



Irrigation New Zealand Chairman's Report 2016

2016 was a great year for irrigation. With the continuation of dry conditions across most of the South Island irrigation became pivotal for profitable production. Low product returns meant good practice irrigation was key to maximise production and minimise operating costs – the most affordable source of feed for New Zealand farming systems is always home grown.

IrrigationNZ made significant progress in establishing our irrigation qualifications and the ongoing success of our training programmes and resources. At IrrigationNZ, we are really proud of these resources which provide credible real information for both new and existing farmers on how we can continue to improve our systems and management to ensure we are irrigating efficiently and effectively. These resources are available to all IrrigationNZ Members at <http://irrigationnz.co.nz/news-resources/irrigation-resources/>.

Our bi-annual conference held in Oamaru in April 2016 was an absolute celebration of the huge progress, role and value irrigation has had in the Waitaki – one of New Zealand's first districts to develop irrigation. The pre-conference field days showcasing the collaboration of irrigators and community to utilise water storage infrastructure was second to none. A water storage pond is now home to a community trust offering sailing, canoeing and kayaking experiences for locals. The conference went on to highlight and challenge the way we communicate with the wider public, present international irrigation systems, environmental research and the "Future of Food". The latter presentation by Julian Cribb really cemented to me the envious position we have in New Zealand to produce highly nutritious food while meeting community environmental requirements. Clarifying community expectations is still a work in progress as so many regions are still working through this collaborative process.

What continues to frustrate us at IrrigationNZ is despite all the positives occurring within the community, there are continuous efforts by anti-farming groups to derail the good work being done. These groups appear not to be interested in a community coming together to provide a road map for land, water and biodiversity frameworks in our districts. The initiatives being put in place are real practical steps at addressing the challenges we have in New Zealand as a result of decades of land development and increasing urban density. We may not always see the results immediately but we are seeing positive trends. Solutions are not always just focused on reducing our current environmental footprint, but also looking at ways to further augment both our lowland streams and aquifers which are vulnerable to Mother Nature's hot dry summer conditions. A great example of how augmentation may look in the future is the Managed Aquifer Recharge trial being overseen by ECAN. This water is moving down the plains in the acquirer at 70m/day. This has the potential to augment both shallow aquifers and lowlands streams in its path which should in turn reduce nutrient loads in these areas. This is a great result of how science and research can really help to deliver.

Having just attended the Bi-Annual Grasslands Conference, held in Timaru, I am continually impressed with the commitment of our research and scientific community to making a difference in

New Zealand – albeit under limited funding regimes. So many of the papers presented had a focus on sustainable production. One of the challenges discussed was one of communication with the wider public to ensure the purpose and results are well understood. Science will be a key part of the solution going forward and we must carry that message loud and clear into our communities.

I started off talking about the “Highs and Lows” of the last year for irrigation in New Zealand. The “Lows” would have to include frustration with the misinformation and deliberate tactics of some to derail the Ruataniwha project despite farmer uptake getting across the line. These are big decisions for farmers who have recognised the value and opportunities water storage and irrigation can give them. As HBRIC work through the final settlement of land we applaud the commitment and patience of the team behind this project. This leadership group has a vision for Hawke’s Bay which is based on creating a resilient, prosperous region that supports the community economically, socially and achieves agreed environmental outcomes – who can argue with that!!

I would like to thank my fellow directors for all their time and commitment over the last 12 months, but of particular note is the huge thank you to Elizabeth Soal who resigned as a director during the year and to our one retiring director Mark Slee who currently holds the role of Vice-Chair. Elizabeth continues as the Policy Manager for Waitaki Irrigator Collectives and this year embarked on a PhD. Mark Slee has been a director on IrrigationNZ for over 15 years and has been invaluable at ensuring there is a strong practical farmer voice into the strategic directions we pursue. We wish Elizabeth and Mark all the best for the future.

Andrew Curtis and the extremely capable team at IrrigationNZ have had a big year with our incredibly successful conference and their above and beyond commitment to pursuing “Excellence in Irrigation”. Thank you to all our team.

As many parts of the country are experiencing one of the best starts to spring and summer in recent years we have not really seen widespread irrigation kick into gear yet. Enjoy this while it lasts. I wish all IrrigationNZ members good luck for the 2016/17 irrigation season ahead and a happy and safe Christmas and New Year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicky Hyslop', with a stylized, cursive script.

Nicky Hyslop

Chairwoman

Irrigation New Zealand