

# Lifestyle block owners focus on good management

By Gina McKenzie.

Lifestyle block owners in Waimakariri have discovered the benefits of good land management during a three-week pilot project run by the Waimakariri Water Zone Committee.

There are more than 4500 lifestyle blocks in Waimakariri, and while they are not significant contributors to water quality issues in the area, collectively they do have an impact on the environment.

Pilot project leader and Waimakariri Water Zone Committee Chair, says lifestyle block owners were invited to workshops which

covered topics such as animal welfare, riparian planting, waterways, pasture growth, feed requirements and fertiliser use.

“This whole project is designed to be interactive and we’ve had plenty of robust discussions around various topics relating to lifestyle blocks.

“It has been invaluable to share our knowledge and to see that we’re all on the same page in terms of wanting the best outcome for the environment while being able to enjoy the benefits of developing a sustainable small block.”

During the final session participants

used Environment Canterbury’s farm portal ([canterburywater.farm](http://canterburywater.farm)) to access an overview of information relating to their property and went through a lifestyle block management plan together with the aim of putting their own plan together.

“Everyone was able to see that this type of plan is extremely useful in terms of getting the best use out of your lifestyle block. Identifying small issues can help people achieve environmental outcomes.

“If you look after the environment your lifestyle block will be more productive, look better and be a pleasure to live and work in.”



Michelle and Daniel Power on their Swannanoa lifestyle block with daughters Jess and Ashlee.

## We all have a part to play

Swannanoa couple, Daniel and Michelle Power, say the pilot project has given them a fresh insight into best management practices for their lifestyle block.

“It’s great to take the time to really look at what you’re doing and to have the opportunity to meet regularly with other lifestyle block owners. Even though we’re a small drop in the bucket, everything counts when it comes to the environment.”

Daniel and Michelle were pleased to discover that their regular soil testing programme is helping them to get the best use of their 8 hectare block.

“Knowing that we’re on the right track is really helpful. It was also interesting to learn more about N-loss and irrigation.

“We were both surprised at how much we got out of it and we could easily keep going every week. Sharing knowledge is really the key to growing and developing new skills.”

# Cutting edge technology key to meeting GMP

By Gina McKenzie.

Waimakariri Irrigation Limited (WIL) has joined forces with Wellington-based irrigation software provider Regen to ensure that all of its shareholders will be operating at Good Management Practice (GMP) by 2020.

WIL general manager Brent Walton says that farmers will be able to gain a complete picture of what is happening on farm and make irrigation decisions that are backed up by hard data.

“Having daily reports on current soil moisture levels and a recommendation on whether to irrigate will provide farmers the right information at the right time.

“To meet our GMP goal and to renew our consent we need to demonstrate that each irrigation event is justified and Regen’s system will provide both farmers and regulators with those facts.”

Stage one will focus on 45 farms on the

south side of the Eyre River. These farms will have flow metres installed on their pivot irrigators, along with soil moisture monitors, and access to weather station data and scheduling reports.

Regen CEO Bridgit Hawkins says working with WIL is a natural fit for her company as continuous improvement is a philosophy shared by both businesses.

“WIL has always aimed for a leadership role within the industry and they have recognised the opportunity to use technology to demonstrate best practice in a highly measurable way.

“You can’t manage what you don’t know and this technology removes any element of guesswork from the irrigation process.”

Bridgit says farmers will receive an update each morning on their phone which will let them know if they need to irrigate that day.



Regen CEO, Bridgit Hawkins, says “You can’t manage what you don’t know”.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

- Soil moisture, weather, and water meter data is collected from the farm
- The data is compiled into a daily irrigation recommendation
- This information is sent to the farmer’s phone via an app
- On-farm actions are automatically recorded
- The data record provides evidence for compliance and FEPs/audits

“The data is being continuously updated so farmers will always have access to the latest information. Having that information at your fingertips makes it easy to decide what action to take in a way that provides the best outcomes for both farmers and the environment.”

Waimakariri Zone Manager Andrew Arps says it’s fantastic to see WIL adopting the latest technology to assist their shareholders to reach GMP by 2020.

“We have been working closely with WIL on GMP and they are leading the way by using irrigation technology to add weight to the decision-making process. Farmers will be armed with the evidence they need to make the best decisions around whether to irrigate on any given day.”

Regen will be holding one-on-one and group information sessions for all WIL shareholders so they can gain an insight into how the technology works.

“We want to empower people to make the right decisions. All farmers will have access to technical support staff and we will provide training sessions so that everyone feels comfortable using the app.”

Brent says that while farmers are being asked to do a lot within a short timeframe, it is vital to accelerate progress towards GMP in order for WIL’s consent to be renewed.

“It is a lot to ask, but we’re getting good buy-in from our farmers and I think we all understand that this is the best way forward.

“Ultimately we won’t have the nutrient loss which is important for the environment and farmers will save money on irrigation during the shoulder seasons.

“Having that certainty around when to irrigate is a very positive move towards reaching good management practice.”

# Ashburton water zone manager at home with feet on dry land

By Tania Butterfield.

When acting Ashburton Zone Manager Janine Holland describes what the zone team is working on, the answer can be summed up in four words: “big, hairy, audacious goals”.

“We’ve got some big, hairy audacious goals - getting six cumecs as a minimum flow into the Ashburton River is the biggie. We’ve also got the largest number of farmers in the region needing consent under the Land-use Consent to Farm campaign,” Janine says.

But while they’re big goals to meet – they’re not impossible.

