



Whitewater Canoe Club (Inc), PO Box 4476, Christchurch

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Evidence regarding the Central Plains Water Trust applications for Resource Consent to take and use water from the Rakaia and Waimakariri Rivers, and related applications.

10 June 2008

Introduction

1. My name is Graeme John Wilson.
2. This presentation is on behalf the Whitewater Canoe Club (WWCC). I am a past president of the WWCC and currently vice president and conservation officer. Our club has around 200 members, who vary in age from mid-late teens to some in their sixties and seventies. Membership is growing each year. The WWCC is based in Christchurch, and our members paddle a wide range of rivers, primarily in the Canterbury, West Coast, Buller and Otago regions. The WWCC has been in existence for approximately thirty years. We are affiliated to the New Zealand Recreational Canoeing Association (NZRCA) and are providing this evidence jointly with the NZRCA.

Lack of consultation

3. We note that the applicant has not consulted with the WWCC in preparing its applications, including its assessment of environmental effects, despite our club's significant size and the extent of our usage of the Waimakariri, and the severe impact that the scheme will have on our activities.

Use of the Waimakariri by the Whitewater Canoe Club

4. Every year we run beginner courses and introduce around twenty new paddlers to the sport. Typically our courses are over-subscribed, but given the volunteer and non-profit nature of the courses we are limited in our ability to effectively introduce even more paddlers to the sport. We also focus our courses on aspiring whitewater paddlers rather than multisporters, but some of our graduates engage in multisport as well as whitewater paddling, and others come to whitewater paddling through multisport.
5. We use the Waimakariri as a training river to get people comfortable on moving water, and to give them some experience in boily or turbulent water where braids come together or on the places where the river pushes close to a bank. In places where the river deepens and pools novice paddlers can practice their Eskimo rolls.
6. A lot of this instruction is given by club members who "buddy-up" with new paddlers immediately after the courses are finished, and escort them down the river. Such is the relatively safe nature of the Waimakariri River that frequently this support is one-on-one, and the usual cardinal rule of paddling in a group with a minimum of four paddlers need not apply. Given the closeness of the river to Christchurch, an after-work run is possible, or late in the day on a weekend – it is not necessary to spend an entire day, and consequently time can be given without being overly demanding on the instructor.
7. WWCC members also make substantial use of the Waimakariri River outside of the formal club setting, and as a club we run a five race series on the lower Waimakariri River during the winter. These matters will be addressed in more detail later within this evidence.

Personal use of the Waimakariri

8. I am a recent convert to kayaking, and have been paddling now for four years. I generally paddle whitewater up to grade 3, with an occasional grade 3+. Unlike many of the other kayaking presenters, I am not currently a multisport paddler and I do not take part in the various races which take place on the Waimakariri. However, I do make use of the Waimakariri during evenings and weekends, particularly during winter months, to keep paddling.

9. The Waimakariri at any time of year is a wonderful place to paddle. I usually paddle the lower river from near McLean's Island down to the SH1 bridge. I can be at the put-in for the run twenty minutes after leaving home, and home in less than ten minutes once I'm loaded at the takeout. The Waimakariri is an incredibly valuable resource. The proximity of the river to Christchurch enables paddlers, me included, to run the river after work or in the evening, which greater distance would preclude.



10. I've crunched across ice on cold winter mornings – for a while, a friend and I regularly put in at around 8am on Saturday mornings as she started work at 11.00. I've run the river on winter afternoons, looking up the river valley behind me and seeing the snow on the mountains.
11. In the summer, an evening paddle after work is wonderful recreation – right on my doorstep. During winter, when days are short and other rivers become riskier due to cold and access difficulties, a local river like the Waimakariri is fantastic.
12. Other than in a flood, the water is clean and clear. At normal flows, the Waimakariri is a safe river. At the moment, the greatest hazards are the willows and the flood protection works, both of which can result in a person or boat becoming pinned above or below the surface. The lower river lacks whitewater features, but is still a very nice paddle.
13. It is extremely therapeutic paddling down a river – it does not have to provide a substantial adrenalin rush to be beneficial. The greatest challenge usually comes where braids run together and create turbulence, where the water pushes sharply into banks, or where the river dangerously pushes into willows, creating a nasty hazard best avoided. There are very few in-stream rocks to create whitewater features. I have paddled the river at flows from around 40 cubic metres per second (cumecs) to more than 150 cumecs. I have found that flows below 60 cumecs are a trial, and result in me having to portage (carry) my boat around shallow sections of braids, or to cross to different braids as the section dries up. I may also need to push with my hands or paddle to achieve forward motion. These days I am reluctant to paddle on the Waimakariri at flows of less than 60 cumecs as I know that I'll scrape my way down.



