

Distinguished career spans four decades

A cadetship in soil and water led John Young into a water career spanning more than 40 years. **Annette Scott** reports.

As John Young recalls the earlier days of his water-focused career, the satisfaction he has drawn from his work is evident. He is passionate, full of enthusiasm, challenge driven, but clearly humble.

John was honoured by IrrigationNZ at its recent conference, inducted to the organisation with life membership for his contribution to the irrigation industry. The honorary membership recognised a long service of input and expertise that has impacted on the success of IrrigationNZ and the wider industry.

“But that is not just about me,” says the humbled trouper. “It’s not just an honour that reflects what I have done but what those around me and the team have done. I am one of the cogs.”

While the honorary recognition acknowledged his present work as team leader water metering with Environment Canterbury and his immediate past position as manager of Rangitata Diversion Race Management Ltd (RDRL) in Mid Canterbury. His passion for work in water and soil goes back to his teens and has led to a most distinguished career.

John started work at ECan in 2008 specifically to implement national policy around water metering and lead the regional water metering team. There was the challenge of 8500 consents to be metered. Consent holders were making good progress and in part that was due to John’s style, ECan chair of commissioners Dame Margaret Bazley said.

“John has championed a pragmatic approach setting us up in a role of technical assistants who provide sound advice. I really appreciate his way of getting out and making things happen,” Dame Margaret said. What John set up in Canterbury has now been adopted by IrrigationNZ and used nationally.

John was the manager of RDRML for 14 years. He ran the company through some testing and challenging times, in particular the nine year re-consenting process of the RDR operation, and the Rangitata Water Conservation Order. In both processes the company’s interests were protected and enhanced. “Thanks in no small measure to



Dame Margaret Bazley looks on as John Young (right) receives the honorary life membership award from IrrigationNZ chief executive Andrew Curtis

John’s extensive knowledge of the catchment and river systems of both the Rangitata and Ashburton Rivers, “RDRML chief executive Ben Curry acknowledged.

As a hydrologist his professional experience and expertise was an enormous asset to the company. He instigated many different processes to improve the operational efficiency of the running of the race, but it was his innate good natured character and sense of humour that was his most disarming facet as he was able to deal so effectively with characters across the water industry landscape.

John worked particularly hard to foster a good working relationship with Fish and Game. He established a sound baseline for scientific studies into the number of salmonids that were potentially entrained into the RDR from the Rangitata River. The results of those studies are still being used. In devising methodologies for excluding fish from the RDR, John brought the Bioacoustic fish fence into operation in the race, the first in New Zealand.

John left RDRML in late 2007. “Fortunately for me, John has been a

constant source of encyclopaedic knowledge of local water matters and issues further afield. He is always keen to help and without his assistance my training wheels would have stayed on for quite some time. I owe him a debt of gratitude,” Ben said.

From the day when John started his five-year hydrology cadetship with the Ministry of Works as an assistant water and soil officer in Invercargill, he has worked continuously in the industry. His varied roles also include a stint with the Waitaki Catchment Commission. Other project involvements include the Manapouri hydro scheme, Maniototo and Kakanui irrigation schemes and to Wellington with the MOW where he was responsible for the investigation team looking at power opportunities for NZ. He was instrumental in the re-launch of IrrigationNZ in 2001.

“I did plan to do a geology degree but the cadetship started and this is where it has taken me,” John said as he fondly recalled his 40 plus years in the industry. “And I have enjoyed every minute of it.”