

BEFORE THE FRESHWATER COMMISSION

UNDER	the Resource Management Act 1991 (the Act or RMA)
IN THE MATTER	of an original submission on the Proposed Regional Policy Statement for Otago 2021 (PRPS)
BETWEEN	OTAGO WATER RESOURCE USER GROUP Submitter FPI043 FEDERATED FARMERS NZ INC Submitter FPI026 and FSFPI026 DAIRY NZ Submitter FPI024 and FSFPI024
AND	OTAGO REGIONAL COUNCIL Local Authority

EVIDENCE IN CHIEF OF RANDALL ASPINALL: EVIDENCE FOR FRESHWATER PARTS



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Introduction

1. My full name is Randall Aspinall.
2. I live and work at Mt Aspiring Station with my wife Allison. Mt Aspiring Station is a ~2,300ha Sheep and Beef operation. We have farmed this property for 13 years having taken over the day-to-day operation from my parents in 2010. We are the fourth generation of my family to farm the property, with my grandparents surrendering over 20,000Ha to the Crown to create Mt Aspiring National Park and then a further 7,700 ha going back to crown control through tenure review.
3. Mt Aspiring Station is unique in that approximately 100,000 visitors pass through the farm each year for recreation purposes or to gain access to the National Park. A large number are school groups staying at the lodges for school camps, there are groups of people from Wanaka, mountain biking, day walkers, rock climbers, anglers, paragliders, or family trips who want to overnight in Mount Aspiring hut. This is alongside many visitors from around New Zealand and overseas, freedom campers and more than 10 tourist operators. This creates a range of interesting challenges for us as landowners both from a logistical and a visual or perceptual perspective.
4. I am Vice-chair of the Otago Catchment Community (**OCC**) Steering Committee and have been involved with setting up the Community from the start. I see it as a great opportunity to connect and support catchment groups across Otago.
5. We are also actively involved with the Wanaka Catchment Group which originated from discussions around the Otago Regional Council's plan 6A change for rural water quality and represents landowners around Hawea, Wanaka and Wakatipu.
6. I'm also engaged with several other water quality and community-based groups around the Upper Clutha.
7. I hold a position on the Board of Trustees for Te Kura o Take Kārara primary school in Wanaka and am involved in junior sport.

Scope of evidence

8. The scope of this evidence is to give the Panel an understanding of the extent of work and efforts being put into freshwater management by catchment groups in the Upper Clutha, with specific reference to our own Wanaka Catchment Group.

9. I also discuss the Freshwater Vision for the Upper Lakes Rohe.

Catchment groups

10. As noted above I am involved in Wanaka Catchment Group and the Otago Catchment Community steering group. I have included photos in the Appendix of plantings and mitigation plans for our property.

Otago Catchment Community Inc

11. Otago Catchment Community Inc is an initiative to bring together the wide range of catchment groups within Otago allowing them to leverage each other experiences, share knowledge, understanding, co-ordination resource etc so that individual catchment groups can be more successful. It is effectively a support network and resource for the wide range of catchment groups around Otago. It has been supported by the ORC which has been useful. But it does not in and of itself implement programmes within catchments.

Wanaka Catchment Group

12. Wanaka Catchment Group was formed in 2017 by some of the large farming operators whose waterways flow to Lake Wanaka. The group started after the Regional Council's Plan Change 6A, led to a Beef + Lamb NZ pilot project on 2 properties to develop a farm plan template that could be used consistently over hill and high-country properties to improve environmental outcomes. In conjunction with this a lysimeter trial was carried out on Mt Aspiring Station to better calibrate the Overseer model in these conditions. This trial was a joint effort between ORC, AgResearch and Landcare scientists.

13. This project led to the formation of the catchment group to get all of the other farms in the catchment on board so we could put a common template across the other properties. This included engaging expertise to help group members establish individualised Land Environment Plans for their property, identifying 'at risk' areas and management responses throughout the properties. The project identified Critical Source Areas on farms and highlighted specific questions on water quality for landowners.

