



## **Irrigation New Zealand Chairman's Report 2017**

The past year has been a busy and event packed period for the irrigation community and for IrrigationNZ.

Water issues and irrigation have been a high-profile topic and as an organisation IrrigationNZ has been very active in this debate.

Our focus has been to bring good science and information to the forefront of any discussion around our water resource while recognising the wider community interest in water and how we use it. This has resulted in IrrigationNZ gaining credibility with a range of stakeholders, including the now successful Coalition Government of Labour, NZFirst and The Greens – while we have not always agreed on the detail around water policies, Labour acknowledge that as a primary sector organisation we had been in their office more than any other over the last 3 years.

It is increasingly apparent that alongside good science and information, we need to engage with New Zealand and tell them about our “Irrigation Story”. We need to talk not just about the economic and social benefits of irrigation but also about the ability of modern irrigation to address the legacy issues of land intensification. Multi-purpose water infrastructure can address both environmental issues and community needs and provide resilience in the face of climate change.

For new developing irrigation schemes, there continues to be challenges. To be successful, engagement with all stakeholders at the outset of any proposal is critical as is the consideration of community expectations. It's been really encouraging to see stage 2 of Central Plains Water get underway. The second stage of this scheme will significantly reduce demand for groundwater in the Selwyn - a win-win for both the community and the environment over the longer term.

Not every developing scheme has been able to proceed. The Ruataniwha Dam is a lost opportunity that resulted from the project being caught in a political storm over water. Hawke's Bay has missed out on the chance to further attract high value crops such as vegetables, pipfruit and vineyards while at the same time augmenting the Tukituki River with stored water over the summer months when mother nature turns the tap off. This could have been a game changer for the region.

As irrigators we are increasingly being challenged with ongoing compliance and regulatory costs. It is often difficult to see the real benefit to our everyday businesses of this “paper war”, however Farm Environmental Plans are and will be a tool for irrigators to not only meet compliance requirements but also identify opportunities to add value to our farms. This may initially appear daunting but I encourage all irrigators to proactively adopt them - whether required or not by your Regional Council.

Other challenges include the need to ensure we as irrigators and our staff continue to upskill. IrrigationNZ are proud to have been able to support you in this area by offering a range of training

opportunities and education resources to provide our members with the right tools and knowledge to make significant changes on the farm. Many of you have also invested capital in new technology to use water more efficiently and effectively and in plantings to encourage biodiversity. The changes made today will result in significant improvements to our environment in the future.

Within irrigation schemes, there has been a lot of investment and activity occurring to ensure they can deliver water where and when it is needed, meet a range of environmental requirements and review governance structures to ensure they are a good fit for future needs.

Our members in the service industry have also been making substantial investments in training and qualifications which will provide irrigators with ongoing access to high quality irrigation designers and service technicians.

We would also like to recognise and thank the contribution of our partner organisations Willis Towers Watson and FMG. Both have provided support to IrrigationNZ and our members through their ongoing sponsorship.

As a small organisation, IrrigationNZ cannot tell the irrigation story by ourselves. We need all irrigators, service industries, schemes and primary sector partners to work with us to carry the message – “New Zealand has some of the most efficient food producers in the world, and irrigation makes an important contribution to this”. We will continue to look to our members to champion our sector and organisation.

The heated election campaign on water issues and our response was a great example of how we can and must collectively work together. I am very proud of the work that IrrigationNZ and our irrigator members did to ensure we had a strong voice that focused on facts and in particular refuted the “benefits” of a water tax. We know going forward that this work is not done and that alongside good science and information we need to tell our story and engage more with the New Zealand public.

Finally, I would like to say a huge thank you to our staff and Chief Executive Andrew Curtis who continues to work well and truly beyond the scope of his role. The passion and knowledge he brings to the role is immense.

I wish all of you good luck for the season ahead and hope you have a happy Christmas, and a safe and prosperous New Year.



Nicky Hyslop

**Chairwoman**

**Irrigation New Zealand**

Irrigation New Zealand Inc. PO Box 69119 LINCOLN 7640,  
AgResearch Building Gerald Street entrance  
Phone: 03 341 2225  
Web: [www.irrigationnz.co.nz](http://www.irrigationnz.co.nz)