14. I don't know if I'm going to be paddling whitewater in twenty or thirty years time, but I expect that I'll still be keen to run the Waimakariri at that stage of my life.

Types of use of the Waimakariri by kayakers

15. Our club members paddling on the Waimakariri use a wide variety of kayaks. I typically paddle a kayak which is about 2.4m in length, which is also the boat which I most often use when running white water. Other club members use a wide variety of boats, but most typically they will either use their whitewater boats; a sea kayak; or a multisport boat or down-river race boat (I will use the terms "multisport boat" and "down-river race boat" interchangeably).
16. Each of these types of boats has its particular attraction and shortfalls for running a river like the Waimakariri. White water boats are typically shorter, broader and much slower than their longer counterparts. However, they trade that for increased manoeuvrability and robustness. A white water boat is typically turned by a combination of the use of the paddle and by edging the boat in the direction of the intended turn. Conversely, a longer boat is considerably faster, but narrower and less stable unless moving at speed. To aid turning, many sea kayaks and down river race boats have attached rudders which trail behind the kayak and are controlled by foot pedals. To save weight, many down river race boats are made from fibreglass or a variety of glass composites which do not react well to being scraped along the bottom of rivers. Modern sea kayaks and white water boats are typically made of various plastics and have greater tolerance for an occasional encounter with the river bottom or an in-stream rock.
17. Within our club we have paddlers who only ever paddle whitewater of considerable difficulty – at the grade 4 or 5 level on the international scale. Yet most club members will not ever reach these heights, or even aspire to do so. At the top end the rivers are harder and more dangerous, and the required skill level rises. To paddle at that level, to keep skills finely honed, the top paddlers must paddle regularly at that level. On those rivers risks increase markedly and the penalty for error can be severe – or fatal.
18. Other than at times of flood, the Waimakariri River is not of that type. Instead, it is a river which is suited to multisport and down-river paddling, allowing the multi-sport paddlers to generate speed and race against themselves as individuals, the clock, and other competitors, or to train with multiple runs. For example, the 12 km stretch from near McLean's Island where the pylons cross the river down to the main SH1 bridge can be paddled in under an hour in a multisport boat, but takes me closer to two hours in my white water boat.
19. It is well also suited as a river for instruction and as a great introduction to river running – whether white water or racing or any of the other forms of kayaking. Many of our club members run the river from time to time as part of their physical and mental health regimes – it's great exercise in a magnificent environment, and although it lacks the adrenaline of serious white water it still suits many people. A club member recently told me that every time she gets on the river it scares her, and yet she recently completed the Coast to Coast. Kayaking challenges us mentally and physically. We develop skills – paddling skills, river-reading skills; and learn to make risk assessments and judgements. Kayaking takes us places with stunning scenery, which can often only be seen from the river. A friend's website says: *I love being around water, to see the light on the water, to look into the water and watch the rocks slide by beneath my boat, to taste the cool clear water and really feel alive and part of this world.* I concur with his view.
20. Non-racing kayakers paddle various stretches of both the Rakaia and the Waimakariri. Although both rivers lack serious white water – at normal flows they are grade 2-2+ maximum – they are still great rivers to paddle. Most years we have a club trip on the Rakaia Gorge, where we paddle down to the Gorge Bridge. The big volume of the Rakaia provides big water experience for paddlers, who must avoid bluffs and the swirly water which builds up on the bluffs and spills out into the river channel. Such water has the ability to tip a paddler and pull them under briefly, hopefully before resurfacing and rolling upright. At other times we paddle the upper Waimakariri from Woodstock down to the gorge bridge. As the river closes in at the gorge the bluffs can be exciting! There is a nice play-wave about 500m above the gorge bridge to which I'm keen to return to and have a play on.

21. Because of the lack of speed of our whitewater boats the longer stretches – eg, the Coast to Coast route from the Mt White Bridge down – are more the domain of multisporters and sea kayakers than white water paddlers in our club setting, although the Mt White trip could certainly be undertaken as an overnighter by a group in whitewater boats. A trip by club members was planned in early 2008 before low flows cancelled the trip. However, as a club we also have a large number of paddlers who have multisport or DR boats and they paddle those stretches in small groups or individually outside of the club's trip calendar.

