

LOCAL VOICE

PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER



NORTH OTAGO

SEPTEMBER 2009

From Paraguay to Oamaru

I have just arrived back from Paraguay, where I was working on a service project with an Indian community. Their forested farm land is protected in community reserves. It was more fertile than anything I have seen around here and they can grow fantastic crops of maize, canola, wheat and oats.



What stood out for me while I was over in Paraguay and what makes farming really difficult for them is the corruption. It was easy to see how underhand payments lead people very quickly down the slippery slope to third world status. Everything is subject to bribes, which makes doing business difficult and expensive.

Back in New Zealand, I am hoping that our high dollar doesn't ruin the season ahead. If only the global money traders were as ignorant of New Zealand as the people of Paraguay who have no clue as to where our country is or that we even exist. If only that was the case, the traders would leave our currency alone. The problem with our currency is that everyone wants to trade it.

The North Otago spring is looking positive. The weather has been perfect for lambing and calving and I have heard of some good scanning results, up 20-30 percent on last year. It has been a relief to see milk powder prices on the rise as well.

I have heard some stories about banks playing silly beggars with peoples' lives. The Federation has been putting pressure on the big Australian banks in particular over the grossly outrageous differential between private loans and business loans. There is no justification whatsoever for the actions of the banks here.

On Wednesday, 19 August in Omarama, I heard equally unreasonable stories about

Environment Canterbury and its consent charges. I feel thankful to be farming in Otago territory. With my neighbours, we have just gone through a reasonably difficult water take application that cost about \$4000, which we thought was expensive.

I've heard of one farmer in Omarama who received a mid-application bill for his new water take in excess of \$30,000. Frankly this is nonsense.

The flat lands of Omarama make great growing conditions with water. When I see those centre pivots, I thank God for the resources that we have available to utilise and enhance the environment. I am constantly reminded that the productivity of the land and enhanced life in the soil from irrigation allows hard working families to make a go of it.



PODS

I have just spent a day visiting the North Otago provincial executive and the chatroom pod leaders. It feels good to be part of this very positive team. People are busy running their farms, but they are also making time to be part of Federated Farmers.

The pods are just about all set up and ready to launch. Creating an internet chatroom is a local idea that some farmers have come up with in order to participate in local issues without anyone having to leave home. The idea certainly has a lot of merit. There have been a few bumps a long the way working out the details but things are now looking spot on.

SHARYN PRICE

We are pleased to have Sharyn on board as the provincial secretary to help me with provincial business. She and her husband, Julian, farm a small property at Kauru Hill

and are exemplary farmers with a great performance track record.

1080 RED FLAG

I have circulated three questions about 1080 to the pods, which ask for peoples' feedback and ideas for countering the increasing public concern with 1080. I am attending a meeting in Geraldine in the last week of August chaired by DoC, where I intend to raise farmers' concerns.

I know that there are farmers on both sides of the 1080 fence, but while we have no viable cost effective alternative, we are left with few options. I think DoC has some answering to do about its use of the chemicals.

**Ross Ewing - North Otago
President**



Federated Farmers members have the opportunity to influence the safety, visibility and comfort of children waiting on local bus routes thanks to an exciting new initiative.

Every year, farm building company Totalspan donates bus shelters to rural communities through their Undercover Kids Programme. This year, with the support of Federated Farmers, they are extending Undercover Kids to include three additional shelters.

Federated Farmers members (who can nominate local bus routes or schools they believe would benefit) will determine the location of these shelters. Nominations close on October 31st, and application forms can be downloaded from fedfarm.org.nz/our-work/undercoverkids

Each of these new shelters will have a plaque acknowledging Federated Farmers' involvement.



Plan presumes brown

The Waitaki District Council has just completed a long and arduous process of hearing submissions on its proposed changes to its district plan. The changes focus on the protection of indigenous vegetation, introducing rules to protect outstanding landscapes.



It has been about four years since the plan change was first notified and about nine or 10 years since the issues of landscape and vegetation protection were first discussed in the district.

