

# Trustpower holds key to big Canterbury scheme

**Chris Hutching**

Trustpower holds the key to a proposed Central Plains Water irrigation scheme that received resource consents this week.

Central Plains has permission to take 40 cumecs of water from the Rakaia River and 25 cumecs from the Waimakariri River.

Trustpower public relations spokesman Graeme Purchas confirmed that the company has been talking with Central Plains, Synlait (holder of some water consents), local councils, Ngai Tahu and other stakeholders about a combined multimillion dollar scheme. The proposal is attractive to cash-strapped Central Plains, which has been bankrolled by Dairy Holdings and Fonterra after it spent more than \$20 million of shareholders' funds on planning and the resource consent process.

Trustpower's plan would take advantage of recent

legislation passed under urgency that paved the way to sack elected regional councillors and overturn the water conservation order on the Rakaia River. The legislation was promoted by Environment Minister Nick Smith.

Mr Purchas said any scheme would be similar to one Trustpower is proposing for the Wairau River in Marlborough which involves diverting two thirds of the river through a 50km canal. (Final consents for the Wairau scheme are expected any day).

Mr Purchas said the Rakaia scheme would involve the high country Lake Coleridge which feeds into the Rakaia and where Trustpower already operates a power station. It also owns land around the lake and would establish another storage lake in the area. Trustpower would seek to overturn the conservation order to allow more high flow water to be taken and diverted to the new storage reservoir.

Mr Purchas said the move to overturn the conservation order might be controversial but the water conservation was also controversial at the time it was gazetted.

The Central Plains Water irrigation scheme has also been mired in controversy not only because of the environmental issues but because it pitted one set of rural property owners against another.

The company was granted rights to designate properties for compulsory acquisition under the Public Works Act. Affected property owners have complained about devaluation of their properties and restrictions on their ability to develop them.

Central Plains obtained its resource consents this week after hearings before an independent panel that took place over the past couple of years.

The hearings took so long because the company had lodged an incomplete

application and it required considerable modification. Unusually, the commissioners issued a series of directives providing guidance to Central Plains about the issues it needed to address

The consents are for a significantly different scheme to the one originally envisaged that was promoted as a community scheme that would harvest flood water in an artificial lake.

But early on during the hearings the commissioners told Central Plains that its plans to flood the

Waianiwaniwa Valley were untenable. As a result it is a run-of-river scheme like most others in the region.

The commissioners also rejected the Central Plains claim that it is a "community scheme" rather than a private scheme and also questioned whether it ever needed rights for compulsory acquisition of properties.

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