

# Rural Support Trust - Snow report

Unlike a drought that has a long gestation period, floods, fire and storms usually arrive with the minimum of notice. Fortunately the timing of the August, Nelson snow was such that little long term affect will be felt. The snow came just before lambing and at the start of dairy calving. Being the end of winter a lot of stock were in poorer than normal condition, as a result of a hard summer and dry autumn. Supplementary feed was scarce and winter crops were poorer than usual.



General snow cover on the Top House Road close to the SH63 turn-off.

The quantity of snow was severe enough to isolate an area that extended from Mariua in the south and took in State Highway 6 as far north as Glenhope. Main access roads were closed for up to five days. The valleys adjoin Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa and particularly the dairy area of the Tukaki Valley were not only isolated, but were without power and phones for several days. Milk tankers could not access the dairy sheds and in some cases milk was dumped. A couple of farms could not get their cows to the dairy shed, so the cows were not milked for a period of over 30 hours. Getting access to calving cows was a problem and consequently some new born calves died.

Modern farming is highly dependant on intensive technology, which in itself is governed by a power source. A generator can be bought in, but it can be insufficient to drive a rotary platform, milking machines, coolers and a water supply, particularly in bigger operations. Storm damage can earth out kilometres of electric fencing and

cause a failure of cell phone repeaters or the rapid depletion of their batteries. Modern houses, likewise, can be over dependent on electricity for the supply of house water and the necessities of refrigeration, lighting and heating.

There are lessons to be learned by such an experience. It is inevitable that if an emergency covers a wide area, highly populated areas will get the earliest priority. It becomes essential that rural families, particularly in remote areas or at the end of a road, have adequate plans to look after themselves for up to a week. The most important emergency response is communication. Every road should develop a system, preferably by phone or radio telecommunication, where the neighbouring farm can be contacted. Messages being passed up and down roads certainly help civil defence teams to quickly identify where help is required.

Time is always of the essence. Any system put in place should be checked weekly. Every house should also have a battery radio as a standard emergency provision. Sadly with the dissolution of the old civil defence warden's, communities need to take it into their own hands and appoint a key person to whom the welfare and needs of each farm house is reported. Ideally there could be one "warden" for every 20 rural houses. These wardens can be part of a contact list known to civil defence headquarters or the local Rural Community Support Trust.

Utilities most at risk are power, telephone and water. Certainly a stand-by generator able to keep the freezer operating or to keep a header tank full would be a bonus. Often power may go off, but phone lines remain active. Every house should have an old analogue phone or one that can be operated from batteries. Cell phones suffer the same problem if they cannot be recharged. The closest house to a cell phone repeater station should negotiate with their telecommunication provider for permission to service the batteries if power fails. Often repeaters only have a battery source that will last less than 24 hours. Every barbecue needs a reserve full gas bottle.



Photo taken seven days after the snow - these flats and paddock have a northerly aspect.

During an emergency it may be the only way of cooking.

Stock are always a priority. It is important that in association with Federated Farmers, transport and dairy companies, that a list be established as to where the following items within in the district can be quickly accessed:

- Portable stock yards, loading race and generators.
- Mobile water pumps
- Battery operated electric fence units.
- Road or track clearing machinery.

The identity of farmers or transport companies who have radio linkages.

Finally, after the storm event, it is important to take financial stock of the cost and to estimate the ongoing effect with the cash flow or budget. Often the Rural Trust can help in the preparation of budgets needing to be presented to banks or finance companies. It is extremely important to keep in contact with any party that has a significant financial stake in the property.

It seems a lot of time and effort to be prepared for something that hopefully will never come. The reality is however, that in a district emergency everybody is affected and the initial care and response of every household is the responsibility of those in residence.