Many individual farmers are affected by 'lines on maps' and Federated Farmers undertook a huge exercise at the time the plan was notified (and well before that) to make sure every single farmer in the district was able to be involved in the process. We

wanted to ensure they had an opportunity to discuss the implications for their farm with the council and the landscape architect.

Federated Farmers more recent work and submissions have been focussed on the rules and what they mean for farmers in the district. A critical issue is the proposal to make irrigation a non complying activity in the proposed outstanding landscape area. A non complying activity status in a district plan is the hardest test to pass. When you apply for a resource consent under this rule, there will be a presumption against irrigation taking place. I don't know of any other council in the country that has included such a rule in a district plan. The argument, primarily from the council's consulting landscape architect, is that turning vegetation from brown to green impacts on the values of the landscape areas that he has identified as outstanding, so a rule has been introduced to stop any further irrigation. We told council at the hearing that to deny even one hectare of land in the district the life blood of farming (being water) is a travesty.

**Matt Harcombe -
Federated Farmers of NZ,
Manager Regional Policy
South Island**



Otago Regional Council water plan

North Otago immediate past president, Robert Borst and Federated Farmers South Island team leader for local policy, Matt Harcombe, fronted up to a council hearing panel in July to present evidence on the proposed changes to water management in the region. The evidence was based on the Federation's established water allocation principles.



In general, the proposed plan change was not in conflict with these principles, but there were some concerns. Some were simply based around wording of the proposed plan change, including a request for the deletion of the reference to inappropriate practices and a request that any promotion of shared use and management of water should be initiated by users and be voluntary in nature. We also opposed a default 100 metre setback for an

assumption of connectivity between surface water and ground water, arguing that this should only apply in the absence of proof by an applicant or an existing consent holder.

However, our main concerns with the plan change are around the impact of considering historical use when replacing resource consents. We were questioned on this by the hearing panel and explained that the plan needs to be more explicit in what it means by historical use i.e. considering seasonal variations and flexibility in land use. This doesn't mean that we want the plan to be more prescriptive, far from it in fact, but we requested that the plan be made clearer on what it wants to achieve, while still being flexible to enable water users to work out how they are going to achieve the desired outcome.

We have also presented to the hearings panel on proposed minimum flows, questioning whether or not the minimum flows are backed up by sufficient data to give consent holders investment certainty.

**David Cooper -
Federated Farmers of NZ,
Policy Advisor**



Federated Farmers Farm Day 2010

is set down for
SUNDAY, 28 MARCH

Please mark this date in your diaries as we would appreciate members support.

Rural school safety days

Rural children often live in an environment that is also a workplace with many potential dangers and hazards.

With funding assistance from ACC, Rural Women New Zealand has developed a Rural Schools Safety Days programme, which is run with relevant presenters at rural schools around the country.

The popular programme includes modules on ATVs, rural fire, civil defence, dog control, firearms, poisons, road safety, water safety.

Four Rural School Safety Days are to be held in Otago:

▪ **27 October**, at Maheno School, hosted by Kauru Hill and Maheno branch

For more information contact Noeline Holt at RWNZ's national office. Email: noeline.holt@ruralwomen.org.nz



INVESTING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

The Rural Communities Trust recognises that living in a rural community can also mean facing barriers to education, health and other services.

Each year the Rural Communities Trust approves grants to individuals, families and community groups with a diverse range of needs who live in rural areas.

WE WANT TO HELP YOU!

Find out more about our funding criteria, grant applications or how to support our work by visiting

www.ruralcommunitiestrust.org.nz
or phone 0800 327 646

Next funding round closes
31 October 2009

Secretary's update

Hi folks. For those who don't know me, I'm helping Ross collect ideas and circulate information as the need arises. What that usually means is gingering up the pod leaders!



While I mostly work for Telford Rural Polytechnic, I also have a couple of hundred ewes (that lamb at insane levels) and some beef cattle on a small farm near Kauru Hill.

The internet pods are finding their feet, hampered a bit by the time of year. There's never a good time to add more work to a farmer's day, but spring is probably the worst. However, we do have the mechanics of the internet communities sorted and Ali Undorf-Lay, Federated Farmers provincial coordinator, has been a huge help in getting us set up.



