

Pilot project to help farmers without direct industry support

By Gina McKenzie.

Eyreton farmer Darryl Brown is discovering economic and environmental benefits for his farm after joining a pilot project run by Environment Canterbury to help farmers complete Farm Environment Plans (FEPs).

One hundred farmers across Waimakariri and Selwyn districts are involved in the one-on-one pilot project which helps farmers without industry support complete their FEPs.

Darryl has already started making improvements to his 485 hectare horse and dairy farm after joining the project in May.

“It’s a bit scary at the start but as you get into it you see that you’re making decisions which benefit your farm and the environment. We’ve already got plans to make our irrigation systems more efficient with increased monitoring. Making the entire farm more efficient means using less resources and having more money in the bottom line.”

Waimakariri Zone manager Andrew Arps says the project is helping farmers who might otherwise “fall between the gaps” complete their FEPs by the middle of 2017.

“We’ve identified 50 farmers in Waimakariri with farms over 50 hectares who don’t belong to industry bodies or irrigation schemes and we’re now engaging with them on a one-on-one basis.

“Being proactive and getting to know farmers is a really important part of the process. We’re helping them understand why it’s important to do a Farm Environment Plan and how this can benefit their farm and the environment.”

Darryl says the process of record gathering and putting together a farm mapping system has given him a much better

overview of his entire farming operation.

“Since 1968 the farm has grown from 91 hectares to well over 400 hectares so we’re definitely having an impact on the environment. Looking at the farm as a whole and using the mapping system to identify areas where we’re under or over irrigating is really helpful.”

Being able to chat informally to Andrew and receiving practical advice has given Darryl a new outlook on how Environment Canterbury is working with farmers.

“There has been a bit of a stigma about ECan but I’ve seen a real change with this type of one-on-one approach and I’ve found it fantastic.

“It’s just more relaxing having a chat about what you’re doing and seeing how a Farm Environment Plan together can benefit both farm profits, and the environment. It gives you a reason to get started.”

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Andrew says the pilot programme isn’t just focused on getting farmers to complete their Farm Environment Plans but is part of a wider environmental management project.

“While we want all farmers to complete their Farm Environment Plans the real success actually comes from seeing environmental planning being part of everyday life and accepted business practice for farmers.”



Emma, Chalk the dog, Darryl Brown, and Zone Manager Andrew Arps on the Brown’s farm in Eyreton, just north of the Waimakariri River in North Canterbury.

A day in the life of a zone manager – putting people first

By Tania Butterfield.

“Saving the world one day at a time” is what Kevin Heays often tells others of his job as Hurunui-Waiiau and Kaikōura Zone manager.

The new position, which Kevin began in October last year, is part of a move to start implementing on-the-ground actions around water management based on the goals of the local water zone committees.

“When it really comes down to it, it’s about relationships – be there to help people, to advise people, and be proactive rather than reactive. That’s my biggest aim.”

Kevin is no stranger to working in the community. He began his career as a school teacher, working largely in small communities before buying a Kaikōura pub which he managed for 13 years. It was during this time he decided to run for Kaikōura mayor.

He served as two terms before deciding not to seek re-election around the time the Government reviewed Environment Canterbury’s governance in 2009.

“Those were the days where you got a visit, a letter, a bill and practically nothing else. We certainly joined the movement of trying to make the regional council become a people’s council.”

Kevin credits Dame Margaret, the commissioners and chief executive for making the changes.

“Consequently, that whole process-driven regional council started to change direction into a people-driven one. There’s been a few hiccups along the way, but it’s 99 percent better than what it was.”

Following his time as mayor, Kevin ended up joining the regional council as its Kaikōura manager. The issues he had experienced with Environment Canterbury during his time as mayor was exactly what he was now able to work towards fixing.

“I knew I could change my community’s attitude towards ECan and ECan’s attitude

towards my community,” he says.

The first thing he changed was the community’s accessibility to ECan’s resources and expertise. He ensured he followed up on people’s complaints the same day they were received, and made sure people knew they could pop into the office anytime for advice or help with their consents.

This change did not go unnoticed by the Kaikōura community.

“A significant moment was after I had been in the job for a wee while, I’d walk into the pub and people would yell out ‘Who can?’ and they’d reply to themselves ‘ECan’. That went on for a couple of weeks. You sort of felt accepted.”

