

Irrigation New Zealand Chairman's Report 2015

The 2015 year has seen IrrigationNZ step up with its communication activities. Sending a message to all that irrigation has a huge role to play in building resilience for our regions, environmentally, socially and economically. This time last year we were preparing this message for a breakfast meeting with a group of Wellington “movers and shakers” from politicians to journalists. This went really well with Mark Slee and Robyn Wells assisting us to tell the full story. On the back of this success, we have continued to take up opportunities to relay positive and factual information about what is happening within the irrigation community, modernisation of old schemes and new irrigation developments, along with the technology now being used on-farm. For example, recently IrrigationNZ representatives spoke to more than 500 Christchurch residents through a series of U3A meetings. Through these, mis-informed ‘prickly’ comments quickly turn into an understanding that irrigators have moved a long way and are continuing to do so. We have some big targets to meet environmentally and we can only meet these if irrigators are financially sound. This message is by no means finished and we still have a long way to go to get the wider public behind central or local government funds to support water storage in New Zealand. IrrigationNZ has consciously spent time in Wellington in 2015 regularly meeting with politicians right across the political landscape. The challenge is to get further traction on the undeniable benefit of central government backing of water storage infrastructure. This is not yet fully over the line, but it is a conversation that IrrigationNZ will continue to push along with other primary industry partners.

IrrigationNZ also has an important role working along-side policy makers to ensure that any regulations put in place are workable - they will allow irrigators to successfully manage their businesses within agreed community expectations. Our staff are specialists, they have an applied understanding of what is workable out in the paddock and what is not. This is invaluable when you are in Wellington contributing to national processes like the Land and Water Forum, OVERSEER developments or meeting with political parties to help them develop policies that are relevant and give confidence to all.

The other barrier for the success of water storage infrastructure and irrigation is farmer uptake. We would be naive to think that a percentage of would-be irrigators will not hesitate to invest in the face of uncertainty from the current downturn in the milk pay-out. But the reality is having certainty of production is even more important when we are challenged with low product returns. Access to a reliable water supply provides an opportunity for farmers to grow more grass per hectare – the most cost effective form of feed for pastoral farmers. Alternatively reliable water and irrigation allows high value crops to be grown. Significant investment decisions should be made on long term pricing indications.

Investment in irrigation requires farmers to be confident in identifying the best on-farm irrigation system for their property and the options for utilising irrigation. As an industry we need a one-stop-shop decision support platform that pulls all the current tools, technology and knowledge together for both existing and new irrigator farmers to readily access. IrrigationNZ is looking to do just this with its proposed Irrigation SMART project which is currently applying for support from the PGP fund. The three objectives of this project are to develop a Decision Support Platform, to also Build Knowledge and Capability alongside the establishment of an Innovation Hub. While this project may be IrrigationNZ led – it will only be successful because it looks to partner with industry wide co-investors including regional government, service industry and industry good organisations. This collaboration from all sectors will create immediate buy in, agreement on the ongoing development of industry standards and tools and enable the utilisation of existing pathways for extension and technology uptake back out to farmers. Irrigation is such a good fit for PGP funding because we can clearly demonstrate the benefit, not just to the agricultural sector, but also for our regions and

New Zealand wide – economically, socially and environmentally. Training and professional development is another important role for IrrigationNZ, alongside delivering Irrigation workshops to over 500 people a year, we can now offer nationally recognised qualifications in Design, Performance Assessment and Irrigation Management. This has been an exciting and significant milestone achieved in 2015.

I would like to thank my fellow directors for all their time and commitment over the last 12 months but of particular note is the huge thank you to our two retiring directors Ian McIndoe and Dan Bloomer. Both these directors have been on the board of IrrigationNZ for over 15 years and have been relentless in the push to ensure that our members are equipped with the very best information, research and access to training. Their input, guidance and leadership of the irrigation industry is nothing short of outstanding and I wish both all the very best for their endeavours ahead.

Andrew Curtis and the extremely capable team at IrrigationNZ has continued to deliver on the challenges we put in front of them for 2015. We really appreciate the significant time and effort they all give their roles within IrrigationNZ, but also the belief they all have in the pursuit of promoting excellence in irrigation.

I wish all IrrigationNZ members good luck for the 2015/16 irrigation season ahead and a happy and safe Christmas and New Year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicky Hyslop', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nicky Hyslop
Chairwoman
Irrigation New Zealand