

BEFORE COMMISSIONERS APPOINTED

BY THE WAIKATO REGIONAL COUNCIL IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER of the First Schedule to the Act

AND

IN THE MATTER of Waikato Regional Plan Change 1- Waikato and Waipā River Catchments and Variation 1 to Plan Change 1

AND

IN THE MATTER of submissions under clause 6 First Schedule

BY **Martin Coup**

Submitter **Martin Coup**

**HEARING STATEMENT OF Martin Ross Amesbury
Coup
10 March 2019**

Name: Martin Coup

Address: 80 Parakoko Road, Aria

Farm: 800-hectare Dry stock property.
116 hectares is native bush Pines and riparian areas,
200 hectares is in class 7,
330 hectares class 6,
70 hectares class 4
84 hectares class 3 land.

I have been farming for the past 29 years

Personal

Mid Northern Farmer Council 6 Years (Beef+lamb)

National chair Farmer Council 4 years

Farmers for positive change 3 Years

Director Beef+Lamb NZ 1 Year (Current)

Director New Zealand Meat Board 1 Year (Current)

King Country River Care (Current)

I farm at Aria in the King Country most of my farm being in the West coast catchment with some in Horizons as well. My interest in PC1 came from my involvement early on during the set-up phase of the Collaborative stakeholder's group. Seeing what has happened in the Waikato has been a real eye opener and my personal opinion is that healthy rivers can happen without the cost and angst that has happened for PC1.

Last year I was elected onto the Board of Beef and Lamb New Zealand and the New Zealand Meat Board. I stood for the position on the beef and lamb board because I wanted to represent the farmers of this region to get a fair and equitable deal in whatever challenge that might come their way so that they and their communities may thrive.

I have become a strong advocate for farmers being responsible for their own contaminants. I believe we all need to play our part in righting some of the poor environmental practices of the past. I have started on this journey on my own property and fenced off the majority of my major streams that I intensively grazed next to. I have installed troughs in all of my paddocks bar one.

Over the past 29 years I have substantially changed the way I Farm. I have lifted my lambing percentage from 100% to this year 162%. We have dropped our sheep numbers back by about 20% to cope with the extra lambs we are now producing. As well as that we have about half the number of cows, we did 20 years ago and replaced them with fast growing bulls. To make these changes in the way I farm we have needed to be flexible to change with changing markets changing climates and changing labour availability.

My initial involvement in the Healthy Rivers process began when I along with Federated Farmers interviewed and appointed a representative for our sector that would represent the dry stock farmers from the Waikato and Waipa regions on the Collaborative

Stakeholders group. We felt it was appropriate that it was someone that would have grass roots experience that could really understand what any rule change would mean for farmers like him.

What we did not realise at the time was that the CSG would be stacked with paid industry representatives that would be advocating for their particular sector with all of the resource that they had available for them. The Collaborative stakeholder Group ended up with very few members that would be directly financially impacted by the decisions made by this group. It ended up as a group of paid professionals that really had no skin in the game that could walk away and for them nothing would change. This for me skewed the outcome somewhat. Industry groups ended up fighting from their corner and it became a non-Collaborative stakeholder group, this was evident by the acrimony at the end of the process with no consensus opinion reached.

PC1 fails on a number of counts to show a clear pathway forward, there is complete confusion as to why we have landed up with grand parenting Nitrogen loss when most Dry stock farmers do not have a any large-scale Nitrogen loss. There is acknowledgement that we do have issues with sediment loss, Phosphate loss and E-coil issues and most farmers over the past 4-5 years have come to the realisation that we can do things better. Low nitrogen loss farmers be they Dairy or dry stock are angry that they will lose their flexibility to farm within the grass curve because they will have to mitigate nitrogen loss to accommodate the high loss farmers that have been the biggest contributors to high Nitrate levels in waterways. It certainly does not align to the principal of looking after our own contaminants.

The majority of farmers (not all) within the dry stock sector and a number of Dairy farmers have been farming within the capability of their land for generations. They are generally low synthetic nitrogen users if at all and when grass supply gets tight, they sell stock or delay the purchase of any more stock. They do not as a rule purchase extra feed or add lots of nitrogen so that they can maintain a high stocking rate through the down times. Thus in all grass systems there are good years and not so good years from a production perspective but it does ebb and flow and needs to be flexible, Nitrogen capping will seriously impact on these low impact, low emitting farmers.

