

**BEFORE THE COMMISSIONERS APPOINTED ON BEHALF OF THE
OTAGO REGIONAL COUNCIL**

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 OS00235 and FS00235

FEDERATED FARMERS NZ INC

Submitter OS00239 and FS00239

DAIRY NZ

Submitter FS00601

AND **OTAGO REGIONAL COUNCIL**

Local Authority

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE OF MICHAEL LESLIE LORD

DATED 1 MAY 2023



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Summary of evidence

1. My name is Mike Lord, I refer you to my experience and expertise outlined in my evidence.¹
2. My evidence focusses on the impacts on wellbeing from adverse events, and in response to other pressures, including personal, financial, and cumulative effects of uncertainty and regulation on farmers and farming communities. My experiences in this regard come predominantly from my involvement in the Otago Rural Support Trust (ORST), although I am also able to reference my personal experiences during my farming career.

Context for Rural Mental Health

3. The ORST has connections and networks across Otago farming communities. The Trust has observed that there is a lot of farmer concern and worry about the changing regulatory regime - including the likely flow on effects of the Otago Regional Council's Proposed Regional Policy Statement.
4. The volume of work that the Trust is dealing with is increasing, consequently, the scope of the Trust has grown. Where there was one facilitator, we have five staff working as required. The work is hard. Our staff are dealing with people and families who are least able to cope. You do not get the great success stories - you get the sad stories and the pain. The role takes a toll on our staff and those who are Trustees. It is just the reality of the role².
5. The Trust is at the front line of dealing with rural mental health and the impact on families and communities. Otago in particular in 2022 was dealing with drought, the Bovis outbreak, and Covid 19 – as well as rapid regulatory change. A particular cumulative stressor that farmers feel is a lack of control over what is happening both within and outside their properties. What is often not acknowledged is that stress affects

¹ At [1-11]

² At [20-24]

everyone in the farming family and those in the wider community whose livelihoods depend on the primary industry.³

6. I have included in Appendix 1 a poem from Martin Hartin called "Rain From Nowhere" that reflects the impact that compounding stress and uncertainty has. I would like to read that now.
7. That poem has a confronting nature about it. The bad thoughts entering his head as he drove down Gully road.

Black Gully road Heriot

Coal Gully Road Milton

Back Road Milton Lawrence and Woodside

Serpentine gully Central

Coal Creek Road

School Road

Boundary creek road

Settlement Road

You could do a TV programme on country roads. There's lots of repeats, farmers were not particularly innovative in our naming of roads.

8. Since I took over as chair for the ORST we have dealt with the aftermath of several very sad farm deaths. What I struggle with is that we have also had to deal with 11 suicides of Farmers and Farm workers in the last 4 years. In Otago we have lots of Gully Roads or similar.
9. The list goes on the names change slightly. The farmers that drive these roads and hundreds of others just like them are real people. They feel marginalised from the rest of New Zealand. What was once a noble profession has been sullied and many people have built huge resentment against rural people.

³ At [24-36]

10. 140 years ago, this country was covered with tens of thousands of small farms. They were peasants hardly producing enough for themselves but over time they progress was made. The use of fertilizers and better grass species and better genetics. The horse was swapped out for the tractor and then bigger tractors and the implements they operate. The government encouraged and subsidized farmers to become more and more efficient and they did. They became the cleanest and most productive in the world.
11. The public of New Zealand abrogated the responsibility of feeding themselves to just 2% of the population and we have not fallen short in delivering our nation's food. Not only that we feed millions of others through our exports. People can be dentists, lawyers' engineers' builders etc knowing they don't need to worry about their food supply. They can thank a farmer. Sadly, they do not. We have government ministers telling the rest of the country we are the problem.
12. Sadly, I know too many people driving close to Gully Road. I would like to urge you to plan carefully and take in to account the farming community the Humans who are on the front line feeding this country.
13. The decisions you are tasked with making are not easy. I don't envy you at all, but I just want you to remember we are not just farmers. We are people. We are husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, we are sports coaches and teachers, we are church members and Rotarians, we are hunters, golfers, and fisherman. We love our families, we love our community, we love our country, and we love the Highlanders and the All Blacks. Please allow us to continue to be the world's smartest and efficient farmers.
14. **I would be happy to answer any of the Panel's questions.**

