

Good evening

This morning I picked up on a number of comments from Gerry Gillespie and the Minister (Trevor Mallard) that touched on a topic that occupies a lot of my time these days — water. These comments related to —

- community engagement
- rebuild urban / rural relationship
- cost centre turned into profit centre
- product stewardship
- climate change and greenhouse gases

From the Ashburton District Council's point of view, mention was made of the need for the Waste Advisory Board to have strong community representation and the comment made about the quantity of putrescibles in our waste streams. In looking forward the greatest impediment to change is cost and so in my district, despite everyone lauding the success of a trial we held two years ago, the capital cost of implementing theory into practice saw the political process defer this to another time. Many of you will know that the intangible benefits of such a move will quickly recoup any up front capital cost but the political reality is that the impact on rates of the up front capital cost is, unfortunately, the dominant factor fed into the equation.

Many of you will also share our frustration over the lack of manufacturer responsibility regarding packaging and the difficulty in utilising recycled waste such as glass and plastic. I am well aware of the excellent work taking place in South Australia and if we are to make meaningful progress as a nation then I believe we need stronger central government direction and start up capital assistance to provide the framework that we at local government level need to make the policy decisions that are so necessary.

Last year when Nandor Tanczos outlined to the rural / provincial sector his Waste Minimisation Bill there was a reasonably robust discussion, not about the principle but about the process and the cost implications of implementing it for local government.

He left the meeting with the comment of —

“Hey guys I hear what you say, but it’s a done deal” !

This morning we heard about a possible \$30 million — half going to local government and half to a contested fund. However I wonder if this is before or after administration and the contested fund could well be gobbled up by the metros who, in my opinion, have not helped themselves in the past (compare Wellington’s policy on plastics to Ashburton’s).

Moving on to another dominant issue, water is without doubt Canterbury’s NUMBER ONE immediate issue. Canterbury accounts for around 70% of New Zealand’s irrigated land and rural New Zealand through agriculture accounts for around 70% of New Zealand’s export earnings. I have seen climate change predictions that in 15 years Canterbury could have the climate of the Hawkes Bay, although with the amount of snow about just now it is difficult to imagine. However because of the significant economic and social benefits, we in Canterbury are very conscious that our strategic thinking has to focus on more sustainable environmental outcomes.

The Canterbury Mayoral Forum (10 territorial local authorities and Ecan) has taken stewardship of the Canterbury Water Management Strategy and I chair the steering group delegated to progress the strategy.

Stage 1 identified that abstractive uses account for 8% of the available resource in 2002 (14% if you count Merridian) and therefore concluded that there was sufficient water to meet reasonable demands, but not available at the right place / right time and therefore storage would be needed.

Stage II undertook to understand whether it was practical to meet the long term needs of the region and Stage III primarily focused on our ability to make water available for abstractive uses. While the initial focus has been on quantity, quality is clearly of prime importance and the effects of land intensification on water quality, biodiversity, tangata whenua and recreational uses are to the forefront of the community consultation process taking place now as Stage 4.

This community consultation is seeking to involve all sectors of the debate but what has become clear and is equally applicable to your goal of zero waste, zero carbon is that

- the current policies are failing to address the real issues
- the current adversarial approach is separating / diluting environmental intelligence
- too important to leave to the political process
- national funding has failed to match the realities of need
- if you don't measure, how can you allocate and manage

So therefore according to Guy Salmon

- face the ownership issue
- reform the RMA – incentivise for collaboration rather than adversarial governance
- advance policy through the collaborative process and commit to implementation of any consensus proposals.

That to me is the key and without leadership along these lines, we in Canterbury will carry on the decades old talkfest.

In conclusion a few facts that you might consider as you drive along SH1, either side of Ashburton – on your way home

- Dairy accounts for approximately 20% of Ashburton's irrigated land
- Ashburton is fast becoming the vegetable bowl for New Zealand
- Small seeds are more profitable than dairy and flourish in our district
- Irrigation is not necessarily about "dirty dairying"
- Nearly 40% of atmospheric CO₂ (carbon dioxide) above a dairy farm is removed from the 10 tonnes of grass harvested per hectare (Prof David Parker – Lincoln University)
- Studies by Waimakariri District Council and Lincoln University dispute the view on nitrate contamination. That is so often promoted through the media.

The way forward is wider community education and understanding.

Until such time as we can come forward with a common message, based on science and fact rather than emotion, the way forward will be difficult and the metropolitan / provincial rift will continue.