**Ian Blair - Top of the South Rural Support Trust Field Officer**

## Nelson Federated Farmers

publishes regular newsletters to keep our members informed

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For comments on this newsletter or if you wish to join Federated Farmers please contact:



NELSON

# LOCAL VOICE

## PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER



NELSON

OCTOBER 2008

## Provincial catch-up

The Nelson Province's weather has been dry over the past season with a very dry spring and a shortage of supplements made for the winter, although there was the opportunity to put autumn crops in to fill the gap.

The Rural Support Trust has appointed Ian Blair as coordinator for the Top of the South. Ian Blair made visits in St Arnaud and the Murchison area to ascertain the need for help from the August snow falls, some residents had no electricity for eight days. Communications and the availability of generators suitable for dairy farms were areas of concern.

Submissions were made to the Tasman District Council on their Annual Plan.

- Increase UAGC until it reaches the maximum 30 percent cap.
- Council advocates to central Government for meaningful reform of local government funding.
- Continued support of the Bovine Tb vector control programme.
- Extension of the tar-sealing of roads.
- That Rate increases be kept within practical limits.

Nelson and Golden Bay Provinces have been working with Sonia Voldseth and Tasman



District Council to get a voluntary Significant Natural Areas programme operating. Phillip Lissaman has been appointed to liaise with landowners and Council.

Nelson City Council has also been working on their bio-diversity programme which affects a few farms.

The Provincial AGM on the 1st May ran a successful water forum that was well received by those who attended.

The Emission Trading Scheme is the biggest issue facing farmers. Politics rather than the real consequences of such a scheme are not being addressed. What is the real cost?

Varroa is spreading south and MAF Biosecurity should be held to account after

the bungled effort to eradicate the pest when first found in Nelson.

There is concern by Tasman District Council staff that crack willows are not to be used for river protection and existing crack willows will have to be removed eventually.

We are still concerned at the productive land that is being lost to subdivision.

Sheep and beef farmers have had another difficult year with some exiting the industry because they have had enough

The restructuring of the meat industry is slowly evolving, perhaps not in such away as farmers first envisaged.

Some of the issues that Federated Farmers have been involved in are NAIT Animal identification, Emission Trading Scheme, Wastewater Treatment Systems, Transport, Land Transport Rules, Fresh Water Management and Telecommunications.

Margaret Drummond retired from the Nelson Board at the end of last year as secretary. We are grateful for the great contribution Margaret made. Tash Newport has taken up the challenge as secretary and is fitting in well.

**Edwin Newport - Nelson**



**President**

## Dairy farmers prove they are compliant

As calving winds down and preparation for mating and silage progress, I hope you are all fit and well and have a short break planned to refresh yourselves for the run through to Christmas.

Congratulations to you all for the very good results achieved in the Tasman District

Council Environmental Dairy Report. With 93 percent full compliance, five percent non-compliance (minor issues) and only 2 percent non-compliance (major Issues). This is a terrific result and reflects well on the efforts that farmers and staff have made to achieve this.

This result helps negate the "bash the dairy farmer movement", which has gained traction with politicians, bureaucrats and the media. The next time someone asks you what you do for a living, tell them that you are a food producer and proud of it!!!

### Cost versus payout

With the financial world currently in meltdown there are unknown consequences for New Zealand dairy farmers. I would urge

all of you to question price increases from your suppliers of goods and services, and ask them to justify them. With last year's average dairy farm costs reaching \$4.90 per kilogram of milk solids, (feed and fertiliser costs already on the rise this season) and the associated decrease in projected payout to \$6.60, our profit margin is decreasing at a very fast rate. We all have to work hard to keep profitability in the Industry.

The Nelson Federated Farmers provincial committee is currently looking for a sharemilking representative. If you are interested in this position could you please contact me.

Hope you all have a profitable season.

**Martin O'Connor - Nelson Dairy Chairman**



## Significant issues face meat and fibre

There have been a number of significant issues and events that have been of major importance to the meat and fibre producers of Nelson since the last Local Voice from Nelson.