With regards to fencing, the one size fits all rules that are being proposed are simply not workable for many hill country farmers, There is acknowledgement that sheep have less impact on water quality which is a positive but for many farmers to fence off every waterway that is in a paddock that is up to 25deg slope for cattle will provide very little reduction in contaminant loss.

To fence every waterway that is up to 25deg slope would be in the first instance be a massive job that would cost tens of thousands of dollars when the farmer might be better to take the more sensible approach and concentrate on the critical source areas that are probably causing 90% of the sediment issues in the waterway. I know from experience that you can put up as many fences as you like but if it has no trees the soil will sometimes slump and slide into the waterway and contribute to a massive sediment load to the waterway.



This was a gully on my property that was 20 years ago slumping into the waterway. I can put hand on heart now and say that I have stopped the slide and the water quality coming out of the stream during a heavy rain event has improved significantly

It would seem much smarter to me to make sure that if cattle are stocked intensively and there is real pressure on waterways then they should be fenced. This is identifying high risk areas and putting in place appropriate mitigation. The rules as they stand are highly contentious.

There is a high degree of interest in the environmental issues at the present time from farmers in the greater Waikato region because of PC1. Over the past 3 years farmer groups right across the region have sprung up because of the realisation that the playing field is about to be tilted in favour of those that are causing the biggest issue around Nitrogen. Interestingly what has come out of it is the desire to really look at their farms closely and work out how they can improve their environmental practices.

In the case of King Country River Care which was originally set up to advocate for farmers in the PC1 process it has now through demand by the farmers in the process of setting up 6 sub catchment groups. The original intention of KCRC was that we might start slowly with a couple of catchment groups to feel our way through the process. This simply was not possible as once the word got out that we were thinking of setting up we had farmers coming to us for help to set groups from other catchments.

One of the first questions these farmers ask when being introduced to the sub-catchment process is what is the quality of the water coming off my farm, what are the contaminants that I need to manage and where do I start.

I am surprised and disappointed that during the CSG process there was very little discussion on how effective this approach could be. Farmers learn best from farmers and this is a perfect opportunity to get farmers in the same room together, get them to take some ownership of their issues through a Farm Environment plan (FEP) and help them determine where they are best to spend their money to have the biggest impact on the contaminants that are entering their streams and rivers. Included in the plan

- What are the Critical source areas and what can I do quickly to deal with them,
- Where can I set up wetland areas to help catch some of the sediment,
- How can I create some biodiversity that would integrate with my wetland areas and erosion control
- Where can I put some troughs and trees away from the waterways to encourage my stock to get out of the waterways.

Over time I would imagine that we as farmers might have to account for green house gasses as well, this I hope will be able to be managed by farmers having to decide through good planning just how they are going to do that. Having a FEP for water could be the first step to a more comprehensive plan that might include gaseous emissions. It would make complete sense to integrate the two plans because mitigating gaseous emissions by planting trees would be complementary to improving water quality if we get the settings right.

Having a plan set to achieve an outcome of clean water in 80 years' time but broken up into 10 year blocks will give farmers no confidence for the future of their industry with regards investment. They will not want to spend money installing troughs and fences on their properties if they are uncertain as to if that investment will not become stranded capital over time. WRC and WRA have significant afforestation planned on hill country farms to get the water quality outcomes that they desire. If this goes ahead it will have substantial detrimental impacts on our small rural communities.

Redesigning our farms is going to be expensive and we need to make sure that every dollar spent is spent to have a positive effect on the water.

Farmers are really good at working out how to solve problems on their properties. Should PC1 go through as it stands now there will be a lot of cost incurred by dry stock and some dairy farmers trying to mitigate a contaminant that they shouldn't have to. There will also be a detrimental impact on income. This will have a serious impact on our small communities, and they will fail to thrive.

I totally agree that the rivers need to be healthy, sustain abundant life and prosperous communities and that we all need to be responsible and accountable for getting this right. I think that it is important that some are not held more responsible than others. I hope that in the future we can look back and say that healthy rivers was a fair process, we all played our part in in getting things right by looking after the contaminants that we are responsible for. I hope that we have farms that are full of biodiversity where all creatures and communities can thrive in a landscape that is diverse, sustainable and a great place to live. We owe it to the next generation.

Thank you for your time

Martin Coup