'Clare Easton and Sharyn Price are online with the dairy pod'.

What's a 'pod' you ask? The pods are groups of North Otago members with access to an internet community site where they can raise issues and swap opinions. If you're not in a pod but would like to be, give me a shout and we'll slot you in. Recent pod topics raised include 1080 poison use, Transpower lines upgrade and dairy effluent options.

By the way, we're not shutting out members who hate computers. Please feel free to phone any of your executive if you think an issue needs debate or you want your views heard on anything farming.

Sharyn Price - North Otago Secretary

More emotion than fact in driving age debate

The Government's release of a discussion document on road safety has reignited the debate on raising the driving age. Given the problems posed by the boy racer phenomenon (a potent mix of alcohol, high-powered cars and youth), the desire for public debate is understandable.

Decisions however, need to be based on facts and not emotion.

Fact: it's not age that's the crucial factor in determining a driver's propensity to have an accident, it's how much experience they've had behind the wheel.

Statistics show that newly unsupervised drivers (i.e. drivers who have just moved from their learner to restricted license) are the most accident prone group, regardless of how old they are. If you look at countries with higher driving ages, there is still a spike in accidents where people begin driving alone, they're just older. If we were to increase the driving age here in New Zealand we would simply be shifting the problem to an older age bracket.

Federated Farmers has thus opposed any suggestion of increasing the driving age. We did, however, support the previous Government's road safety initiative; to increase the length of time a learner license must be held from six to 12 months. We believe that more time behind the wheel supervised by an



experienced driver will lead to fewer crashes when driving unsupervised on a restricted license.

Increasing the driving age would only curtail the freedoms of young people in rural areas. It's too far to bike or walk and there are no buses or public transport systems. It would mean relying on mum or dad to drive teenagers to rugby or netball practice or to after school jobs and other activities and farming families are pretty pressed for time during some parts of the year.

Young adults in rural areas have also had exposure to vehicles from an early age and tend to be more competent drivers as a result. So, if the driving age was raised, we would hope that some sort of exemption could be negotiated.

How would rural communities be affected if the driving age was raised? We're keen to hear your view, either join our pod discussion or get in touch with William McGimpsy at Federated Farmers in Wellington (0800 327 646).

The People's Times

Project manager Rebekah Brumwell says she is delighted that several Federated Farmers groups are now using the People's Communities service to help farmers use internet chat rooms and stay in touch. This provides a forum for the discussion of local, regional and national issues.

"This is exactly the kind of grassroots organisation we had in mind when the People's Times was set up. Many farmers and other rural residents have to drive long distances to get together and the nature of farming means it's not always practical to get away for meetings. At the same time, the farming community face a range of pressing issues around the economy, business compliance, district planning and the environment, to name just a few. It makes sense to discuss and respond to these as a group," says Rebekah.

"The People's Communities service offers Federated Farmers' members the opportunity to set up their own private, autonomous spaces online where they can share information, news and views and participate in discussions 24/7, without leaving the farm."

Services include:

The People's Times (News) – instantly publish original articles and pictures to your online newspaper, or share stories and videos from other websites

People's communities – join a network of simple, ad-free, community 'hubs'. As well as displaying contact details and general information about your group, each hub has easy-to-use tools built in (members can publish blogs and articles, post photos and notices, store and share files or chat in private forums). Plus anyone can search communities to find local groups.

People's notice board – browse, search, post and subscribe to notices across a range of community-oriented categories.

All services are free, it only takes a few minutes to register and you don't need any special skills or software.

For more information, visit www.peopletimes.org.nz or contact Rebekah Brumwell at info@peopletimes.org.nz or phone 04 382 8711 (we can call you back if you're outside Wellington).



Ali Undorf-Lay and Rebekah Brumwell get together to discuss pods.

Farm effluent

When it comes to Farm Dairy Effluent (FDE), dairy farmers have told us that they want certainty that their system is compliant and that when they invest more money in making it compliant, it will be compliant for the next 15 to 20 years. So what is Federated Farmers doing about it?

