



## **Chairman's Report**

### **Annual General Meeting – October 20, 2011 at Darfield**

Welcome to the 2011 annual general meeting. This past year has been another significant year for IrrigationNZ as the importance of the organisation's work continues to be well recognised in a steady membership increase, particularly in the technical and trade business area with over 130 members now signed up in the service provider and research categories.

Irrigator membership remains the big challenge, particularly bringing individual irrigators on board. Member commitment remains critical and all members have a role to play to encourage individual irrigator members. It is pleasing to note we are now making good headway in the North Island as well as in the other South Island regions outside Canterbury.

The Technical and Trade arm of IrrigationNZ has moved ahead in leaps and bounds and I pay tribute to the sector chairman Stephen McNally who has been a driving force in the success of this special interest group that has really put the legs on several key challenges including water measuring, training, the Irrigation Decision Support Package, and spearheading work on the Codes of Practice. Through this and other parallel projects the IrrigationNZ Technical and Trade Association is seeing an increased uptake of industry standards.

The IrrigationNZ Board continues to meet every six weeks with recent work including a review of the organisation's principles, goals, objectives and long-term work programmes. The board has recently put its executive committee into recess, as with a full management team and the technical and trade arm well established there is no longer a need for it.

This is my final annual report as chairman of IrrigationNZ and as I look back over my 10 years involvement on the board it is very satisfying to note the growth and stature

of the organisation that has become a well recognised and a respected voice for irrigation in New Zealand.

IrrigationNZ rapidly gained momentum as the nation's unified voice on irrigated issues contributing a positive influence on water related challenges for all irrigated agriculture in New Zealand.

There is no doubt increasing demand for water is placing New Zealand's water resources under increasing pressure – but we are confident smart planning and investment outcomes that satisfy community objectives will be reached. The impact of irrigated agriculture on water quality is now the elephant in the room for us all, however if sound science is applied to better understand the facts, issues, and solutions, and we develop and adopt new technologies, today's issues will be overcome. It's all about whether you see the glass half full or the glass half empty.

IrrigationNZ has maintained an influencing position of engagement with central and local government in the development and implementation of water policy. We have approached our business in clearly identified areas – leadership and advocacy, technical developments, communication with members, increasing membership and corporate revenue growth and liaison with other industry related groups.

Work has been prioritised on the basis of what benefits IrrigationNZ can develop for members and how best to mitigate negative effects of policy changes.

So as I reflect back to a meeting I was invited to attend in Ashburton in 2001 called by the then New Zealand Irrigation Association, a small group of enthusiastic consultants and businessmen, to reform the association to IrrigationNZ – I remember looking around and asking where are all the farmers?

The answer was instant – you! Followed by, if this organisation is going to fly we need farmers to step up to the plate. I became the first farmer board member on the re-born organisation. Clearly the balance of representation has developed over this past decade and I believe farmer/irrigator drive has played a key role in the organisation's overall success, in conjunction with the business team of very capable and focused driven staff, both past and present that have steered this ship to resounding successes and continue to pilot IrrigationNZ onwards and upwards.

IrrigationNZ is dedicated to adding value to individual irrigators' business and committed to uplifting the general level of knowledge for sustainable outcomes from water use in terms of both quantity and quality.

It has been reassuring to see government willing to move off the sideline to help secure New Zealand's primary sector space in the global market place. Future sustainable development is essential to meet market requirements for production outputs.

Water is our future and IrrigationNZ has clearly brought the water debate to the fore and played a major part in getting the government to commit in terms of the OECD and a profitable country, of which water is the critical factor. The message is simple – until we fix the economic issues we won't fix anything in the environmental book.

The Board's stand has always been to make its position known from the platform of fact and reasoned argument in the circles where important decisions are made. We have been successful in this approach as evidenced by the influence IrrigationNZ has had on the development of water policy at the central and local government levels.

An ongoing challenge for rural communities is that of changing the urban perception that farmers are polluters and not environmentalists. While there may be a few bad apples in the pack they are a small minority. The majority of farmers are proactive towards environmentalism and we have to keep focused on ensuring our city cousins get the right message. The major battle is getting the urban news media to report the good news.

On a more positive note the Canterbury Water Management Strategy is an area of significant involvement for IrrigationNZ. We can feel satisfied we have good representation on both zonal and regional committees and that didn't come without astute management on our behalf. IrrigationNZ needs to keep involved in the Strategy to ensure we get the right outcomes as progress moves into the implementation phase.

IrrigationNZ has had significant involvement in the Land and Water Forum, and Audited Self Management, while still with some way to go to get embedded, is another idea that was initiated by IrrigationNZ.

Water measuring has not been a cheap exercise for farmers but again IrrigationNZ's involvement has certainly put some economic sense into the exercise. The government was determined to do this so rather than oppose the concept IrrigationNZ has been involved in helping to shape and mould the processes as measuring is implemented.

The Canterbury Earthquake events have been a test on the organisation, both in a business and personal respect. I believe our staff have come through these traumatic times remarkably well and it was just very fortunate we had a good deal for our new premise at Sonter Road, Wigram, one week ahead of the February event, a deal we wouldn't have got one week later. It is great to see the team now well settled into their new home base away from the city centre.

Good things are happening in Canterbury and with Christchurch's economy quite clearly rural-based, irrigation is a key cog in helping the city get back on its feet. I believe IrrigationNZ is showing strong leadership in the whole water debate that is bringing about change both from an improved environmental outcome while achieving economic growth that New Zealand so desperately needs as it recovers from the economic downturn and from the Christchurch earthquake disaster.

The IrrigationNZ News magazine continues to grow from strength to strength as it provides an IrrigationNZ face to the full spectrum of the irrigation industry from irrigators to engineers, to scientists, politicians and the wider community. To ensure you are being delivered the full complement of news, views, happenings, commentary and community and irrigator experiences, in line with IrrigationNZ's growing involvement in the nation's water challenges, the December issue is moving up to a bumper 48-page magazine.

Planning for the conference and expo to be held in Timaru, April 2-4, 2012 is well underway with early indication that this 2012 event is going to be even bigger than last time. We are delighted to announce five key principal partners for this 2012 conference and expo and thank these partners – ANZ, DHI Group, Meridian Energy, Siemens and WaterForce for their support in helping to deliver this specialist irrigation industry conference in April.

I also acknowledge the support given to IrrigationNZ work by the MAF Sustainable Farming Fund, MAF Irrigation Acceleration Fund, AGMARDT and many regional councils and economic enterprises throughout New Zealand. My thanks goes also to the scheme chairs, irrigation members, government officials and Ministers for their ongoing support of IrrigationNZ.

I take this opportunity to thank our past chief executive Terry Heiler, and administrator Pat Brown for their untiring efforts in helping to establish IrrigationNZ on a firm footing in its formative years.

To our chief executive Andrew Curtis who is very successfully leading his professional team – Chris, Paul, Marilyn and Annette. They are a very capable dedicated team with a broad range of expertise and skills that continue to take the organisation to even greater heights.

To fellow board members who I have had the privilege of working with over past years, to Matt Ross as he steps aside at this meeting, and to all the current board, thank you for your untiring input and support. I wish you all the very best in the future. With two years of my tenure yet to roll over I will remain on the board as a member meantime.

The challenges relating to important water issues ahead will be no less but I have every confidence IrrigationNZ has the profile, knowledge, experience and support to meet these with increasing confidence, as a unified national body successfully representing irrigation interests and promoting excellence in irrigation right throughout New Zealand.

*Graeme Sutton*

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Chairman Irrigation NZ