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## **Malvern Hills economic evidence criticised**

The evidence given today by Professor Tim Hazledine on behalf of the Malvern Hills Protection Society at the Central Plains Water (CPW) resource consent hearing is “academic and motivated by sentiment” says Tom Henderson, chairman of South Canterbury Farmers Irrigation Society.

“Professor Hazledine’s evidence ignores the results of other schemes that rely on harvesting water to provide reliable irrigation. The benefits of harvesting water are very significant, with job opportunities, the environment and the economy all substantially enhanced on a sustainable basis,” says Tom Henderson.

“I would be happy to show him around South Canterbury’s Opuha scheme this season, to help him gain some knowledge on this subject.”

Chairman of Central Plains Water Limited, Pat Morrison says Professor Hazledine’s evidence is seriously flawed. It takes an extreme view of the scheme’s costs and an unbalanced view of the economic value it would add. For example not included in his calculations are any of the benefits from:

- improved farm practices as outlined in the scheme’s Sustainable Farming Protocol
- farmers closing down their wells, taking significant pressure off Canterbury’s depleted aquifers and,
- land use change reliable irrigation will bring.

“Professor Hazledine’s economic calculations regarding pollution do not factor the significant advances technology is making, particularly nitrogen inhibitors such as eco-n that cut up to 75% of nitrous oxide. He also ignores the procedures outlined in CPW’s Sustainable Farming Protocol that require farmers to commit to best environmental practices and efficient application of water – or forfeit their water rights. Other factors such as Fonterra’s Effluent Indicator System that control effluent discharge – and if farmers breach this it means their milk is not collected – were also not considered in his calculations,” says Pat Morrison.

“I’ve never heard evidence of an irrigation scheme failing to boost its local economy. In fact all evidence points to the economic benefits of these schemes consistently outperforming what was predicted, particularly the Opuha scheme,” says Pat Morrison.

Tom Henderson cites an impact study released in 2006 that analysed the impacts of the Opuha Dam built in 1999 on the provincial economy. It found that due to productivity gains from irrigation of former dryland farms, agriculture has grown at about twice the rate of the rest of the economy. The study reported that irrigation has made a major contribution to the growth of agriculture in Canterbury, and while it all cannot be attributed to irrigation, it certainly has added to it.

Pat Morrison says Professor Hazledine's evidence did not take into account the extent to which a reliable water supply would change land use in Central Canterbury, as occurred with the Opuha scheme. It led to changes to farm systems – from dryland sheep and crop to irrigated sheep, irrigated dairy farms and irrigated cropping.

"The impact study also showed that irrigation had substantial flow-on effects for the South Canterbury community including increased business confidence, increased processing activity, improved utilisation of processing plant and increased activity at the Timaru port. A new onion processing plant and a better spread of kill to local meat works were examples of this."

Tom Henderson says, "We need to make the right decisions about irrigation otherwise we are going to be lost. New Zealand is a trading nation and production from farms is New Zealand's future. This can only be achieved with efficient reliable irrigation that is environmentally sustainable. Economic benefits accrue when you get a good year every year and reliability of water ensures this."

-Ends-

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