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For immediate release

## **SIGNIFICANT MILESTONES FOR CENTRAL PLAINS WATER**

Today Central Plains Water Limited achieved two significant milestones for the scheme. On behalf of the Central Plains Water Trust, the Assessment of Environmental Effects (AEE) and resource consent applications were lodged with Environment Canterbury, and advice was received that the Minister for the Environment has approved the company's application to become a requiring authority.

Pat Morrison, Chairman of Central Plains Water Limited said that after many years of discussion about a community irrigation scheme for the district, he is delighted that further progress is being made.

Central Plains Water Limited is seeking resource consents to take 40 cumecs from the Waimakariri River and, in conjunction with Ashburton Community Water Trust, take 40 cumecs of water from the Rakaia River.

"Lodging the consent applications is a significant achievement. However it is simply the first step in a very long and complex process governed by the Resource Management Act," says Pat Morrison.

"We encourage anyone who is interested in the scheme to review the AEE as it will assist them to understand the scheme. The AEE gives the community and interest groups the opportunity to determine if the scheme will impact on their property or lifestyle. It contains sufficient information for people to decide if they want to make a submission supporting or opposing the scheme."

Pat Morrison continues, "Gaining requiring authority status is a normal step in the process for any major infrastructure development proposal where construction may not immediately take place. In effect we are seeking to secure the opportunity to use land needed for the scheme once we have the resource consents. Gaining the consents may take up to two years."

Now that the requiring authority has been approved, Central Plains Water Limited will notify the Selwyn District Council of its requirement for a designation. From this point there will be opportunities for the community to be involved in the process.

"For designations, Selwyn District Council is required to initiate a submission and hearing process that is just as rigorous and transparent as the more familiar resource consent process. At this point the public can make submissions on the requirement in exactly the same way as they do on resource consents," says Pat Morrison.

"Our approach is to apply only for designations for those components of the scheme which must be in a set location such as the dam, intakes and headrace canals."

Since the commencement of the scheme in 2000 more than 100 consultation meetings have taken place with a wide variety of groups.

“We are continuing extensive consultation and key issues are being fed back to the scheme’s technical experts. Central Plains Water Limited’s technical representatives are attempting to mitigate concerns that have arisen as a result of consultation. The objective is to find a balance between enabling sustainable use of the scheme, and, where possible, avoiding or mitigating any adverse environmental effects,” says Pat Morrison.

Important elements of the scheme design will include:

- A dam and reservoir in the Waianiwaniwa Valley to provide stored water for release across the scheme area when required.
- Making sure the bottom of the storage dam will not be allowed to dry out offsetting potential dust issues.
- The concept of a Farm Management Accord that promotes sustainable management.
- Ensuring the scheme proposals work within the scope of the Rakaia National Water Conservation Order and the Waimakariri River Regional Plan.

Some of the environmental benefits of the scheme include:

- Restoring flows to lowland springfed streams.
- Introducing wetland areas.
- Establishing high environmental standards that require efficient use of water, for example spray irrigation rather than flood irrigation.
- Creating opportunities for water based recreation on the reservoir and on other structures associated with the scheme.
- Establishing an ‘environmental trust’ to deliver other enhancement opportunities.

“The scheme’s objective is to improve the security and prosperity of Central Canterbury via a water enhancement scheme that provides increased agricultural and horticultural diversity, while enhancing ecological and recreational resources,” concludes Pat Morrison.

-Ends-

***To view the AEE the general public can contact Environment Canterbury.***

***Note to journalists – The Minister for the Environment has also issued a press release on Central Plains Water Limited gaining the status of requiring authority.***

**For further information**

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## **MEDIA BACKGROUND**

- Central Plains Water Limited has been formed by the Central Plains Water Trust to investigate, construct and operate a water enhancement scheme, providing surface water for community irrigation to farmers who farm within the Central Plains area of Canterbury, New Zealand.

- The scheme will comprise a network of canals, irrigation channels and a water storage reservoir capable of irrigating 60,000ha of land between the Waimakariri River, the Rakaia River, State Highway 1 and the Malvern foothills of the Southern Alps.
- The scheme will provide surface water for irrigation between the Rakaia and Waimakariri Rivers, while also enhancing ecological and recreational resources in the area. Scheme proposals are based on a storage reservoir in the Malvern Hills and takes from each river to irrigate the area.
- The Trust will own the consents on behalf of the wider community, thereby ensuring that the potential recreational, social and environmental benefits associated with water management will be achieved. The consents, if granted, will be exclusively licensed to Central Plains Water Limited, whose shareholders are likely to consist mainly of farmers taking water from the scheme.
- Costing \$350 million to build, it's estimated that farmers will invest a further \$150 million in on-farm development costs. This makes the scheme the South Island's largest construction project in recent times.
- Significant employment and regional economic benefits will accrue because of the scheme.
- Irrigation schemes south of the Rakaia and north of the Waimakariri have provided great benefit to rural communities in those districts.

**Before the scheme can proceed to construction, many consents are needed, with the major ones being:**

- To divert and take water from the Rakaia and Waimakariri rivers.
- To store and use water in a defined way – for enhancement and irrigation.
- To discharge back into any identified water bodies/ground water.

**Because it involves water storage, the Central Plains Water scheme is designed to:**

- Provide a reliable irrigation supply, even during droughts.
- Meet the irrigation needs of farmers within the scheme area for the next 100 years.
- Bring balance back to the groundwater system.
- Provide security against climate change.
- Promote the most efficient, economic and environmentally sensitive farming practices.
- Future proof the region's economic base.

## **Key Elements of the Proposed Scheme**

- An intake on the Waimakariri River above the confluence with the Kowai River and an inlet canal feeding water to the Waianiwiwa Reservoir via a tunnel through the Malvern Hills.
- An intake on the Waimakariri River at the Gorge Bridge to bring water into the main headrace across the plains.

- An intake on the Rakaia River approximately 8km downstream of the Gorge Bridge to bring water into the main headrace across the plains.
- A level headrace that will run between the Rakaia and Waimakariri rivers and deliver water to the distribution network.
- A distribution network of water races down the plains providing water to all shareholder properties in the scheme area.

**The “State of the Canterbury Region Water Resource” recently released by Environment Canterbury includes the following conclusions:**

- Over most of the Canterbury Plains groundwater levels, particularly in deep aquifers, are currently one to three metres lower than the same time last year.
- Record lows have been recorded in many regions.
- Lowland streams that are dependent on groundwater supply are very low.
- It is expected that record groundwater lows will be recorded across the Central Plains as a consequence of low rainfall over winter and the anticipated summer draw down for irrigation. This may lead to some well owners having to lower pumping for underground water and, towards Lake Ellesmere, many wells will lose artesian pressure as the season progresses.