14. To provide evidence and a deeper understanding of the Critical Source Areas identified in those farm plans a follow-on project with the Council was started in 2019. The Good Water project established a structured and comprehensive water quality sampling program to help the landowners better understand what was happening throughout their catchment and help evidence the linkage between their land use and the resultant water quality.

15. The outcomes from that initiative led to the catchment group successfully establishing the Wai Ora project. The Wai Ora project has encouraged landowners to act on some of the Critical Source Areas identified through the farm plans (and the Good Water project) to improve water quality and target improvement to those areas. We are currently 2 years into the Wai Ora project.
16. The Wai Ora Initiative is funded from a Freshwater Improvement Fund grant (2020). The project builds on the implementation of farm environment plans, nutrient plans, and comprehensive water monitoring project in the area. The plan is for over 45 kilometres of riparian fencing to be erected, 57,343 native plants to be planted and stock water/culverting infrastructure constructed as well as some interaction with local schools.
17. Our Wanaka Catchment Group is a small group that functions differently to some other catchment groups – but it works well for our needs. Our model is based around 1 – 2 meetings per year maximum however we have a freshwater scientist / consultant who works individually with each farmer in our group to help develop a farm specific plan and supports us in our interactions with the Council etc.
18. These interactions with each property are specific and at the level and topic each farmer is interested in. We are a small number of very large farms, so this process works well for us. Our group compared with other Catchment groups is probably more like a collective – but this model is ideal for us. It is about getting things done and making specific changes for each property to reflect their farm system.
19. This is what we are seeing in OCC – that each catchment group is different, and it is not a one size fits all. However, there are similarities in terms of the collective community goal and vision for improvement.

The Good Water Project

20. Our freshwater testing for our Catchment has been a mainstay of helping our landowners understand where the specific issues are and work out ways to address them. We have also done our own farm- based water testing to supplement this. We had someone from the Regional Council take 30 water samples from various spots within the catchment every 2 weeks for 2 years. Based on the results, we would restructure the testing sites every 6 months to follow up on and investigate specific sites of interest for the next 6 months. The aim was trying to help our farmers relate water testing back to their land-use practices on farm.

21. The testing looked at some good quality creeks, but also waterways that had been identified with issues. The idea being that we would sample the problem sites to evidence impacts that nearby land-use was having. The project was not about proving people were doing wrong, but about trying to directly tie land-use to water quality so our farmers could better understand the impact they were having.
22. Whole point of the project was to provide the catchment group members with information. The information generated was specifically for us with the intention of educating landowners and promoting positive behaviour change. The follow-on Wai Ora initiative has then allowed us to address specific areas identified.
23. As a group we are trying to educate, normalise good environmental practice and create behaviour change. That's why the Good Water project was fantastic and worked so well for our group to help build on the time our freshwater consultant / scientist had spent working with people and explaining about the impact of their practices on the water ways. The Council staff also worked with landowners to help them understand the tangible evidence that linked land use to water quality.
24. The intent was for landowners not to hide when sites weren't good. We wanted to show a way forward and how we can improve water quality on our properties. We are not trying to pretend that we are perfect and we all have plenty of sites that still need to be worked on however we do not want to hide this. Sometimes you have to be brave and acknowledge your shortcomings but also show that we are working on these areas and spending significant time / money to make positive changes.
25. For our group it's about the want. If you have any group, its usually about a couple of people who have the "want" to set it up and get it moving. They are the ones who push and encourage the others to get involved. This then creates the buy in and engagement from the local community and people want to be involved rather than being told what to do by external parties.

FRESHWATER VISIONS

26. The visions outlined for the Upper Lakes are termed differently to how a landholder here would couch them. For example, with vision 3 on migratory fish, we cannot comment on that because we have the Clyde dam and Roxburgh dam in between our catchment and the ocean.
27. We can understand that conceptually the visions are well-meaning and where Council would like to eventually get to – however we do not see where the urban and rural

communities fit into the visions nor the balance with productive businesses to ensure that NZ has a sustainable economic future. The visions do not appear consider the need for people to live and work, for people to be fed, build houses, or recreate as they would like to with water. The visions need to consider the economic perspective and the lifestyle use/balance that many people value highly in the Upper Lakes rohe.

