



WAITAKI IRRIGATORS COLLECTIVE

BE WATER-RACE SAFE

The *Be Water-Race Safe* animated short film delivers important targeted safety messages about irrigation infrastructure to children, whilst helping them learn about the benefits of irrigation. The film has already reached thousands of children, and is supported by Water Safety New Zealand and Public Health South.

The Issue

Public safety is an increasing concern for infrastructure owners. Irrigation races are seemingly inviting, but potentially dangerous, places to swim. Drowning accidents have already occurred in irrigation races, making it an important industry-wide issue. Maintaining physical exclusion barriers across entire irrigation schemes may be neither practical nor effective.

Several of the Waitaki Irrigators Collective (WIC) member schemes (in North Otago and South Canterbury) operate open race networks. WIC recognised the potential risk these pose to public safety, and wanted to proactively educate the community on the dangers of the races.

School-age children were identified as the target audience – to provide key safety messages to them *before* they reach an age where they may seek fun and adventure away from adult supervision. The challenge was finding an engaging way to deliver the messages, which children would enjoy and therefore remember.



The character Bobble delivers water safety messages in the film

"I like the bubble man because he's cool and kind-of funny-looking"
Eight-year-old school student

The Innovation

Ross Bishop, Operations Manager for the Lower Waitaki Irrigation Company, conceived of a making a short film. This was made into digital reality by Logan Adams, who was completing his studies in animation at Victoria University.

WIC commissioned *Be Water-Race Safe*, and has funded its production and distribution. Input on content was provided by Water Safety New Zealand and an internationally-qualified water safety professional from the Waitaki.

Being computer-animated, the film 'speaks' to children through a media they understand, enjoy, and engage with. The format also meant positive messages - on why we need irrigation and the benefits it brings - could be included.

"We watched the film with our whole school today (5-13yrs) and had a good response from them – thanks!"

School principal



The film explains irrigation infrastructure in a way that children can understand

"I think this is an awesome animated video on keeping children safe around water-races"

Swim School Team Leader

Delivery

WIC uses a variety of platforms to maximise reach. The film has been provided on DVD to all primary schools in the WIC area. WIC representatives have shown the film in some schools, to encourage questions and discussion on the issues raised. Presentations have also been done with Waitaki Aquatic Centre staff, as it dove-tails with their water safety and learn-to-swim programmes.

A key method is the annual *Waitaki Clued-Up Kids* programme. Students from East and North Otago are delivered important safety messages over two days in several modules, one of which is water safety. Children are shown the film followed by a hands-on demonstration around the hydraulics of irrigation infrastructure. Children also talk with a water-safety professional (engaged by WIC) about what they should do if they find themselves in trouble in the water.

WIC has promoted the film through social (Facebook, YouTube) and traditional media. The film is now being taken-up throughout the industry, after WIC received multiple requests for its wider distribution from other irrigation schemes.



The film describes irrigation's importance in food production

Impact

- **100% positive feedback** from children, schools, and parents
- Children tested prior to and after watching demonstrated **improved awareness** of the dangers of irrigation infrastructure, and are able to repeat the key message **"it's never safe to swim in a water-race."**



Humour is used to explain why New Zealand needs irrigation



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"Be Water-Race Safe" now!

