

Media Release

20 December 2010

Fish & Game and Whitewater NZ withdraw from the Hurunui Water Conservation Order

Fish & Game and Whitewater NZ have withdrawn their joint application for a Water Conservation Order (WCO) for the Hurunui River.

Whitewater NZ President Polly Miller says: "The primary reason for withdrawing is that the ECan Act watered down the Water Conservation Order law and process to such an extent that we have decided that our efforts to protect the river are best directed toward other processes. We are hopeful that withdrawing from the WCO will create a context where a collaborative solution to conservation and recreation needs, and environmentally responsible irrigation possibilities may be found for the Hurunui/Waiau catchment within the framework of the Canterbury Water Management Strategy."

Fish & Game CEO Bryce Johnson says the WCO applicants were faced with a difficult situation. "The Government is clearly viewing the development of large scale irrigation ahead of river conservation in Canterbury and we are faced with having to make the best of a bad situation brought about by the ECan Act, which now puts all of Canterbury's previously protected outstanding rivers at risk from damming, diversion and subsequent pollution from land use intensification."

"Under the circumstances we are best to apply our efforts and resources into the limited available processes where we can get the best outcome possible under this unique and unfortunate situation."

Environment Canterbury has released the Natural Resources Regional Plan (NRRP), which recognises the upper Hurunui above the Mandamus confluence as being of "high naturalness." Very briefly, the NRRP provides potentially effective protection for the upper river to be retained in its natural state. Appeals against the NRRP can only be made on points of law to the High Court, and we understand that Hurunui Water Project Limited (HWPL) has appealed.

Both Fish & Game and Whitewater NZ regard HWPL's decision to appeal the NRRP to the High Court as a most unfortunate step for the collaborative process. Fish & Game Environment Officer Tony Hawker says: "We need to work through a catchment management plan for the Hurunui which will work for everyone."



Whitewater NZ

That's quite difficult with uncertainty due to the threat of legal action hanging over our heads."

If HWPL persist with their NRRP appeal then the WCO applicants will probably join the appeal in defense of the NRRP.

Polly Miller says: "We were relieved when HWPL's proposal to dam both branches of the Hurunui River for irrigation was put on hold via a moratorium for the Hurunui, while science and planning work is carried out. The Hurunui is one of our few remaining wild rivers in Canterbury and should be protected for future generations as a national treasure."

The Hurunui River has been found to be nationally outstanding for kayaking and fishing, and a Special Tribunal has recommended there is a strong case for a Water Conservation Order to protect the river in its natural state. However, the ECan Act effectively re-started the WCO application process with a different set of rules.

Water Conservation Orders continue to be an important tool to protect rivers and Whitewater NZ and Fish & Game will continue to identify rivers which are outstanding for kayaking, fishing and other attributes and deserve the highest level of protection.

About Whitewater NZ

Whitewater NZ works to protect and conserve rivers, improve opportunities for kayakers to enjoy our whitewater resources safely, and protect public access to rivers for recreational use. We are the primary advocate for the preservation and protection of whitewater resources throughout New Zealand.

About Fish & Game NZ

Fish & Game is a public entity responsible for sports fish and game conservation and associated public access for recreational angling and hunting. It has a long history of seeking and obtaining protection for New Zealand's outstanding wild and scenic rivers.

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