



Change mustn't ignore humans

Changes to land and water use can have an adverse impact on farmers and their practices.

Farmers are facing a wave of regulatory stress from nutrient rules to the *Mycoplasma bovis* response. A study commissioned as part of land and water plan changes in Canterbury looks at the impact on personal and community wellbeing. **Tim Fulton** reports.

REGIONAL council plan changes often spark debate about economic and environmental consequences but the human factor is sometimes swept aside.

In May researchers Mary Sparrow and Nick Taylor delivered their assessment of the social impact of the proposed land and water Plan Change 7 in Waimakariri.

The changes will make it difficult if not impossible for many farmers to maintain livestock grazing practices and farm nutrient inputs.

The Sparrow/Taylor report for Environment Canterbury predicts farmers will need help to cope with financial and personal stresses.

"Recognition of the potential for New Zealand farmers to face mental health issues has increased in recent years. This is an issue that needs to be kept under review when considering measures likely to place additional pressures on those managing farms," they said.

They argue a plan change should not be viewed in isolation from other pressures for change being addressed by those most affected. The management of change must look to maximise outcomes for social wellbeing across the population and

communities of the district and for all water users.

The researchers cite a recent ACC report indicating farmers in Australia, Britain and northern European countries are more likely to commit suicide than other occupational groups. Those nations all have jurisdictions similar to NZ.

They recommend the implementation of the plan change should aim to reduce or mitigate negative impacts and enhance the positive ones.

One of the talking points in policy debate for Plan Change 7 is the extent to which the proposed policy lines up with the intent of the Canterbury Water Management Strategy, created and implemented over the past decade.

A key goal of the strategy is that people feel they are being treated fairly and involved in decision-making, allocation decisions are resolved in most cases without resort to the courts, there is a high level of audited self-management and compliance action is targeted on a minority of non-complying water users.

The report assesses the extent of added benefits that can be achieved through successful implementation of the non-statutory actions recommended in the Waimakariri Zone Implementation Programme Addendum.

The vision statements in the strategy include:

- Primary production and employment will increase and the net

Strategy has social goals

THE Canterbury Water Management Strategy sets out a vision for the region's management.

Stated social outcomes are:

- Ecosystems, habitats and landscapes will be protected and progressively restored;
- Indigenous biodiversity will show significant improvement;
- Water quality will be protected and start to return to within healthy limits for human health and ecosystems;
- Opportunities to exercise kaitiakitanga and rangatiratanga will be operative and increasing;
- Opportunities for recreational activities will be returning and improving;
- Water users will have access to reliable water, to be used efficiently and productively;
- Water management systems will be better able to adapt to climate change in the future;
- Efficiency in energy use will improve;
- Opportunities for tourism activities based on and around water will be returning and improving and;
- The net value to Canterbury's economy from these activities will increase.

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Mary Sparrow & Nick Taylor

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value added by irrigation to the Canterbury economy and the national balance of payments will rise;

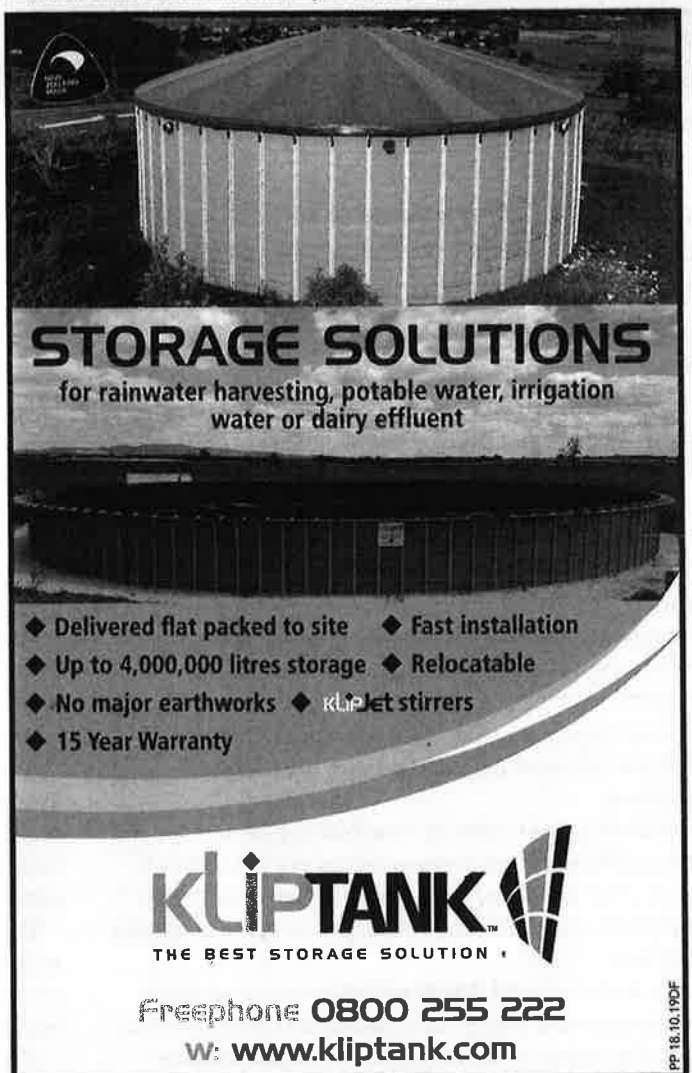
- Rural community viability will improve and community cohesion will be maintained and;
- Understanding and empathy between rural and urban dwellers will increase.

Sparrow and Taylor make it clear it is possible to make useful change without laws.

They also warn against social disruption as a result of rapid, forced changes to farming practice.

“Timing of changes is the most important factor.

“Clearly any forced, rapid changes in land use will have the greatest potential for social disruption,” they say.



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