28. When we talk about economic and lifestyle balance in the Upper Lakes rohe, it is not just farming – every house in Wanaka that is built, every ski-field, every tourism operation, every international or domestic visitor, every boat on the Lake and every hospitality establishment incrementally affects the water quality in the region however they all also bring positive lifestyle and economic benefits. For example, we have a dozen fords on Mt Aspiring Road which provides access to the National Park. If we have 400 vehicle movements per day on the road – that also impacts sedimentation along with livestock movements.
29. Our local water quality is also impacted by the local geology. We are in a landslip prone area of Otago – the ORC Otago Natural Hazards Portal¹ shows the landslide prone areas in the hill country around our property. Landslides contribute to the silt content of the waterways. If you look at delta for Makarora river, it has significantly increased since the Young Valley landslide in 2007².

WHAT TYPE OF REGULATORY APPROACH WORKS - *Plan Change 6A*

30. A lot of the consultation and mediation discussions in relation to Plan Change 6A was about addressing specific issues in each catchment and looking at ways to address them. For example, the discussion covered the issue of turbidity, and therefore in Plan Change 6A the Dart and Matukituki rivers were exempted from turbidity standards due to the natural erosion within their catchments.
31. All of the effort and thought that went into the creation of Plan Change 6A worked through a lot of the issues that are seemingly to be started on again. Yet for us, our catchment group has worked through a clear process to help achieve our freshwater goals. In the time since PC6A was settled we have made significant progress while the Council has decided seemingly gone back to square one. It is quite frustrating for us.
32. What we liked about Plan Change 6A was that it was effects based. The goal was not about putting restrictions on land use, but instead highlighting the standards that are

¹ [Otago Natural Hazards Portal \(orc.govt.nz\)](http://orc.govt.nz)

² [Code Red declared for Young Valley | Otago Daily Times Online News \(odt.co.nz\)](http://odt.co.nz)

expected in a catchment because of the land use. At the time, ORC was one of the only councils in New Zealand taking that approach with other councils being more prescriptive in their land use approach. Whilst the farming sector had some significant concerns about aspects of PC6A it was supportive of the effects-based approach. And buy-in to that has been borne out through the various catchment groups that have sprung up to tackle various challenges within different catchments. It is a bit disappointing to see the Council appear to change tack given the progress that I think has been made. Once again farming groups are needing to gear up to achieve an outcome that we can actually work with.

33. Plan Change 6A was not about limits but targets. The aim was that if the ORC's State of the Environment monitoring showed that water quality results were exceeding the targets, then the Council would come into catchment and help work out why, then provide support for the catchment in improvement. There were standards set for all the significant waterways in Otago. The standards for each river were discussed and mediated based on the characteristics of the river – for example the water quality targets for high country lakes were set to be different from the lower Clutha.
34. We have a vision as a catchment group and have discussed implications of the freshwater visions at a high level – we do recognise that it will become an issue we need to look at. Our current concern is the whole raft of issues that the sector is trying to deal with at the same time. As a catchment group we could be talking about ORC provisions, or we could be talking about stock exclusion, or Freshwater Farm Plans, or He Waka Eke Noa, or our labour shortage, or our biosecurity threats – or any one of a number of issues that we are being bombarded with. You can spend a lot of time and angst worrying about these – often for the end result to then change as factors beyond your control create changes to the intent or focus of legislation.
35. Wai Wanaka, a neighbouring catchment group that covers much of the Upper Clutha has also done an Integrated Catchment Management Plan³ that worked through all the visions and objectives. The Queenstown Lakes District Council has also run the Shaping Our Future process where they worked through the freshwater visions and values and generated a report⁴. Similarly, Catchments Otago and DanielaLanghams⁵ have both

³ [FINAL-Upper-Clutha-CCP-Dec-2021.pdf \(waiwanaka.nz\)](#)

⁴ [SoF-Final-Upper-Clutha-Freshwater-Report-2019.pdf \(shapingourfuture.org.nz\)](#)

⁵ [Accounting for diverse cultural values in freshwater management plans by using a transparent and collaborative decision support system based on multi-criteria decision analysis: New Zealand Journal of Marine and Freshwater Research: Vol 0, No 0 \(tandfonline.com\)](#)

generated reports on freshwater visions and values in Wanaka. The Regional Council has now gone through 2 similar processes within 8 years – there does not seem to be much use of or interaction with work that has already been done in detail with the local community. As a result of that the Visions do not reflect all the values of the community.

