



## **Chairman's Report**

### **Annual General Meeting – October 13 2008**

I welcome you all to the 2008 annual general meeting.

2008 has been an important year for Irrigation New Zealand.

- This important year will be show-cased over the next two days as Irrigation New Zealand proudly brings you the biggest irrigation event in this country.

Our Conference and Expo will showcase the best technology, present to you the latest in irrigation practice and policy and give you the opportunity to meet fellow irrigators and key people in the industry.

Significant growth of water allocation and continued increasing demand for water continues to place New Zealand's water resources under increasing pressure.

Water quality and quantity prompt ongoing vigorous debate on the science and management of water resources and management of the land.

Irrigation New Zealand continues to gain momentum as the nation's unified voice on irrigated issues, as a national body contributing a positive influence with significant impact on water related issues for all irrigated agriculture in New Zealand.

- One of the bigger challenges Irrigation New Zealand faced this year was to develop the resources to cope with the ever increasing workload of our organisation.

This was not a new problem but this year we were forced to address this issue in order to manage our increasing growth and importance in the industry.

I am pleased to report that in May we appointed Christine Coughlan to the new position as Business Manager.

Chris will assist in the team with improving our links with current members and helping to increase the involvement and support of the wider industry in INZ work.

- The board has undertaken a review of the INZ annual strategic plan adopted in early 2007 and has adopted a refreshed version to take us through to the end of 2009.

The review showed a very satisfactory set of achievements in each of the areas that we targeted.

We have maintained our position of engagement with central and local government in the development and implementation of water policy.

The technical issues, Codes of Practice, WQN9, audited self management and establishment of a good practice technical group within INZ have all been either completed or met targets.

We were short on resources to adequately address our targets of improving contacts with our membership and to hit new membership targets.

I am confident that with the appointment of our business manager we will see good progress in both these areas going forward.

The 2008/2009 plan is ambitious.

Essentially we have approached our business in clearly identified areas - leadership and advocacy, technical developments, communication with members, increasing membership and corporate revenue growth and liaison with other industry related groups. Work has been prioritised on the basis of what benefits we can develop for members and how we can best mitigate negative effects of policy changes.

We are clear that the challenges ahead call for more resources to be made available both within the INZ operations financed by members' funds and for projects to develop the technical tools by undertaking projects with outside funding and often in partnership with others.

- In May several INZ board members joined with a strong contingent of irrigation farmer members to visit Australia.

The main focus of the visit was to attend the Irrigation Australia conference, have discussions with Irrigation Australia and the Victorian Government about sharing resources and materials in the education and training areas, and to explore benefits of a more formal trans-Tasman arrangement.

This Australian visit brought home how blessed we are with water resources.

- The Canterbury Strategic Water Study has moved into stage four and is in the process of working with the wider community in extensive stakeholder engagement.

INZ is now active on the steering group for this management strategy with Peter Scott and I appointed as new members to the management committee in August.

This management steering group with its wide irrigation, recreation, environment and community representation plays a vital role in working with, and advising the Mayoral Forum set up to establish strategy for planning future water management in Canterbury.

- An ongoing challenge for INZ is deciding whether or not to respond to the types of media coverage given to the often extraordinary and misinformed claims of anti irrigation development interests

The position of our Board is to not join the “screamers” in the media bun fight but to make our position known from the platform of fact and reasoned argument in the circles where important decisions are made.

We have been successful in this approach as evidenced by the influence INZ has had on the development of water policy at the central and local government levels.

We also take the opportunity to speak in a balanced way at many conferences and forums where the general public is represented.

- We now have the proposed National Policy Statement on Freshwater Quantity and Quality (NPS). However I am disappointed to report that it sets some pretty hard targets and the long-awaited leadership expected from the NPS has not come to pass.

There doesn't appear too much that can be done now other than to convince the Board of Enquiry that it needs a new approach.

The Board of Enquiry has been appointed and now takes over from MFE.

There looks to be regulatory pressure coming to make irrigators save water that will be returned to the freshwater resource. There's not a lot about how, and at what cost, but I am expecting it will all become clear as we move into the Board of Enquiry process.

- Submissions have closed on the National Environmental Standard on Ecological Flows and Levels (NES) and there's significant concern over the interim flow limits being proposed to be applied across the country where such limits have not been set by other means.

Of concern is that the limits clearly do not address differences in stream hydrology and as they stand, would preclude water harvesting in many situations.

INZ believes a better approach would be to give a National Direction under the NPS to all regional councils requiring them to develop ecological flow limits for their regions. A top down “one size fits all” developed in Wellington has opposition. The trouble with a NES is that there is no appeal – officials receive and consider submissions and make recommendations direct to Government.

- INZ is pleased with the more engaging approach being shown in the consent reviews in the Rakaia-Selwyn area.

INZ is also encouraged that Environment Canterbury moves to arrange bulk tenders for water meters and data loggers look promising.

The cluster group approach seems to have encouraged more irrigators to become engaged and we are now seeing larger numbers turning out for meetings.

- We are however disappointed with the delays and reluctance of ECan to accept that there are major problems in the way annual allocation limits are estimated in what we regard as inappropriate methodology (WQN9).

Last month INZ arranged an informal closed meeting with ECan management and 29 scheme and individual irrigator representatives.

A number of views were freely expressed with all discussion based on Canterbury's water future.

It is expected a report from this meeting will be released in due course.

- On the technical front INZ is alerting regional councils, commercial firms and irrigators to the benefits of making use of the INZ Codes of Practice for irrigation design and assessments of existing system performance.

We have sought support for additional technical codes of practice for installation and operation of irrigation systems.

INZ is in discussion with government agencies and farming organisations about a line of work that will hopefully satisfy regulators and be sensible and workable on farm.

This is ongoing.

- INZ is proud to be in the position this year to award the Ron Cocks Memorial Trophy.

This award will recognise outstanding individual contribution to the irrigation industry. There will be more on this award at the conference dinner tomorrow evening, at which the inaugural recipient will be announced.

- I would like to thank our members for their continuing support. Our membership continues to grow and I am confident that this will be the case in the future.

These past three years have been truly remarkable.

This time has shown the ability of the irrigation sector to get its own organisation up and running and shown how effective a unified voice can be in adding value to its members.

I acknowledge the support given to INZ work by the MAF Sustainable Farming Fund, MfE Sustainable Management Fund and many regional councils throughout New Zealand.

I take this opportunity to thank our chief executive Terry, and staff – Pat, Chris and Annette - and the board, for their untiring input and support.

I also acknowledge the valuable contribution of Dave Attewell who as a board member has contributed significantly to the irrigation industry.

Dave is stepping down from the board at this annual election process.

- The challenges relating to important water issues ahead will be no less but I have every confidence INZ has the recognition, knowledge, experience and support to meet all challenges with increasing confidence as a unified national body successfully representing irrigation interests and promoting excellence in irrigation development and efficient water management right throughout New Zealand.

This will be another important year for irrigated agriculture and INZ needs your continued support to have our voice heard strongly.

I urge your non-member neighbours to join up Now! And look forward to meeting you all over the next couple of days at the conference and expo....

*Graeme Sutton*