

We're all in this together to make a difference

By Tania Butterfield.

When Waimakariri Zone Manager Andrew Arps was 18 years old, someone asked him "What is the legacy you'd like to leave?"

"My immediate response was 'a park', but I didn't mean a nicely presented park, but rather something like a national park – something that has a big impact on the environment."

Decades later, Andrew believes he's now on the road to fulfilling this dream.

"I look at Waimakariri as being my backyard and I want to put in a positive change throughout the district. This is the 'park' I want to leave behind."

Andrew and his wife Marina moved into Waimakariri district after their home was destroyed in the February 2011 earthquake.

"My wife and I had always talked about one day getting a piece of land. That one day came because of the earthquake."

While Andrew says he had always enjoyed the outdoors and nature, moving to a rural property brought about a greater sense of appreciation and awareness of the impact development has on it.

So when a neighbour encouraged him to attend a meeting held by the Waimakariri Water Zone Committee to discuss water management in the district, Andrew went.

"That piqued my interest and shortly afterwards this job [for the Waimakariri Zone Manager] popped up in the paper and I thought this works really well – I was looking for something quite connected and working in the environment in which I was living."

The new position within Environment Canterbury was created as part of the zone teams who work on the ground with land owners and the community to protect and enhance the environment.

Andrew was appointed as the Waimakariri Zone Manager two years ago.

The move could be viewed as a completely different direction from his career in marketing and management for brands such as Cadbury, Black & Decker and Vodafone, but Andrew says the skills he learnt in those positions – which included dressing up as Cookie Bear to promote Griffin's products – are all relevant.



Waimakariri Zone Manager Andrew Arps says he wants to make positive change in his backyard.

"What's important in all these positions is the power of building relationships, and not just to say 'Giddy', but to take the time to understand somebody and learn a couple of things about them helps build those connections.

"Invariably if you end up bumping to those people again at a later point in life they might be more willing to help you out or vice versa because you've taken the time to know who they are, and what their values are and recognise the aligned values."

This desire to build relationships with those in the district is one reason you won't find Andrew sitting behind a desk at Environment Canterbury's Tuam Street office.

"My aim is to spend only a third of my time at a desk so I've become a nomad, and happy to do so."

One of the most enjoyable parts of his job is working with others within Environment Canterbury.

"Coming to Environment Canterbury you realise there are a lot of great people here who are very passionate about doing the right thing and about their particular interest. In business, people are often not necessarily working for something they're passionate about – they're passionate about the pay packet but not about the role.

"There are some days where I go 'Heck – I get paid for this!' and it's great. You're having fun, connecting with people, progressing

things, having a positive influence and things are moving forward."

Outside of work, Andrew and his wife run wedding business, Harpers Homestead, which has been rated in the top ten wedding venues in New Zealand.

The key to its success – "It's about creating a great experience and the little things count".

"We're quite active hosts – keeping an eye on the rhythm and structure of the day.

"Recently we had a wedding, and just as the ceremony was about to start, a chainsaw started up next door. I ended up jumping on the mountain bike to go tell them to stop for a minute. I sort of felt like I should be wearing a cape – going to save the day and as I came back I got a little applause.

"I also have a tradition of getting an old piece of cardboard from the shed and writing 'Just Married' on it and putting it on the couple's car the next day. It's just these little things that add to the experience."

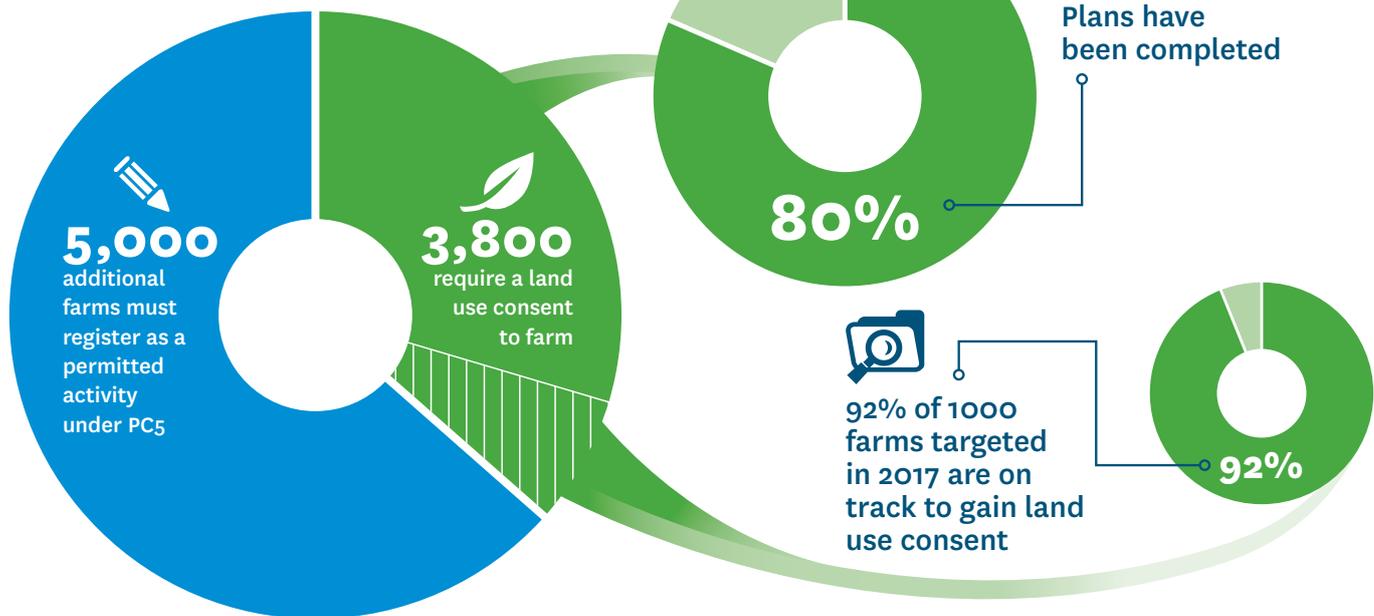
And while the wedding business will see him through retirement, Andrew's passion currently remains with getting people engaged in looking after the environment in their backyard.