36. The correct balance in rules and legislation is where people are comfortable that their needs and the benefits they are providing to New Zealand are balanced against what they are required to do. It is hard to write policy that achieves the intended outcome and applies to everyone – especially in a region as variable as Otago. Traditionally a lot of programmes focus on trying to improve the bottom 10% - and try to lift their practice up to average. My general observation is that those practitioners are there for a reason - and a more successful model is encouraging the top 30%. If you allow these innovators to progress and lead in the way that they do they will drag the rest of industry with them. This is as simple as normalising practice change within a district. You go down a road with 10 farms and someone has fenced water ways, then someone else does it, then one more and before long it becomes the minority who haven't.
37. There are always a small portion of gross polluters at the bottom who need to be dealt with and the mechanisms need to be there for that to happen. However, these should be targeted at that bottom percentage, not the industry as a whole.
38. Within our group everyone has a slightly different view on life, a different financial situation, a different farm topography, a different climate and the farm systems are all different. For example, some are deer farmers, some sheep and beef and some all three. It's much easier to build a 2-wire cattle fence than a deer fence so we cannot expect every property and location to progress at the same rate. It's not a huge job to set up a temporary fence for a month to exclude cattle – whereas with deer, the only option is expensive permanent fencing and it is a significant thing to do, that can also have other adverse effects, such as landscape effects within areas that are generally classified as outstanding.
39. We focus a lot on behaviour change. What people do in their day to day decisions can have a much larger long term influence than just one or two riparian fences. We are progressively looking at fencing those creeks, however we don't want to be in situation where farmers have fenced off one or two sites and then sit back thinking they have ticked things off, we want our education and mindset change to permeate through every decision they make on farm.

40. The vacuum left after Plan Change 6A has meant that we were able to chart our own course as a group. Various Council staff and projects have aided us along the way – but it was due to us asking and talking to contacts about our project ideas and pushing them to support our plans.
41. It has been hard working with the council where high staff turn-over has made it difficult to get consistent support for on farm projects. We work hard at developing a good relationship with council staff, we take them on farm and explain the issues, then the staff change – and we are back where we started.

