

## **Lindis River minimum flow setting**

My name is John Barlow and my background includes many years experience as a Rural Valuer and as a farmer. Since boyhood I have fished the rivers, streams and lakes of Southland and Otago. This life experience has given me a wide perspective on water in its various uses.

I understand the vital nature of water to farming and its value in dollar terms, both its capital value to the farming asset and its function in allowing a profitable revenue stream. On the other hand as an avid angler I understand the value of water for its multitude of uses in recreation, be it angling, swimming, biking or the more passive uses such as walking the dog,, picnicking or just looking at a water body and enjoying its beauty.

These statements are made purely to show an understanding of the sometimes competing forces at work in a water-short areas like the Upper Clutha.

It is important to reinforce the basic premise behind the minimum flow setting. The replacement of Deemed Permits with Water Permits under the RMA is the replacement of privately owned water use, with the return of its ownership and use to the public domain. The thirty (30) years before change occurs gives a generation of owners of Deemed Permits time to adjust both practically and mentally to the new situation. The ORC has the responsibility of engineering this change back to public ownership and making decisions as to how the water will be used. My belief is that it was never envisaged when the legislation for this change was made, that it would be business as usual when looking at over-allocated rivers such as the Lindis. If no change was envisaged then why change the law?

The Lindis is a small stream sited in picturesque surroundings which, if running freely would support a healthy fishery and have a high value for other recreational uses, both active and passive. The Upper Clutha is very short of this type of recreational asset which increases its importance.

Under the Deemed Permit system irrigation takes have degraded these values greatly in the lower reaches of the river and now is the time to readdress the balance between users ie between the general public and irrigation. Anyone who

understands farming realises a reduction in irrigation takes have serious consequences. However, the Lindis is a little unusual in that a large component of the water taken under Deemed Permits is carried in a west flowing race out of the Lindis catchment proper. It makes little sense to de-water a small and vulnerable stream when a lot of this westerly flowing Lindis water could be replaced with water from the Clutha River. Obviously for irrigators to change to Clutha water could incur practical and cost challenges but in principal it makes sense and at this hearing I believe we are addressing basic principles. The difficulty I see is timing. Probably nothing can be done about out of catchment water till after Deemed Permits expire, but a decision on a minimum flow has to be made **now**. As the minimum flow is being set, we have to anticipate future happenings.

In some Otago streams eighty per cent of MALF has been adopted as a minimum flow. MALF on the Lindis is in the order of 1600 litres per second. At 80 per cent this would give a minimum flow of approximately 1,300 litres per second. Recognising the timing problem outlined above and the existing needs of farmers in the Lindis catchment itself, I believe a minimum flow of 1,000 litres per second is reasonable in the lower River. This flow would still not guarantee connection with the Clutha River in the height of summer, however in-stream health and aesthetic values would improve immensely. For the general public to enjoy what is after all a public asset, the River requires enough flow for it to act as a real river and not be reduced to a warm trickle full of algae.

In conclusion, I was part of a working party set up between Otago Fish and Game and the Lindis River irrigators. Its purpose being to try and identify methods that could be introduced to manage the water extracted from the Lindis, in a way that would increase the residual flows. We looked at such techniques as co-ordinating the timing of takes, returns of water to the River and channel management which the irrigators seemed motivated and willing to undertake. If this type of approach could be adopted then I am sure it would be much easier to maintain a worthwhile flow in the River with less detrimental effect on water takes. I understand the ORC at this stage does not see a place for this type of approach which seems unfortunate.

John Barlow