### Meat Industry

Meat industry consolidation has been widely debated amongst Nelson farmers, local service industry and processors after several seasons of low meat prices, changing land use and difficult climatic conditions. Sheep meat in particular has been returning values that are less than competitive with alternative land uses. The resulting dramatic decline in sheep numbers, both regionally and nationally, has focused the minds of those passionate about the future viability of their business. Increasingly beef production and dairy grazing are options being chosen by many of those who would have traditionally farmed more sheep.

Locally there has been a strong view expressed in support of retaining farmer shareholder control and preservation of the co-operative model. However, a majority of the Silver Fern Farms (SFF) shareholders (who were eligible to vote on the PGG Wrightson (PGGW)/SFF proposal) supported the PGGW capital injection in return for a substantial shareholding and initiate a new company model combining the expertise of a large rural servicing company with those of a large meat processing and marketing company. At this point there is little widespread support for consolidating both Alliance and SFF/PGGW into one entity.

The onus is now on the supporters and management of all companies to perform both on farm and in the market place, as producers will inevitably move towards the co-operatives or privately owned companies that consistently provide the best return on their capital and for their hard work and perseverance.

The effect of recent global financial turmoil on the PGGW attempt to raise the required capital is just the latest twist in an evolutionary process that grinds along at a snails pace and at times seems to take two steps forward and three steps back.



### T150 - Target \$150 per Lamb

New seasons lamb price forecasts are encouraging and, with the prospect of a period of higher returns, it is timely that Federated Farmers has put a "stake in the ground" in terms of what is required as an average lamb value. This is to be worked towards over the next five years. The reasons for this target is based on the need to keep sheep farmers in business and stop the flow of farmers exiting the sheep industry while their land is being converted to alternative land uses. Lamb exports contribute over \$2 billion per annum to the New Zealand economy. Farmers have been receiving less than 20 percent of the retail value of their lambs. We need to reverse the negative impact on towns and cities, and preserve down stream jobs and rural communities. By promoting the T150 campaign we are providing a clear target for everyone involved in the lamb supply chain to lift our sights and keep our business viable and our communities strong.

### Wool

The wool sector is still struggling to give adequate returns to producers. It's unfortunate that in a world where an increasing population is resource conscious, (natural and renewable are now commonly used words) our wonderful natural wool fibre languishes with other commodity traded fibres.

There are plans underway through the new Wool Company (60 percent farmer owned and 40 percent PGGW owned) to once again lift the profile and market presence of New Zealand wool by securing sufficient product

mass and developing a more direct supply chain from the sheep's back to the customer. It is far from clear just what the best solution is. Like the meat industry, without a substantial lift in prices, wool quality and quantity will remain secondary considerations for farmers selecting for genetic traits that give the best financial return.

### National Animal Identification & Traceability (NAIT)

Driven by a desire to meet future market access requirements and enhance our ability to market meat in a fiercely competitive market, the proposed scheme was designed to enable better animal tracing from farm to point of slaughter. This proposed scheme has now evolved into a scheme that has far wider implications for livestock farmers than initially envisaged.

If a new scheme must be implemented then it needs to be low cost at startup, have low on going maintenance costs and a small administrative burden. This will be absolutely imperative if there is going to be wide acceptance from farmers and producers. There also needs to be meaningful cost benefits to the farmer. Not all farmers will be intensively monitoring individual animals and will have difficulty identifying the value to them in this new system (e.g. lifestyle-block owners with small numbers of animals). There needs to be approved third party service providers to provide client data from those farmers who are unwilling or unable to justify the estimated \$1000 to \$2000 capital cost of tag readers. This could also apply to show managers who will be reluctant to invest this sort of money in relation to the small numbers of stock being exhibited. The cost of providing this service needs to be sensible and acceptable to the small farmer or casual user. The system needs to ensure that there will be seamless inclusion of other species at some future date without additional capital cost over and above the tags. There is still much discussion to take place on this topic.

