



David Viles
Project Manager
Hurunui Community Water Development Project

30 May 2006

Re: Request for Feedback

Dear David,

Thank you for giving the New Zealand Recreational Canoeing Association (NZRCA) the opportunity to comment on the Hurunui Community Water Development Project, affecting the Hurunui, a major whitewater resource for paddlers, especially those from the Canterbury region. The NZRCA is the national body representing whitewater kayakers and canoeists in New Zealand, and has the mandate from the New Zealand Canoe Federation to represent all paddlers on conservation and access issues.

Without concrete options on the table it is difficult to comment definitively on the proposed scheme. However, the NZRCA would like to make the following comments for your consideration:

- a) **Usage:** The Hurunui River is one of the most used whitewater kayaking rivers in the South Island, particularly for Canterbury kayakers.
 - In the last River Survey completed in the early nineties, the Upper Hurunui was in the top 10 sections nationally for trips per paddler. Also, highlighting its significance in the region, 75% of paddlers on the Hurunui were from Canterbury.
 - Graham Charles in the canoeing guidebook "New Zealand Whitewater" writes "Flowing through an isolated subalpine valley, much of the attraction of the Hurunui lies in its easy, yet enjoyable rapids with excellent eddies for teaching and learning. It is Canterbury's most used beginner river, the first whitewater trip for countless neophyte Canterbury paddlers, site of many slalom and training sessions, and a good hang out to escape the city scene."
 - It is the only medium grade river which regularly flows close to Christchurch and as such is an essential element of progression to harder water. For many people, Maori Gully is their first Grade 3 section.
- b) **Value:** At present the river is characterised by a fairly dynamic flow. Importantly, the character of the Hurunui River (particularly below the South Branch) changes with different flows and this produces substantial differences in the canoeing experience. On this river particularly, any scheme which results in smoothed flows (i.e., fewer low and high flows) will destroy many of the characteristics of the river which makes it so highly valued by kayakers i.e., a natural flow regime is strongly preferred by kayakers.



- As a generalisation, in summer when flows are low, the river has many defined drops and the rapids are tight and technical in nature. In high flows, the river is a veritable roller coaster, with many standing waves and holes but few defined drops. However, note that flow differences need not always be large for the canoeing experience to change significantly – for instance, between 10 and 60 cumecs, the river changes are noticeable even in 5 cumec increments.
 - In the River Use survey mentioned previously, the Hurunui was rated only slightly less important than the Rangitata Gorge for which there is a Water Conservation Order.
 - The Hurunui River has a dynamic river bed which regularly changes after high flows adding further interest to kayakers.
- c) **River Ecology:** Smoothed flows may also have detrimental effects on the river ecology e.g.,
- Kayakers, like all river users, are significantly affected by the recent invasion of the Didymo organism. It is our understanding that Didymo is more likely to prosper when there are fewer “flushes” as is likely to occur under the proposed scheme.
 - As an example, this year, the whole river had a long period of low stable flows with few flushes. It is likely that this contributed to a situation where the river bed was covered in a thick coating of green filamentous algae for many kilometres.
 - We also have concerns for water quality, particularly on the lower Hurunui, due to more intense agriculture in the catchment.
- d) **Multiple sections:** We would also note that there are multiple sections on the Hurunui, as well as sections on the South Branch and North Esk which have whitewater value.

We appreciate the ability to comment on the proposed scheme and as an interested party would appreciate being continually updated on any developments as they arise.

Please contact me if I can be of further help.

Yours sincerely,

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