



Media Statement

June 17, 2010

Irrigation NZ backs dam safety review

Irrigation NZ has welcomed the review of dam safety regulations that has put more sense into the proposed scheme.

The review recommendations include redefining large dam status, increasing efficiency and effectiveness while continuing to ensure dam safety without imposing unnecessary costs on dam owners.

The initially proposed safety regime was unnecessarily costly and complex and had the potential to force owners of small farm dams in remote areas to follow the same processes as owners of big hydro-electric dams.

Irrigation NZ (INZ) fully supported the review and is encouraged to see the resultant recommendations follow the line of INZ's suggestions.

INZ also supports moving the administration and monitoring from regional councils to a national Dam Safety Authority.

"This entire review makes a whole lot more sense of the proposed scheme. There has been a lot of smaller (low impact) dams caught up in this that will never affect anyone and the size and volume now being recommended from the review puts the overall scheme into sensible perspective," INZ chief executive Andrew Curtis said.

"It also makes good sense to centralise the administration and monitoring to the one body as there is a lot of limited expertise around the traps."

Centralisation will also reduce the overall cost of the scheme.

Curtis applauded the new timeframes that push implementation of the scheme out two years.

The scheme was to come into force on July 1.

"The delay gives time to implement the recommended changes and to fully inform scheme stakeholders," Curtis concluded.

The review recommendation redefines a large dam as one being at least eight metres high with a reservoir holding volume of 50,000 cubic metres. This change will eliminate around 36% of low impact dams from the scheme, many of which will be farm dams.

This will reduce the number of dams needing specific safety plans by about a third while still ensuring high risk dams are covered.

The costs of an initial classification for a low impact 'large dam' being estimated at \$3,000 will look to save around \$1.2 million in engineering fees alone with further savings in ongoing compliance costs.

Following the independent review of the proposed scheme earlier this year government is now planning to incorporate the recommendations to ensure dams that pose a higher risk and therefore need specific safety plans are more clearly identified.

Building and Construction Minister Maurice Williamson assures dam owners and other interested groups will be given plenty of notice of the new start date and the details of the scheme once decisions are made. Amendments are likely to go before Parliament later this year.

Further comment: INZ chief executive Andrew Curtis phone 0274 966314

Irrigation NZ

Irrigation NZ is a national body representing all irrigation interests in a unified voice to promote excellence in irrigation development and efficient water management based on the principles of responsible and sustainable water management throughout New Zealand.