Dated 1 May 2023

Mike Lord

Appendix 1

Rain From Nowhere

By Murray Hartin

His cattle didn't get a bid, they were fairly bloody poor,
What was he going to do? He couldn't feed them anymore,
The dams were all but dry, hay was thirteen bucks a bale,
Last month's talk of rain was just a fairytale,
His credit had run out, no chance to pay what's owed,
Bad thoughts ran through his head as he drove down Gully Road.

"Geez, great grandad bought the place back in 1898,
"Now I'm such a useless bastard, I'll have to shut the gate.
"Can't support my wife and kids, not like dad and those before,
"Crikey, Grandma kept it going while Pop fought in the war."
With depression now his master, he abandoned what was right,
There's no place in life for failures, he'd end it all tonight.

There were still some things to do, he'd have to shoot the cattle first,
Of all the jobs he'd ever done, that would be the worst.
He'd have a shower, watch the news, then they'd all sit down for tea
Read his kids a bedtime story, watch some more TV,
Kiss his wife goodnight, say he was off to shoot some roos
Then in a paddock far away he'd blow away the blues.

But he drove in the gate and stopped – as he always had
To check the roadside mailbox – and found a letter from his Dad.
Now his dad was not a writer, Mum did all the cards and mail
But he knew the writing from the notebooks that he'd kept from cattle sales,
He sensed the nature of its contents, felt moisture in his eyes,
Just the fact his dad had written was enough to make him cry.

"Son, I know it's bloody tough, it's a cruel and twisted game,
"This life upon the land when you're screaming out for rain,
"There's no candle in the darkness, not a single speck of light
"But don't let the demon get you, you have to do what's right,
"I don't know what's in your head but push the bad thoughts well away
"See, you'll always have your family at the back end of the day

“You have to talk to someone, and yes I know I rarely did
 “But you have to think about Fiona and think about the kids.
 “I’m worried about you son, you haven’t rung for quite a while,
 “I know the road you’re on ‘cause I’ve walked every bloody mile.
 “The date? December 7 back in 1983,
 “Behind the shed I had the shotgun rested in the brigalow tree.

“See, I’d borrowed way too much to buy the Johnson place
 “Then it didn’t rain for years and we got bombed by interest rates,

“The bank was at the door, I didn’t think I had a choice,
 “I began to squeeze the trigger – that’s when I heard your voice.
 “You said ‘Where are you Daddy? It’s time to play our game’
 “ ‘I’ve got Squatter all set up, we might get General Rain.’

“It really was that close, you’re the one that stopped me son,
 “And you’re the one that taught me there’s no answer in a gun.
 “Just remember people love you, good friends won’t let you down.
 “Look, you might have to swallow pride and take that job in town,
 “Just ‘til things come good, son, you’ve always got a choice
 “And when you get this letter ring me, ‘cause I’d love to hear your voice.”

Well he cried and laughed and shook his head then put the truck in gear,
 Shut his eyes and hugged his dad in a vision that was clear,
 Dropped the cattle at the yards, put the truck away
 Filled the troughs the best he could and fed his last ten bales of hay.
 Then he strode towards the homestead, shoulders back and head held high,
 He still knew the road was tough but there was purpose in his eye.

He called his wife and children, who’d lived through all his pain,
 Hugs said more than words – he’d come back to them again,
 They talked of silver linings, how good times always follow bad,
 Then he walked towards the phone, picked it up and rang his Dad.
 And while the kids set up the Squatter, he hugged his wife again,

Then they heard the roll of thunder and they smelt the smell of rain.