



Chairman's Address to the Annual General Meeting of Irrigation NZ Inc.

2nd October 2014

Ladies and gentlemen welcome to the 2014 annual general meeting of Irrigation New Zealand.

The Chairperson Nicky Hyslop is unable to attend the AGM due to another long standing commitment. She offers her apology and has asked me, as the recently retired Chairman to Chair today's meeting.

Irrigation NZ, along with Federated Farmers has been instrumental in raising the profile of the irrigation sector. We have endeavoured to do this in a positive way, highlighting the achievements of the sector and the significant improvements in efficiency of irrigators at various levels. This higher profile approach has contributed to water and irrigation becoming more prominent political issues, especially in the recent election.

The recent Parliamentary elections have seen the issues of water and irrigation to the fore, with vastly different policies emerging from the left and the right of the political spectrum. Unfortunately, politicising these issues is probably not in the best interests of the country and instead some political consensus on the value of irrigation and on the contribution that farmers and irrigators are making to improve performance and deal with legacy issues would be a more constructive route.

Irrigation NZ welcomes the election of a national led Government and is looking forward to its continued support of the sector.

Many irrigators, irrigation schemes and water user groups up and down the country are currently involved in collaborative processes that are attempting to set values for water bodies and improve water quality and quantity

outcomes in regions and catchments. The outcome of some of these processes to set limits, this year, has highlighted the fragility of collaborative and consultative processes. As a consequence Irrigation NZ is looking forward to the Governments proposed amendments to the RMA, including providing a statutory basis for collaborative community processes relating to water.

The Irrigation Acceleration Fund (IAF) of \$35M established by the last National Government has been very successful in providing financial resources to emerging schemes working on feasibility. INZ is hopeful that the Fund may be given a further top up to assist those schemes that are only now in a position to be able to test feasibility.

The Crown Irrigation Investment Ltd. also established under National made it's first investment this year; a \$6.5million loan to Central Plains Water Ltd. CIIL potentially has a very important role to play in assisting the financing of scheme development, however its place in financing schemes is still being clarified and we look forward to more significant investments in the very near future.

The policy platforms of Labour and the Greens in relation to water, irrigation and farming; especially the proposal to impose water use charges on irrigators, highlights that the sector must continue to engage with these Parties so that they gain a thorough understanding of how irrigation works and its value to rural economies.

Nutrient limiting setting processes continue throughout the country and there is tension in many areas as to how nutrient loads will be allocated. In some instances the tension is between different agricultural sectors. The Land and Water Partnership forum established by Federated Farmers has been an important initiative to which Irrigation NZ has made a significant contribution. This forum has more work to do to ensure that the agriculture sector gets on the "same page" and avoids public disagreement on how allocations will be made.

A key aspect of the work of the Organisation is to lift standards within the irrigation sector. One aspect of this is to provide design accreditation to irrigation companies and individuals in the sector who achieve prescribed

standards. It is with great pleasure that I congratulate Ashburton irrigation company Rainer Irrigation (Gavin & Roger Briggs) on being the first irrigation company to achieve design accreditation.

A biennial focal point for INZ is its conference held this year in Napier. This is the first conference in recent times to be held outside of Canterbury. It proved to be very successful and was well supported by Hawkes Bay and North Island irrigators, and the trade sector. Thanks again to Chris Coughlan and the team at Avenues for their work in organising the conference.

Less prominent but just as important is the basic training courses that INZ is delivering, particularly those for people who manage irrigation systems. My thanks to those who have developed the course material and deliver the courses. The feedback I get from participants on the courses is hugely positive and I encourage farmers and their staff to make the time to attend. These courses are a major reason for the sector lifting “its game”.

The success of the Napier conference spurred the North Otago region and Oamaru to submit a proposal to INZ to hold the 2016 conference in Oamaru. The region put up such a compelling case that the Board of INZ could not refuse their proposal and INZ recently confirmed Oamaru as the venue.

A key objective of the organisation has been to raise the public’s awareness of irrigation and to tell the positive story of irrigation. This is not achieved overnight, but I think we are finally starting to see the positive messages getting through. This work is slow and can be frustrating, so I want to once again thank our CEO Andrew Curtis and the staff at INZ for their dedication and hard work in promoting and improving the performance of the sector.

Thanks also to the Irrigation NZ Members who continue to strongly support the work of the organisation and to the INZ Board Members who continue to give generously of their time to lead the Organisation.

John Donkers
Irrigation NZ Inc.