In Otago, we're involved with the DairyNZ led Dairy Action Team (DAT), a group of dairy industry leaders including local farmers, Federated Farmers, Otago Regional Council, AgResearch and DairyNZ. DAT aims to provide solutions to the effluent issues highlighted by members. The group recently held its first meeting. The key issues discussed at the meeting included:

- Getting better clarity around ponding.
- When and if enforcement action will be taken when application of effluent occurs where it MAY have entered fresh water.
- What, if any, changes are required to the regional rules to provide greater clarity and certainty?
- Concerns include protocols for compliance visits, communication with owners/staff/sharemilkers as well as compliance officer skill level and the feedback given to farmers following a visit.
- Ensuring that every one is treated with an even hand, including local authorities'



treatment and discharge of sewerage.

Unfortunately, the recent prosecutions reported in the ODT haven't helped clarify matters. The way the reports were written completely slanted the reader into thinking that the farmers had been prosecuted for simply discharging dairy effluent to land. That is not true; the discharge of FDE to land is still a permitted activity. We have followed that up with council to try and get it to clarify the issue publicly and we will also be meeting with the ODT to discuss how these issues are reported.

At the national level, the Federation sought an amendment to the Resource Management Act in the current bill before Parliament, suggesting an interim enforcement option for councils, where they could effectively work through a process with the farmer in the Environment Court, which does not lead to

a criminal prosecution. There is no certainty over how this will progress, but it would take the stress out of some of the recent cases, where farmers have made genuine mistakes while under production/weather/staff/financial/equipment pressure.

We are keen to get your feedback on these issues, including whether you'd prefer that a resource consent be required for application of FDE to land. While some argue that requiring a consent will provide greater certainty to the farmer, it will not provide absolute certainty. In fact, the certainty provided by a consent and a permitted activity as it is currently are no different, the only thing that changes are the costs to you and the level of prescription on the consent. Consent holders are certainly not immune from prosecution.

We have always argued strongly that these activities should be permitted in the plan (subject to certain standards). That would effectively provide certainty and retain the flexibility to adapt to your own on-farm situation. If you have any thoughts on the issue, please contact Matt Harcombe at mharcombe@fedfarm.org.nz or call 03 4777 356.

**David Cooper -
Federated Farmers of NZ, Policy Advisor**

Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP)

This year, councils released their LTCCPs for comment. These define the major expenditure for councils over the next 10 years. Federated Farmers submitted, on your behalf, to all six councils in Otago. Here is a brief breakdown of what we submitted to the Waitaki District Council and the Otago Regional Council and how they responded:

Waitaki District Council submission:

- Supporting council's tourism rate, arguing that it should be increased.
- The Oamaru business area rate fund further council expenditure.
- Review the method of funding public toilets.
- Waste minimisation funded from the Uniform Annual General Charge (UAGC) and increased user fees for waste.
- Support for movement towards a more user pays approach.
- Support for council's reduction of expenditure, but asking for core infrastructure spending to continue.



- Investigation of targeted rates to fund the Oamaru Harbour development.
- Support for council's move to a SUIP as a basis for striking the UAGC, with minor amendments to the wording of what constitutes a SUIP.

Council response:

- Slight changes to business and tourism rates.
- Existing 80 percent rate for Oamaru Harbour expenditure targeted at Oamaru area.
- Waste and minimisation under review, funded from reserves and UAGC.
- The issue of funding for public toilets was not addressed, but may be in the future.
- Council slightly amended the definition of a SUIP.

Otago Regional Council - We submitted:

- Postpone some proposed upgrades of flood pumps on schemes, reclassify land use to reflect the benefit of the scheme to other (non-farming) properties and consult with communities.
- Reconsider the proposed new Otago Regional Council building.
- Supporting council's contribution to TBFree New Zealand and the Otago Ballance Farm Environment Awards.

Council response:

- That the current level of funding for the

Ballance Farm Awards and TBFree will continue.

- Council is undertaking a review of the classifications of the Taieri scheme to consider who will benefit from planned future works, consulting with communities in the process.
- Defer construction of the Henley Pump.
- To investigate alternative options for the proposed new waterfront building.

**David Cooper -
Federated Farmers of NZ, Policy Advisor**

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