Sections of the Waimakariri used by kayakers

22. The key sections of the Waimakariri used for paddling are:
- Mt White bridge down to Woodstock
 - Woodstock down to the Gorge bridge
 - The lower section, from either The Willows (Thompsons Road – 25km upstream of the SH1 bridge) or McLean's Island (where the Transpower pylons cross the river – 12 km upstream of the bridge) down to the SH1 bridge.
23. The upper section of around 70km from Mount White Bridge down to the Waimakariri Gorge Bridge is the course used by the Coast to Coast and by Arawa's Classic river race. This section ends with 10km of braids from Woodstock down to the Gorge Bridge, which is also able to be conveniently paddled in white water boats rather than race boats.
24. Serious training for these races commences in spring and continues throughout summer, and there are trips provided by commercial enterprises which introduce paddlers to the route prior to their big day. As well as training, the runs act as a reconnaissance for competitors who also learn what is around each corner and where the best (and worst) lines are. Typically the "best" routes are flow-dependent so paddlers will intentionally try a meet a variety of flow conditions.
25. The upper river offers a long run from alpine surroundings down to the plains, and has an element of a wilderness experience. The trip is a combination of braided streams as well as some more demanding rapids, such as Hamilton's Rapid, which can "break" boats, paddles and paddlers, and turbulent water in the gorges bouncing off or piling onto bluffs and creating eddies and swirly water. As mentioned above, it's an overnight trip in a white water boats, but can be completed in a much faster time in a race boat (around four hours, for the faster kayakers).
26. The final section – McLean's Island down to the SH1 bridge is the stretch used for our Brass Monkey races series, which I will describe later in this evidence. In spring the Arawa club also runs race series on this lower section.
27. At a low flow the lower river can either flow in a single, narrow channel, or it may spread out over a number of braids. Often the deeper water is up against the edge of the river bank, and consequently pushes into willows, creating a strainer hazard as a boat or swimmer can be pinned either above or below water. If passage is too dangerous due to the presence of willows, or the braids dry out due to low flows and a lack of concentration of the available water in the river, then carrying (portaging) the kayak is often the only option.



28. For many years my only real knowledge of the Waimakariri was the view I would get driving over either of the two bridges heading north out of Christchurch, or returning to Christchurch. The deep wide river visible in a single channel under the bridge is not representative of the river even a kilometre or so upstream, as the available water distributes itself across channels and runs in the river bed itself. As I stated earlier, even at around 60 cumecs – or around 20 cumecs above Ecan’s existing minimum flow for all irrigation takes – channel choice can make for a very frustrating scrape along the stones.

Whitewater Canoe Club member survey

29. I have conducted a survey of WWCC club members to gauge their views of the parts of the Waimakariri they use; how often they use it; when in the year they use it; when in the week they use it; and what flows they prefer. I have previously conducted surveys within the club, and regrettably the response rates have not been tremendous. On this occasion, we received over 34 responses from club members, 5 of whom do not make use of the Waimakariri.
30. Of the 29 respondents who do paddle the Waimakariri, 22 specifically stated their preferred minimum flows in the lower section as measured at the SH1 bridge are:
31. Of the 22 responses:
- The minimum desired flow in the lower section named by one person was 35 cumecs
 - A further three stated 50 cumecs as being their preferred minimum flow
 - A further eight stated 60 cumecs as being their preferred minimum flow
 - A further six stated 80 cumecs as being their preferred minimum flow
 - A further two stated 100 cumecs as being their preferred minimum flow
 - A further one stated 140 cumecs as being their preferred minimum flow
 - A further one stated 250 cumecs as being their preferred minimum flow.
32. The most common section paddled by WWCC members is the lower section, from the Pylons down to the SH1 bridge.

33. It is also important to note that our members use the other sections of the river too.
34. Significantly, they paddle the river all year around – some, including myself, make more use of the river in the winter; some make more use in the summer, and others paddle it all year around.
35. Most also report using the river throughout the week – our use is not restricted to just weekends.
36. The group who responded reported collectively paddling the river a minimum of 588 times per annum – an average of just over twenty times each per annum.
37. Based on the survey, minimum flows of between 60 and 80 are the preferred minimum flow. Upper ranges vary from paddler to paddler, with some citing up to 500 cumecs or more as being within an upper limit. Most respondents reported an upper range of somewhere around the 150-200 cumec mark. The disadvantages of low flows include:
 - slow or very slow paddling along the river
 - channels drying up, with water running under the bed
 - a need to stop paddling and push with hands or paddle to sustain forward movement
 - a need to get out and carry the boat to another channel some distance away
 - concentration of water in a few braids, bringing other river users – particularly jet boats – into close contact with paddlers
 - concentration of water along the edges of the river, and willow-infested banks, which are a trap for paddlers
 - an inability to manoeuvre a kayak at speed
 - an inability to perform correcting strokes
 - an inability to roll the kayak to self-rescue
 - an inability to perform a paddle stroke to an appropriate depth
 - damage to hulls, rudders and paddle blades.



