



## **Media Statement**

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### **Irrigation NZ bats for regional water authority**

A specialist body with a total focus on fresh water is the way forward to create opportunity in a fresh start for the Canterbury region says the major leader of irrigation farmers in New Zealand.

However the Creech Report from the government initiated review of Environment Canterbury's performance fails to clearly identify the responsibility for ensuring that Canterbury's potential in environmental and economic terms is realised by way of irrigated agriculture says Irrigation NZ chairman Graeme Sutton.

Neither does the report define how the effects of climate change be addressed – both aspects are mentioned as being major drivers for institutional change but the role of the proposed Canterbury Water Management Authority as listed does not include these aspects.

The Creech Report recommends the establishment of a regional water authority to implement a new water plan after revealing that ECan had botched the management of freshwater in Canterbury impacting not only on the region but the national economy.

In setting up an entirely new authority to manage water issues it is important that the vision behind the Canterbury Water Management Strategy (CWMS) is maintained for any new way forward, Sutton said.

As the major leader of irrigation farmers Irrigation NZ (INZ) strongly supports a government move to implement the recommendations of the Creech Report.

"As a major stakeholder INZ is willing and able to roll up its sleeves to help put the new Canterbury Regional Water Authority in place," Sutton said.

Change is required in order to achieve both the environmental and economic outcomes as set out in the CWMS.

"We believe that the Canterbury Water Management Strategy (CWMS) is an important work stream that needs to be incorporated into the new authority and that all the excellent work that has been achieved through this process should not be lost."

The Creech Report suggests it would be too difficult for the council itself to manage the transition to a separate water authority without creating problems of governance and accountability.

INZ supports appointed membership to the new authority.

INZ expresses concern over indication that flood protection and land management as an integral part of water resource management be left in ECan's control.

Sutton suggests that the technical inexperience of the review team and maybe in those interviewed has led to recommendation that this be left with ECan.

"The drainage boards and flood control aspects are part of the overall water resources. Land management also has significant ties to the water resource. They therefore all as a whole need to sit with the new authority."

Sutton acknowledged that INZ is encouraged by the thorough investigation into the performance of ECan under the Resource Management Act and Local Government Act.

The report recognises both the scale and significance of fresh water to the Canterbury region while also highlighting the many capability challenges the region is currently facing.

"We have been encouraged by ECan's recent positive moves to further the fresh water management challenge in the region, especially its recent leadership role in the CWMS process. However a new institutional approach could potentially create opportunity and more importantly a fresh start for the region."

With 70% of NZ's consumptive water use being in Canterbury and the often conflicting interests of stakeholders it is important that the way forward for water management enables balanced and sustainable outcomes.

The CWMS process has already shown that the region's stakeholders can work towards a common vision.

"Building on this process is vital if win-win outcomes are to be realised for Canterbury," Sutton concluded.

**Further comment: Graeme Sutton phone 0274 449673**

## **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.**