CONCLUSION

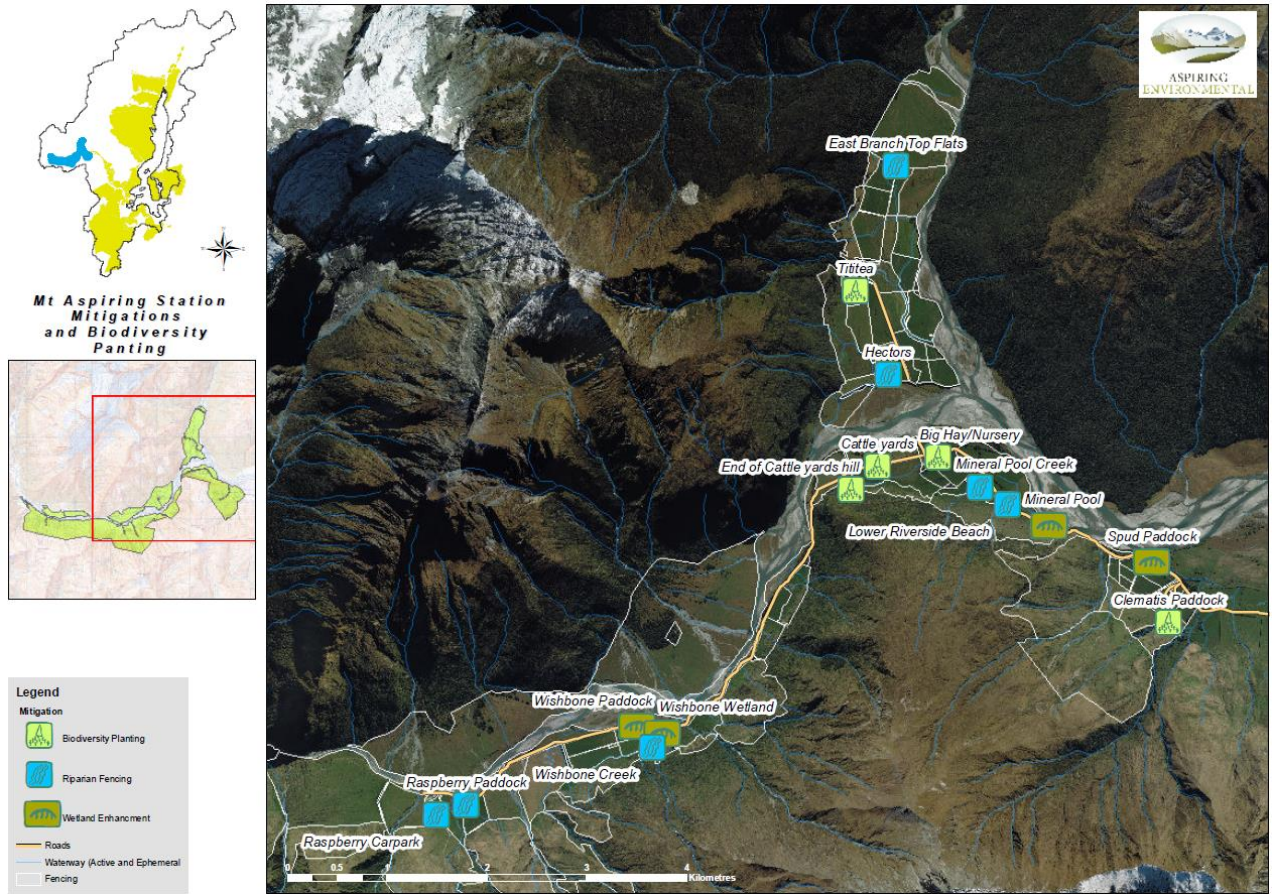
42. I think catchment groups like the Wanaka Catchment Group have demonstrated what can be achieved when resource users are supported and enabled to work together to address a problem. The reality is that this work has continued despite the fact that the regulatory regime did not ever come into force. Our group, and many other recognised the benefits and the importance of the work that was already underway and have continued with it.
43. The uncertainty that is created by the constant change and barrage of new regulatory intervention only stifles progress and causes people to disengage.
44. Any new regime needs to recognise the utility of catchment groups and encourage them to be the first responders, so to speak. Doing that will empower these groups and the communities that make them up to implement change. In my experience that will achieve change more quickly and constructively than regulation. PC6A has proven that point.
45. Finally, the freshwater visions for our catchments need to recognise the full spectrum of values that are held by our community. The benefits that accrue from use of water and the way that supports the community is an important value that underpins a lot of the social, economic and cultural activities we all enjoy.

Date: 28 June 2023

Randall Aspinall

Mt Aspiring Station

Appendix



Mt Aspiring Station Mitigations and Biodiversity Planting Plan



Wai Ora Project – Proposed Glenfinnan Planting and Fencing Site III – August 2022



Wai Ora project - Glenfinnan Planting and Fencing Site – June 2023



Example of fenced off waterway through paddock country



We spent over \$200,000 on a fully reticulated stock water system, which meant that we could then fence off waterways in our paddock country.



Mineral Pool – fenced off and planted out with help from the Wanaka Water Project.



Mineral Pool – fenced off and planted out with help from the Wanaka Water Project



Lysimeter Overseer Trial we did with ORC, Landcare Research and AgResearch.



Planting at Wishbone – May 2018. Planting originated with Fish and Game, but has continued with many other partners since.



Planting at Wishbone – Oct 2020 II. . Planting originated with Fish and Game, but has continued with many other partners since.



Wishbone planting site



Te Kura o Take Kārara School Planting Oct 2020



Wishbone planting site - Te Kura o Take Kārara School trip Oct 2021.