"We're all in this together. We may appear to have differing views, but when you nut it down, you'll find we all want similar things. With that in mind, together we can really make a difference."

Proactive approach drives on-farm environmental improvements

By Chelsea Halliwell

8,800 farms in Canterbury



As Canterbury's Land and Water Regional Plan approaches its sixth birthday, a unique approach from Environment Canterbury is helping farmers to meet some of the toughest farming rules in New Zealand.

Back in 2012, nutrient restrictions were virtually unheard of. Guidance on appropriate levels of nutrient losses from farms, and their impacts, and good management practices were scarcely available. Environmental requirements on farmers were unconnected, and enforcement was isolated.

The Land and Water Regional Plan (LWRP), in 2012 introduced consent to farm requirements based on nutrient allocation zones, farm size, and nitrogen loss rates. The rules were based on industry-agreed Good Management Practices, and designed to improve water quality by enforcing limits to protect the water resource.

SUPPORTING CHANGE

To meet the LWRP requirements, Environment Canterbury developed a groundbreaking new programme to support farmers and their industry bodies in making the required changes.

Environment Canterbury has been in touch with thousands of farmers across the region, advising of the new requirements, offering support both directly and through industry bodies, and following up.

Chief Operating Officer Nadeine Dommissie says that by undertaking active follow-ups, the council is ensuring that farmers are left in no doubt about the steps they need to take.

"This is complex stuff. Farmers need to prepare a nutrient budget, create a farm environment plan, apply for land use consent, and be regularly audited, so it takes some time

to get your head around. We're making the process as straightforward as we can through a programme which reaches each farmer several times, following up with phone calls and visits to those who haven't taken action."

Nadeine says that both farmers and industry have both stepped up to embrace the changes, with community-wide collective engagement making a real difference.

"I'm yet to meet a farmer unconcerned about the state they leave their land in for future generations. Farmers know that society's land stewardship expectations will continue to rise. Whether it's from the local community, or the international market, respect for the environment is paramount, and most farmers are determined to do the right thing.

"Here in Canterbury, we believe that everyone can be part of the solution. Our zone committees are made up of concerned and

engaged citizens from all sorts of backgrounds, who want to use their skills and knowledge to address the problems, and be the change. It's not about attributing blame; rather, it's about moving forward together," she says.

REALISING THE RESULTS

Of the 8800 farms in Canterbury, 3800 require a land use consent to farm. The remaining 5000 farms must register their activities, and many of these are required to have their farm environment plan independently audited on a regular basis.

With many farmers to reach, Environment Canterbury has been focusing on the highest impact farms first. Nadeine explains that the priority has been those with more than 50 hectares of irrigated land.

"We've had some excellent results in this target group, with 92% of these farms now on track to gain their land use consent. Many are on waitlists, and we will continue to follow up with them to check their progress," she says.

"We also now have more than 3000 farm environment plans in place, with a high level of compliance from the early audits of these. Each of these require farmers to identify the environmental risks on their properties, outline their Good Management Practices across the farm, and outline the actions they need to implement. Each is then audited on their progress against these actions," says Nadeine.

Environment Canterbury is the first council in New Zealand to introduce a comprehensive audit certification programme, allowing full transparency, consistency and robustness of farm environment plan auditing.

"We advise farmers to use the Good Management Practices guidelines, which provide industry-agreed advice on improving water quality by managing contaminants such as nitrogen, phosphorus, sediment, and faecal material," adds Nadeine.

Many farmers find that their farm environment plan becomes a useful management tool across the farm. The plan brings previously isolated but important areas together, presenting them as one farm system, and leading to simpler resource allocation before environmental issues become a problem.