38. In short – at low flows of less than the 60-80 cumec threshold, the river is less enjoyable, potentially more dangerous, and damage to equipment will also result.
39. We recognise that under a large water extraction scheme that the Waimakariri will simply run below our desired paddling levels more often, and that water levels will be at or below the existing 41 cumec minimum flow restriction much more often.
40. We are aware of and endorse the work which the NZRCA has performed in reviewing minimum flow levels as they are at present and as they might be if the central plains scheme, or another similarly-sized water extraction scheme, comes into being. A step increase in the number of days where flows are below our desired levels will have a marked impact on our use of the public resource which is the Waimakariri River.

Brass Monkey race series

41. For twenty years the WWCC has conducted a "Brass Monkey" race series on the Waimakariri each winter. This race is held on Sundays, two weeks apart, from late June until early August. This year's series begins on 29 June, with further races taking place on 12 and 26 July, and 9 and 23 August.
42. The Brass Monkey encourages participation. Major prizes are drawn and awarded to series participants rather than the winners in each of the various categories. The category winners receive chocolate fish as prizes, their name engraved on a trophy (but not the trophy itself) and bragging rights amongst their peers.
43. This participation theme is also encouraged with separate sections for different types of boats – including categories for sea kayaks and double kayaks and kayaks whitewater-type boats – and having sections for veterans. Entry fees are significantly cheaper than for many other kayak races, and at \$60 for the five race series the cost is not a major hurdle for many competitors.
44. The series provides fund raising for our club, and provides an important early training and benchmarking regime for competitive paddlers as well as early introduction to future multisporters. We also have parents paddling with their children in either double kayaks or alongside them. Our oldest participant is in his mid-eighties.
45. We have large numbers of competitors. Total boats on the water each year across the five-race series for the last seven years are as follows:
 - 2001 508
 - 2002 608
 - 2003 704
 - 2004 625
 - 2005 636
 - 2006 553
 - 2007 733.
46. In the fourth race in 2007 we had a record 157 paddlers on the water.
47. Most paddlers are accompanied by friends and family who are there at the start and then move to the end to cheer them on. Given the close proximity to Christchurch this is also easy for supporters to achieve – even on a cold winter's morning.
48. The Brass Monkey series is an important fund raiser for our club, and requires a substantial commitment by our club members. Each race requires pre-race river safety checks; safety kayakers placed at identified trouble spots; scrutineers to ensure boats and equipment are of an appropriate standard; time keepers; first aid staff; starters; and the like.

49. Importantly, we also undertake the series to encourage and promote the sport of kayaking. As noted earlier, many of our club members do not paddle racing boats, and much prefer water which is graded harder than the Waimakariri. However, some of our top paddlers paddle both; some find that they prefer racing; and some start racing and convert to white water over time - or vice versa. The Brass Monkey series is an important beginning step for aspiring paddlers, as well as an important stepping stone for experienced paddlers to keep training over the winter and start preparing for the Coast to Coast or similar events.
50. Of course, the Brass Monkey also encourages the more competitive to paddle on the Waimakariri ahead of each race in order to inspect the river and to make educated choices about the ever-changing braids – the choice of a braid which runs to dry stones has the potential to turn a place getter into someone who finishes late in the field.
51. In summary, the Brass Monkey places large numbers of paddlers on the Waimakariri during organised events on five times each winter and also encourages large numbers of individual training or reconnaissance runs each winter. If the flow in the Waimakariri sits at the 41 cumec minimum, or below, on race days or in the period of preparation which precedes the day of the race, an event which is enjoyed by many has the potential to become a spectacle of another sort.

Effects

52. We are deeply concerned about the proposed central plains scheme and the removal of significant amounts of water from the Waimakariri River. We believe that the scheme will lead to a significant reduction in flows below the planned intake, which will make the river less enjoyable, or unpaddleable.
53. Likewise, any additional take over and above CPW's take will further contribute to an ongoing reduction in flows, which will have a huge impact on the use of the river by kayakers.
54. We are also deeply concerned about any intake structures in the river. Artificial dams and intake structures create significant hazards, and threaten the lives of river users. Separate evidence provided to this hearing by Mr Hugh Canard, who is a life member of our club, considers this aspect, and it is also covered in the NZRCA submission. For that reason alone I do not intend to cover that serious issue in this evidence. As well as the impact on safety, the intake structures negatively impact the natural character of the river.

Summary

55. In summary:
- the Whitewater canoe club and our members make substantial use of the Waimakariri river as a club, in small groups and as individuals
 - preferred paddling flows for reasons of safety and manoeuvrability are for a minimum flow of somewhere between 60 and 80 cumecs
 - the water extraction for Central Plains will lead to the Waimakariri dropping to its minimum flow on a more frequent basis than it does now
 - the intake structures in the river are dangerous to river users.

As a result the CPW scheme will have a major negative impact on our sport and our river.

56. For all the above reasons we submit that the Commissioners should decline Central Plains Water Trust's resource consent applications.