**Gavin O'Donnell - Nelson Meat & Fibre Chairman**

## Nelson policy update



### SNA Issues in the Tasman Resource Management Plan (TRMP):

The SNA project (called Significant Native Habitats) is a result of appeals to the Tasman District Council on the indigenous vegetation provisions, and a subsequent consent memorandum issued by the Court. The parties (DOC, Royal Forest and Bird, Fish and Game, Federated Farmers and Tasman District Council) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) whereby the parties would work together on a plan to come up with appropriate provisions for indigenous

vegetation (either regulatory or non-regulatory).

Federated Farmers prefers a non-regulatory approach. Currently, the parties are still discussing the best way forward on several of the tools within the process, as well as how the criteria will be applied, but trialling has already started in the Waimea area.

Federated Farmers still has a few major concerns with the process: One is how the current rules in the plan will apply if a landowner agrees to participate. Federated Farmers' view is that if a landowner agrees to participate in the identification of SNAs project then he or she should be free to clear vegetation on the rest of the property. Further, there must be assurance from the Council that the landowner has an opportunity to reject the report. Finally, it needs to be made clear what else it may mean to have an SNA identified on your property.

Federated Farmers will continue to work with the other parties to resolve these concerns.

### Proposed Variations 55-60 (TRMP):

Federated Farmers made submissions to the Proposed Variations and made further submissions in February of this year. The issue was an appendix to the plan which contained a design guide (for landscape), which could be interpreted as applying to the Rural 1 and Rural 2 zones. Further, Federated Farmers said that we do not want landscape designations applying to normal farming activities, so that a resource consent is required. Hearings were held in March 2008 and we are now awaiting a decision from the Council.

### Proposed Variations 61-63 (TRMP):

Federated Farmers originally submitted that no further Rural 1 land should be re-zoned for industrial, residential or mixed business use. Further submissions were made 3 June and a hearing will be held on 21 October.

**Sonia Voldseth - Federated Farmers of NZ, Senior Policy Advisor**

## Is water quality just another craze?

As farms look to future proof their increasingly large investment in land and infrastructure, owners are right to ask 'is water quality a real and lasting issue, or is it just an overreaction?'

As we dig deeper, we find that; water is indeed a very real national problem and that it is being taken very seriously. The following key directives will see all New Zealanders taking a long term interest in our water quality.

### Draft National Policy Statement

<http://www.mfe.govt.nz/rma/central/nps/freshwater-management.html>

The draft National Policy Statement on freshwater has been released for submissions by the Ministry for the Environment (MfE). This document requires councils to review regional and district plans to improve water quality and water allocation. It will require local government to reverse the decline in water quality and to adopt integrated management of land and water (ICM). It also requires Councils to undertake land-use planning to stop the adverse effects of land-use on water quality. Comments are invited on the document which can be downloaded or requested from MfE.

### Primary Sector Water Partnership

Collaboration between key primary sector organisations has resulted in the release of a draft plan of action for water. Participants in the plan includes: Federated Farmers, DairyNZ, NZ Forest Owners Association, NZ

Farm Forestry Association, Horticulture NZ, Meat & Wool NZ, Irrigation NZ, Fonterra, and Fertiliser Research. The plan includes specific actions to be undertaken by each industry over the coming years to improve waterway health and is available at

<http://www.dairynz.co.nz/page/pageid/2145836756/Sustainable%20Dairyin#g#PrimarySectorWaterPartnershipLeaderDocument>

The NZ Landcare Trusts role is to assist farmers to resolve their environmental problems.

Over the next month or so I will be making contact with key farmers around the region to gain support to make application to the Sustainable Farming Fund for a project designed to fund free farm environmental plans and advice to interested farming landowners. If there is genuine interest for this we will do our best to help position farmers to meet the growing environmental expectation we are facing.

**Further inquires or to express support telephone:** Barbara Stuart, 03 545 0443

**Barbara Stuart - NZ Landcare Trust Regional Co-ordinator**

*Congratulations Barbara on your appointment as a Commissioner on the Walking Access Commission.*



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