it to consider providing a letter of support for the proposed project.**

With the support of the HDLG committee we are putting together the funding application. This document highlights the key points raised in the application.

We are optimistic that we will be successful with our application and propose to have the project started by the end of the year. The HDLG welcome feedback on this proposal.
The project – Resilient Rural Communities

Goals
The project at its simplest aims to empower our farmers, and wider community to address the change they are confronted with in order to build a resilient rural community.

Expanded, the goals of the project are to:

- Provide farmers with a solid base from where they can make sound decisions
- Have a trusted person that farmers can turn to who provides sound advice to help them pick their way through the challenges they face. Having this person outside of a regulatory organisation is key, as it provides the best platform for farmers to be open and honest without fear of regulatory backlash. This also allows access to farms that would not engage with regulators but still need help to make changes.
- Support sub-catchment, farmer-led groups to address their local issues and opportunities.
- Develop a “farm plan” that incorporates the wide range of issues/opportunities farmers are facing. This farm plan would also, where possible, align and consolidate the numerous reports/documents farmers are required by supply companies and regulators to have.
- Become a central and secure point for data collection and consolidation. This would allow farmers to retain ownership of their data, protecting their privacy, whilst allowing for it to be utilised in an aggregated fashion. Potentially providing access to data that external organisations would otherwise struggle to gather. There is value to both the farmers and external organisations in doing this.
- Leveraging the collective of farmers, collaborate with industry and research organisations to deliver value to our members and wider rural communities.
- Facilitate access to funding for farmers to undertake environmental enhancement projects. This can happen at both the individual farm scale and with a wider collective of farmers.

Delivery
The proposed Resilient Rural Communities project is split into three key delivery streams. These are:

- Resilience building / Extension
- Data hub
- Facilitating funding access / On-the-ground environmental enhancement projects

Resilience building / Extension
Resilient rural communities will be built through the project by preparing farmers for change. This support will predominantly be provided by a Land Management Advisor (LMA). The LMA is central to the project and reflects the feedback we received in our woolshed meetings. Our members are asking us for a trusted face that can answer their questions and help them address the challenges they are currently, and in future going to face.

The advantage of the LMA being employed by HDLG / the Resilient Rural Communities project is that they do not have any regulatory affiliation or function. This enables a level of trust to be built with the community that would otherwise be unachievable.

The LMA would work with farmers and industry to develop a tailored “farm plan” that has three key components:
1. An inventory of current land assets (LUC or similar)
2. Outline of current regulatory requirements, and a wider stock take of the farmers current position.
3. A plan for moving forward.

These farm plans would incorporate our members current Farm Environment Plans where possible but would go further and provide a far more comprehensive planning process for the future, supported by a better stock take of current land assets. These plans would align with supply companies and regional council expectations in order to condense the number of reports farmers need.

Farmers would be encouraged to share these plans in their local farm discussion groups, which with the help of external experts would extract further solutions and opportunities.

Data hub
HDLG has over the past two years recognised and utilised the power of the catchment group to collect and then utilise data. The key advantages of a catchment group doing this is:

- Farmers retain ownership and control of their data
- Access to a large number of farms

The Resilient Rural Communities project would build on this. This would be done through two mechanisms:

1. Partnering with commercial and/or research organisations. An example could be collaborating with Farm IQ to deliver their system across all member farms.
2. Maintaining an internal GIS database. HDLG currently has a robust GIS database, collecting and aggregating information from its members. This has proven to be an asset over the last two years and could be expanded. Aggregated information can be released to external organisations to build knowledge and further research.

Facilitating funding access / On-the-ground environmental enhancement projects
Facilitating access to funding can be split into two parts:

1. The “farm plans” in addition to be a planning document will also provide an access point to numerous funds. An example is the LUC component of the “farm plan” which could be the basis for a One Billion Trees application.
2. Collaborative sub-catchment projects can be pulled together under the umbrella of the larger Resilient Rural Communities project, leveraging already available resources, creating efficiencies for both internal and external organisations.

HDLG already dabbles in this space and would expand this program under the project.

A metric of success - Life beyond MPI funding
The intention of the Resilient Rural Communities project is for it to survive beyond the life of MPI funding with its members paying the cost, having seen what it can deliver. This implies two additional aims for the project:

1. It delivers a program that farmers value
2. It can do the above at a reasonable cost.
**Next Steps**

This document is intended as a starting point for discussion. Further breakdown of costings and milestone details can be developed once the higher-level detail has been agreed upon.

Time frames are still vague but if successful with funding we hope to have the project at least started by the end of the year.

HDLG welcomes feedback on this proposal.