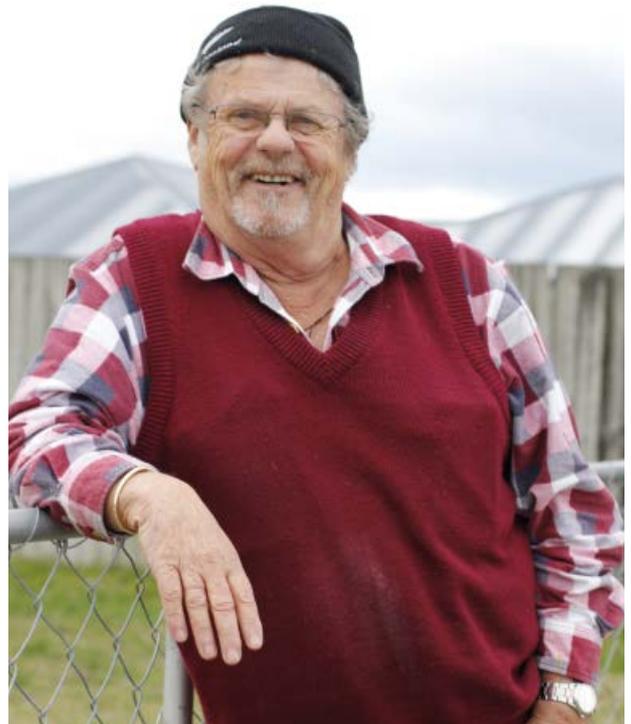
While taking on the zone manager position for Kaikōura was a natural transition for Kevin, entering the Hurunui-Waiiau Zone with no previous association to the area meant he had to work hard to establish a relationship with the community.

“I understandably have to prove myself. It’s their territory not mine. They’ve lived here for generations and I live over the hill. But if you explain that straight away, people are pretty good about it.”

Already, Kevin believes he’s had some good wins in the Hurunui-Waiiau Zone, such as working with people to find solutions to long-time issues such as the debate over opening the Waipara River mouth to mitigate flooding and issues between lifestyle block owners and farmers.

“But the key to it is you can’t do it on your own.

“You’ve got to get the landowners, the district councils, all the stakeholders involved. You just can’t do it on your own. It’s just



Kevin Heays, Zone Manager for Hurunui-Waiiau and Kaikōura.

impossible. Everyone needs to be in on the game.”

Being proactive rather than reactive, and making the effort to meet with people is the key to success in the position.

“All problems can be solved over a farm gate or a cup of tea. You can save the world doing that,” he says.

The most rewarding part of the job has been seeing how proactive farmers are in protecting waterways through fencing or riparian planting.

“They’ve done it themselves because they want to. That’s just fantastic and they’ve been doing it for years – they just don’t skite about it.”

Kevin’s also noticed an increase in farmers asking how they too can ‘get on the bandwagon’ and protect the water.

“That’s great. That’s a new thing. It’s probably always been on their mind but now they can see the value in doing it.

“Their eyes have never been closed, but perhaps they’ve just taken the sunglasses off. It is really rewarding.”

So what would ultimate success look like?

“For the Zone team – being out of work would be the ultimate. I don’t think that’s going to happen in my lifetime, but I think we’re getting there – I really do.”

Amuri irrigators make big strides with farm environmental management

By Phil Roberts.

Over the past 12 months the Amuri Irrigation Company (AIC) has taken a leadership role in delivering significant environmental management programmes across the Amuri Basin.

An important part of this programme has included ensuring all 144 shareholders have a Farm Environment Plan (FEP) to help farmers operate industry-greed Good Management Practices. FEPs help farmers identify environmental risks and target actions to improve to improve water quality.

AIC's Environmental Manager Alastair Rutherford said shareholders have demonstrated a strong desire to be involved in projects that address environmental challenges.

"AIC fully supports the Hurunui-Waiiau Zone Committee's recognition that the future social and economic prosperity of the zone is largely dependent on the sustainable use of its water resources.

"Growing agriculture and horticulture through irrigation expansion is pertinent to this, and must occur alongside enhancing environmental, cultural and recreational values.

"The Zone Committee asked us to take a leadership role to help deliver community-developed water quality objectives, and we're proud of the progress we've made so far.

"Since our environmental strategy was signed-off around 18 months ago we've provided environmental guidance to our shareholders and all of our farms now have FEPs, a year ahead of schedule, which will help reduce environmental impacts," he said.

The company's Environmental Management Strategy builds on work already undertaken by its shareholders which has seen significant conversions to more efficient irrigation and effluent management systems as well as stock exclusion from waterways and riparian planting initiatives.

These developments have resulted in a significant reduction in sediment and phosphorous loads in the Hurunui River.

The strategy was developed in accordance with the community-developed

Hurunui-Waiiau Zone Implementation Programme (ZIP) to deliver environmental gains and production efficiencies through better management.

AIC has also established an Environmental Subcommittee with responsibility to oversee the implementation of its Environmental Management Strategy and the auditing of Farm Environment Plans, with the first round of audits being completed earlier this year.

Alastair Rutherford said AIC is well on track to meet its commitment for all farms in the collective to be audited within three years of FEPs being implemented.

"Earlier this year our first round of FEP auditing commenced and we met our target of having the first 53 audits (30%) completed by the end of March.

"This first round of auditing has been a valuable experience and provided us with good data to plan our work around for the next few years.

