

THE RON COCKS MEMORIAL AWARD

FOR OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP IN IRRIGATION

Sid Hurst

Ron Cocks Memorial Award Winner 2008

North Otago farmer Sid Hurst's innovation in the community, as a leader with passion and enthusiasm, determination and drive to succeed for wider community and national gain, his willingness to pass on his experience and knowledge – his inspiration, innovation, enthusiasm and philosophies have been a huge influence on irrigation up and down New Zealand.

In honour of his influence in the irrigation industry Irrigation New Zealand honoured Sid with the organisation's inaugural award in an official presentation at the IrrigationNZ conference in 2008.

Humbled and with much gratitude Sid shares a few words.

"I am sure there are others more deserving," he modestly begins.

"Nothing succeeds like a change" – a lasting philosophy of Dr Sid Hurst and a key driver in his pursuit for irrigated agriculture.

A farmer with some of the greatest experience of the mighty Waitaki River Sid was the pioneer of ambitious irrigation schemes that breathed life into North Otago communities in the 1960's and 70's. He was committed to finding reliable and affordable sources of irrigation water as the catalyst to ongoing increased farm production.

Sid is modest about the progressive growth he pioneered through his intensive involvement in numerous farming and water related groups and organisations.

He is disappointed that there are so many obstacles stifling irrigation growth and development today.

"It's bureaucracy gone berserk. There is too much emphasis on trying to stop development rather than getting development going. We had no problem at all in the 60's and 70's, no such thing as objectors. I think they have got a place but that place is being overdone."

Very much a gentleman Sid went about business in a quiet manner with passionate enthusiasm that earned respect where ever he dared to paddle.

Irrigation schemes he initiated are testament to the ability of private landowners to work cooperatively and imaginatively with local government and the private sector in order to deliver substantial infrastructure. His model followed by the rest of the country.

Sid began his farming life on a drought prone hill country farm at Corriedale in the North Otago region. Frustrated with the dry and with an appetite whetted by a small



irrigation project developed by his father on the Lower Waitaki Plain, Sid recognised the value in irrigation and set out to follow the water.

His practices in farming, particularly from dryland to establishing irrigation opportunities were revolutionary in their time. He established his own irrigation scheme under the "60's policy", policy designed and administered by the government for border irrigation systems and set water allocation.

Sid was committed to the ongoing battle with councils and regulations. His passion for water, his patience and determination combined with his practical experience eventually paid off.

Under Sid's leadership The Lower Waitaki Irrigation Scheme was achieved

in 1968. Water was delivered to the farm gate. The scheme's worth was recognised with the Lower Waitaki becoming a national model.

The downturn in farming in the 1980's prompted the government to sell the Waitaki scheme to the farmers. This signalled the opportunity for ongoing irrigation development. The Waitaki scheme became the catalyst for the irrigation of 18,000 hectares of land in the Lower Waitaki Plains.

"I still think the lesson learned from that 1960's policy to develop irrigation was not only good for farmers but the government too. If we had not had that policy we would not be where we are today."

Sid's leadership and director roles include involvement in Federated Farmers, the Lower Waitaki Irrigation Scheme, the Canterbury based Fereday Irrigation schemes and North Otago Downlands irrigation scheme. He was a member of the National Water and Soil Council Board making national decisions on irrigation and water allocation. His two decades of service on the Lincoln College Council were recognised with an honorary Doctorate.

His farming involvement covers the field from dairy, sheep and beef, horticulture and viticulture to beekeeping and deer. At 90 years of age Sid continues to actively farm in a family partnership on a 2000 hectare North Otago property milking 2000 cows and running 3000 beef cattle and 3000 fine wool Merinos.

