

Submitter No: 561

Submitter Name:
Willie Menlove

Date Received: 16/8/17

I am a proud 3rd generation custodian of our property at Lumsden. It has been a privilege to have the opportunity to continue and enhance the fine management that my grandfather and father started. It is our philosophy to manage the property in a financially and environmental sustainable manner that will allow the ^{future} ~~next~~ generation to farm ~~unburdened~~ into the next 100 years of tenure. My son has just enrolled at Lincoln University with that intention at the top of his list of possibilities. While this is fantastic and I would love that, I can't help but thinking it may be more of a burden than a privilege for him. So much so, I suggested he has environmental resource management in his proposed degree because there may be more future in telling farmers what they can't do or helping them navigate the minefield of consents than actually getting out there and doing it. That may be a cynical view, but to be fair it's hard not to be cynical in the present climate where individuals that make their living from the land are repeatedly being marginalised and maligned with sound bites of science and emotive dialog from people or groups with utopic, blissfully uninformed and sometimes self-serving views of the world. The scary thing is that if this plan is adopted as it stands, I will effectively become a criminal overnight. I know that there is no practical way that all requirements of the plan can be met on my property and if they could be I am not confident that the environmental impact would change a great deal.

Every farm is different with its own unique features that create the need for varying approaches to solving issues that impact on daily management, stock welfare and the environment as a whole. Blanket rules/ limits with limited scientific integrity are clumsy, lazy attempts to “fix” things. Just yesterday I read an article which quoted Taranaki Regional Council environmental director Gary Bedford, reporting on an international land use and water quality conference he attended. He said “Many countries have realised the one size fits-all approach to regulation is expensive, draconian and ineffective.”

This is a chance for ES to be leader in NZ. Environment Southland has the opportunity, through the Water and Land plan, to empower the rural community and work alongside it to achieve realistic, practical outcomes, but thus far it appears the focus is on consents, compliance and limit setting. I firmly believe individual farmers have the most extensive knowledge and understanding of their property’s strengths and weaknesses. While saying this I do appreciate there is a minority that need more help to understand the impact of their current practices. Education and taking ownership of the ability to make improvements is where we can collectively make progress and should be focusing our attention. The efforts of the Land Sustainability Team should not be underestimated. Their non-confrontational interaction with farmers, practical understanding of constraints and variables that farmers face daily and ability to communicate the good stuff they see as well as the not so good make them the most effective tool ES has to help improve water quality. I believe there is a mutual respect, for what each is endeavouring to achieve, ~~between these parties.~~

We are living in a country where popular politics is becoming the norm. For this to be successful politicians need somebody (preferably a minority group) to be public enemy number 1- or a group in society that can be blamed for all the perceived problems we face. From where I view the show it looks like the agriculture sector is increasingly being cast in that role.

Basically the water debate has become a political football field and agriculture is the ball. The general public are all watching the game and don't really care who wins but will support the team that kicks the ball the hardest. I am not prepared to sit back and allow emotive perception dictate who we are and what we do. Environment Southland has an obligation and is in a position to help the agriculture sector stop the proliferation of these views.

I urge ES to direct their resources to this front end contact with their constituents rather than bog them down with compliance ~~and~~ consents and fear of prosecution. Engage the stakeholders, don't alienate and enrage them.