"The results confirm irrigation and nutrient management are the areas in greatest need of improvement and we're developing a strategy to work with farmers to address these, including a clear process set out for

dealing with repeat failure," he said.

AIC plans to keep the momentum going by extending membership of the collective to non-shareholder independent irrigators in a number of sub catchments by the end of 2016.

Despite challenging times for many farmers in North Canterbury, investment continues for the piping of the AIC scheme to deliver pressurised water to the farm gate, reducing pumping costs and allowing more efficient use of irrigation water.

WHAT IS AN FEP?

A Farm Environment Plan helps farmers recognise on-farm environmental risks, and sets out a programme to manage those risks.

FEPs are unique to a property and reflect the local climate and soils, the type of farming operation, and the farmer's goals.

WHAT IS AN FEP AUDIT?

An audit is an independent assessment (visit www.ecan.govt.nz for a list of assessors) of the implementation of an FEP to check risks are being managed and Good Management Practices (GMPs) are being applied.



Culverden dairy farmer David Croft (left) with Alastair Rutherford.

Good progress being made on measuring water use

Around 97% of water used in Canterbury is now being measured as part of a long term programme to work with water users to gain an understanding of the use and reliability of our water.

With government regulations requiring around 5,900 water takes across Canterbury to be measured and reported – three times more than any other region in New Zealand – it has been no small task.

The uptake of this programme in Canterbury has been world-leading in terms of the number of measuring technology installations and a sophisticated service industry has developed alongside.

Nadeine Dommisie, Environment Canterbury Regional Manager – Implementation, said it is pleasing to see so many water users measuring their use as a key part of managing their business or farm.

“Obtaining accurate water data from users is an important step in ensuring this precious resource is managed efficiently to meet the community’s environmental, economic and cultural expectations.

“Implementing this programme and ensuring the government’s regulations are met has been challenging but we were pleased to find that farmers are supportive of this programme.

“The vast majority are already doing things to achieve on-farm water efficiencies as part of their normal practices because it saves time and money and makes good business sense.

“We are pleased with the progress that has been made and even happier that more than 3800 consent holders have also installed telemetry equipment so that water use can be monitored on a daily basis and the community can develop a clearer picture of the region’s resource.

“We appreciate this has taken a lot of time and effort and we congratulate the majority of water users who have played their part and are now enjoying the benefits,” she said.

There is still some more work to be done with a few hundred consent holders that have yet to take action, so in May, Environment Canterbury began taking a stronger approach to non-compliance.

“We have a number of different legislative tools at our disposal to ensure compliance but our first priority is to work with farmers so they comply voluntarily,” said Nadeine Dommisie.

“If we come across non-compliance we work with the consent holder to put an action plan in place but in cases of significant or repeat non-compliance enforcement action will be taken.



Installing and verifying a water meter.

“As a result we expect to achieve 100% compliance with the regulations before the 2016 irrigation season starts,” she said.

The Resource Management (Measurement and Reporting of Water Takes) 2010 requires all water consent holders with a take of 5l/s to install a water measuring device. For information on the government’s regulations, and a full list of approved service providers visit the Environment Canterbury or Irrigation New Zealand websites. Visit: www.ecan.govt.nz/watermetering irrigationnz.co.nz/industry/water-measurement

IN BRIEF

PROGRESS ON FEPS

More than 2200 Canterbury farmers have taken action to develop Farm Environment Plans (FEPs). The FEP approach recognises every farm is different and it helps farmers think about the risks on their land and the actions they can take to improve. FEPs cover a wide range of activities including water use efficiency, nutrient management, effluent management, soil management and hotspots such as waste pits, ofal or silage pits. The farmer takes responsibility for what happens on their land, assesses risk, gets advice from professionals and puts in place Good Management Practices to address risks and minimise the impact to water quality. Industry organisations and irrigation

schemes have got on board with FEPs, holding workshops and working with farmers to assess the environmental risks of their farms.

The follow-up is an independent audit which looks at the FEP and assesses whether the farmer is doing what they said they would. They are then graded A, B (acceptable) or C, D (not acceptable) based on how they are managing environmental risks under their plan. Farmers who receive consecutive C or D grades are highly likely to face compliance action (an abatement notice, infringement and fine, or even prosecution). If a farmer fails to make the necessary improvements it could lead to them losing their consent to farm. More than 250 have already had plans independently audited. We expect all 5000 farms in the Canterbury region to have

created their FEPs and be working to Good Management Practices within a couple of years.

NEW STOCK EXCLUSION RULES FOR HIGH COUNTRY LAKES

Amendments have been made to the rules on exclusion of stock from high country lakes following advice from a panel of Independent Hearing Commissioners. The change makes the application of the rules in the high country simpler where excluding cattle from the water on these vast properties is challenging, and the impact on water quality is minor. Strong prohibitions remain in place especially around cattle in waterways near spawning sites and the bed and banks of lakes.

For more information on the Plan Change, go to www.ecan.govt.nz/lwrp-pc4