



Embargoed until 1pm, 18 October 2012

Chairman's Address to the Annual General Meeting of Irrigation NZ Inc.

18th October 2012

Ladies and gentlemen welcome to the annual general meeting of Irrigation NZ.

The last year has seen the twin issues of water quality and land management very much to the fore in provincial New Zealand, with Regional Councils responding in different ways to give effect to the Government's 2011 National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management.

There is no doubt that the nutrient limits that will emerge from the various regional council processes currently underway will pose a challenge to all farmers in future.

I am confident that the agricultural sector will respond positively to the challenge and continue to prosper. Irrigation NZ has a significant role in assisting irrigated agriculture in meeting the challenge.

Unfortunately the water quality debate has overshadowed the discussion on the strategic opportunity that water presents for New Zealand. NZ ranks second in the world in terms of its fresh water resources but has suffered from a lack of strategic investment in water infrastructure over a long period to enable us to capitalise on the resource.

With strong leadership, planning and capital investment there remains a significant opportunity to increase the area of irrigated land in NZ. This objective currently has support from Government and from a number of Regional and District Councils.

The time is right and the opportunity is now.

Many of the schemes and individual irrigators here today are very involved in delivering on this objective, investing millions of dollars in the construction of new infrastructure – everything from large water storage reservoirs to sophisticated precision controls for irrigators.

The same irrigators are also being required to take a broader role in the leadership of water infrastructure development and management in their respective regions.

I want to encourage irrigation schemes and irrigators in general to grasp this opportunity and be more active in the development of regional water infrastructure.

I acknowledge it is a difficult role, particularly in Canterbury and perhaps to a lesser extent in Otago where infrastructure developments are not greenfield, discrete projects. Instead they are being perceived as part of much bigger, regional infrastructure plans, where the integration of existing interests and infrastructure elements is not necessarily clear. The picture is further complicated by many and varied interests, both existing and new, in the water management and development space.

To hit the mark, new water infrastructure will have to be “multi-purpose”, not only supplying water for irrigation, but providing water for the environment, domestic and industrial uses, and possibly have some power generation capability.

In a number of critical areas provision of new water infrastructure will be part of the solution for managing nutrients and providing improved water quality. The existing Opuha Water scheme in South Canterbury exemplifies this approach to community water infrastructure development.

New and existing irrigators can't achieve these outcomes on their own. They will need support, including financial support to fund the significant opportunity that well planned water infrastructure development provides the wider community. Local Council and Central Government support is essential.

It will be irrigators who ultimately pay the cost of water infrastructure development (assuming it is affordable for them) but we urgently need focused resources in some regions to investigate the options in a structured and timely manner.

Existing irrigators have a wide range of skills to contribute to this process. They manage large and increasingly complex infrastructure, they understand the importance of concepts such as water supply reliability and how this impacts and drives its shareholder members. And they already occupy a prominent place in their communities, although this role is often not well understood.

Obviously schemes and water user groups need first and foremost to represent the interests of their shareholders and members, but they must also look to the future and their place in a community that is made more vibrant through access to more reliable water.

It would be a sad outcome if the opportunity to deliver regional outcomes was compromised by the lack of leadership from existing irrigators.

Over the last year, Irrigation NZ has been working with a number of strategic partners to create and deliver initiatives such as: -

- Continued advocacy for water infrastructure development
- Leadership and financial training for irrigation scheme directors
- Regular forums for existing and new schemes
- Codes of practice covering design, installation, evaluation and operation
- Practical Irrigator Operator training including:
 - Irrigation Essentials
 - Irrigation System Maintenance
 - Irrigation scheduling
 - Regulatory requirements for irrigators
- Audited Self-Management processes
- Good Management Practice definitions

These initiatives will help schemes and irrigators successfully manage to limits and drive infrastructure modernisation and development forward.

I would like to thank Andrew and the staff at INZ for their hard work and commitment during the year. Highlights included a very successful conference,

ongoing input into the Land & Water Forum process in Wellington and improved dialogue with our members – both irrigators and trade.

Also my thanks to the Members of the Board. The Organisation is fortunate to have a Board comprised of such motivated and skilled individuals who continue to work hard for the Organisation.

Graeme Sutton – refer to media statement.

John Donkers
Chairman
Irrigation NZ Inc.