“We really want people on the road to consent early next year. We’re already hearing Good Management Practice is being implemented, Farm Environment Plans are getting done and people have applied for their nutrient budgets which is fantastic.”

It’s been six months since Janine joined the Ashburton Zone Team whose role is to work on the ground to deliver the community aspirations for environmental management.

The role is a far cry from her early career working as a journalist in Kaikōura during the early days of the marine tourism boom – a role that was challenging for someone who suffered from sea-sickness.

“The number of times I went out on boats and I’d get so sea sick that somebody would have to look after me as we came back in. But I’d still be out there doing my best to get the story. I’d get back to the office and try to recover while getting the story written and filed.”

After four years in Kaikōura and a stint with the Marlborough Express in Blenheim, Janine swapped the journalism lifestyle for one in communications.

“I found myself increasingly attracted to roles in communications that revolved around resource management – how we manage people and their environment.

“I’m drawn back to how we look after our natural environment, and how we enable access

where it’s appropriate for those resources, while also ensuring we have sustainability.”

It wasn’t long before this passion led Janine back into the water space, this time in communications roles at Environment Canterbury and IrrigationNZ.

While working at Environment Canterbury as a water communications officer, Janine met her husband and eventually moved to Methven to be with him.

“When I left my hometown of Ashburton for university in Christchurch, I swore at the time I would never return to the district, purely because I wanted to get out into the world and experience bigger broader horizons.

“However, I returned 12 years ago and it’s great. It’s really nice being back living in the area.”

One of the things that most excited Janine about returning to work for Environment Canterbury was the creation of zone teams based locally in the districts they serve.

“I’m really passionate about working with the community and think it’s been a hugely positive step. Previously, the organisation was highly centralised based largely in Christchurch and Timaru and it was difficult making a connection with those rural communities we needed to work alongside. It feels easier to do that in the zone delivery model.”

And it seems the public agree too.

“I was talking to someone from a big organisation with lots of consents and they said, isn’t it amazing I’ll now ring up my local resource management officer and go have a coffee with them? Who would’ve thought we’d get to that point?”

“It just reinforces the value of face to face communication and that’s what people prefer at the end of the day. A lot of farmers may not want to use email or get on the phone to ring customer services, they just want to talk to someone in person and say this is my issue, this is what I want to do, how can you help me?”



Janine Holland, Ashburton Water Zone Manager, says the team is working on some “big, hairy, audacious goals”.

The Ashburton zone team has an open-door policy, and increasingly they’re finding farmers and consent holders approaching them for advice before making changes to their land or practices.

“It’s really different from the days people would probably wait until the last minute and be forced to come and have a conversation with us. Now we can steer them earlier and say if you want to do this then you’ll need to work under this plan or these rules. And we can help them understand the requirements.

“It’s much more positive to have these conversations early. And it works because we’re based in the zone and are building relationships with the people that live here.”

*If you’re in the Ashburton zone, you can test out their open-door policy by visiting them at 4 McNally Street, or email Janine at [Janine.Holland@ecan.govt.nz](mailto:Janine.Holland@ecan.govt.nz)*

# Investigation into impact of earthquakes on Kaikōura farms begins

A three-year project to investigate the impact of the Kaikōura earthquake on farmland in the district has officially launched.

The project, which received \$600,000 through the Ministry of Primary Industries earthquake recovery fund, seeks to help farmers manage earthquake-damaged farmland and understand the impact of the earthquake on groundwater levels and how this has potentially changed the land use of some farms.

It has received support from Environment



Jodie Hoggard, Project Manager of the investigation into the impacts of the Kaikōura earthquake on farmland.

Canterbury, Kaikōura District Council, Fonterra and Dairy NZ as well as the local iwi and the farming community.

Project Manager Jodie Hoggard said community engagement was key to the success of the project.

“Being local, from a farming background and knowing many of the farmers already and the industry partners, means we can hopefully hit the ground running and get on with creating some good outcomes for our

landowners,” she said.

Speaking at the launch in mid-October, Environment Canterbury councillor Claire McKay said the council was committed to supporting the project and working alongside the farmers and partners to get the best outcome.

“While this project is primarily for earthquake recovery, it is a wonderful opportunity to deliver environmental, economic, and social improvements,” Cr McKay said.

## South Coastal Canterbury farmers reminded about land use consent

Environment Canterbury has been working with South Coastal Canterbury farmers to help them prepare to meet water quality limits and find out whether they need a land use consent to farm.

The South Coastal Canterbury section (Plan Change 3\*) of the Canterbury Land & Water Regional Plan became operative in September 2017. This places new responsibilities on farmers to operate within water quality limits and implement good management practices.

South Coastal Canterbury Zone Manager Chris Eccleston said 318 landowners in the catchment had been contacted and asked to take steps to see if they need a land use consent to farm, which needs to be applied for

by 1 March 2018.

“These changes are part of our region-wide approach to improve water outcomes in Canterbury. For South Coastal Canterbury, improving the water quality at Wainono Lagoon is crucial and action is now required.”

Landowners will need to apply for a land use consent to farm if their property is over five hectares in size and their nitrogen losses exceed certain limits, which recognise differences between soil types.

Before applying for a consent, affected farmers need to:

- Ensure they are implementing industry-agreed Good Management Practices
- Create a Farm Environment Plan
- Prepare nitrogen loss calculations.

All these steps will help address the water quality issues in the zone and Environment Canterbury and industry bodies are available to help along the way.

If you farm in Canterbury and want to find out what new and proposed rules mean for you visit [www.canterburywater.farm](http://www.canterburywater.farm) or phone our customer services team on 0800 324 636.