LEADING THE WAY – THE SELWYN CATCHMENT

First off the starting blocks in Canterbury was the Selwyn catchment, just on the outskirts of Christchurch. The state of Selwyn's rivers, streams and Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere left a lot to be desired, and a large package of work is underway in the area to address water quality and quantity issues.

The first priority for Environment Canterbury were the 900 farms in the catchment. In the last 12 months, Environment Canterbury has offered regular drop in sessions, shed meetings, and one on one contact with farmers.

Selwyn Zone Manager Michaela Rees says that a whole of community effort has had an enormous impact.

"Our intention was to take the unknown out of these responsibilities for local farmers. Everybody here wants things to improve, and our approach has been guided by the zone committee which led the regulatory process. By taking the time to talk widely first, and regulate second, we've now achieved the support of the majority of farmers here," she says.

The results are evidence of this. As of this February, only two farmers remain in the initial target group, and Environment Canterbury's focus shifts to the next priority, farms in the cultural values and lower phosphorus risk area.

In January, Environment Minister David Parker visited the Selwyn area to observe the work in action.

The Minister discussed the vision, practical work, efforts to restore water quality, and implications of the rules on farming operations in the catchment.

It was a positive trip, with the Minister reporting that he believed Canterbury and Bay of Plenty are two regions nationally that are making good progress on water management, and that it gave him a lot to think about.

CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

As we enter 2018, Environment Canterbury's programme will widen to include further farms.

Nadeine says that the focus is firmly on sustainable management.

"That means a process of continual improvement, which is going to be increasingly demanded, whether by your neighbours or a buyer in a far-off country. The regulations on farmers now are designed to help them to continually identify areas for improvement, and to prioritise these improvements," she says.

"This is a long term programme, and we've started from a place where water quality limits weren't even on the agenda.

"This was all new for farmers, so it's extremely heartening to see them stepping up in large numbers right across Canterbury.

"In the coming years, audits and compliance visits will ramp up, and so will the positive impacts on the environment. The strong results we're seeing today are just the beginning," says Nadeine.



Hon David Parker visited the Selwyn catchment with representatives from the Te Waihora Co-Governors, the Selwyn Waihora Zone Committee, and Environment Canterbury Councillors and staff.

Community to decide future management of the Kaiapoi River

Waimakariri Zone Manager Andrew Arps discusses the complex issues behind high salinity levels recorded in the Kaiapoi River. He says there are a mix of factors working together to produce the current situation, including the unique tidal relationship between the Kaiapoi River and the Waimakariri River.

The Kaiapoi River is the heart of the community for local people and that's why the Waimakariri Zone Committee has been investigating water quality issues raised by residents for the past three years.

Scientific investigations carried out by Environment Canterbury have shown high salt water intrusions as far up the river as the railway bridge. This has shown that salt water levels reached 75 percent for periods of up to four weeks between February and July this year.

What I find particularly interesting is the complexity of the forces at work along the river and the impact of the Waimakariri River on the Kaiapoi River. We have a mix of factors working together to produce the current situation including: irrigation, historical river issues such as industrial pollution, climate change, low rainfall, dry summers, the impact of earthquakes and natural issues including the unique influence of the Waimakariri River on the Kaiapoi River.

Like most locals, I'm aware that the Kaiapoi River used to be the north branch

of the Waimakariri River but I didn't realise quite how unique this river system actually is compared to other rivers throughout New Zealand and the world.

The two rivers are inextricably linked so that when there are low flows in the Waimakariri there isn't enough power to push the saltwater back, however when there are high flows in the Waimakariri, the amount of salt water coming up the Kaiapoi River is limited.

Now that we have the scientific data, the real question is, "what does the local community want to see happen with the Kaiapoi River?". As I see it we have two options, we can either fight what has already happened or we can accept the situation and start having conversations about where to go from here.

The Waimakariri Zone Committee, Kaiapoi River Rehabilitation Group, Waimakariri District Council, local community boards and Ngai Tahu have been working on a number of proposals for improving the Kaiapoi River since 2014.

These include: creating wetlands, removing sediment from the main channel, increasing inanga habitat, realigning the inner bank at Charles/Smith Street corner, planting channels to increase river flow, excavating an improved navigational channel, controlling willows and replanting with natives. These proposals went out for public consultation and feedback earlier this year.

I would encourage everyone in the community to get involved in these discussions – go along to your local community board meetings, pop into your council and provide feedback, and attend the Waimakariri Zone Committee meetings.

The only way we are going to make progress to improve the Kaiapoi River and all Waimakariri waterways is by sitting around the table together and having constructive conversations where we all get to express our views and find the best way forward by working together. After all, one thing we can all agree on is that we need to take action to improve our waterways for future generations to enjoy.



Kaiapoi River.



Kaiapoi residents gather to discuss options for improving local waterways at a public meeting organised by the Waimakariri Water Zone Committee.