

Manuherikia Catchment Group

Newsletter no. 3

November 2021

As we come to the end of the year another catch up is over due. Committee and consultants have had plenty to contend with over the last 6 months!

Proposed Regional Policy Statement (RPS)

The New Regional Policy Statement was notified in June. This is a high-level strategy and policy document for Otago. It is important because if an activity isn't allowable in this document, then any subsequent regulatory plan can also not allow that option. The RPS is an overarching policy document that has the potential to enable or block any land and water use rules in the future.

MCG made a small submission on the Freshwater Management Unit section of the RPS for the Manuherikia Catchment.

OWRUG have submitted a more comprehensive response with the support of Landpro.

The new Land and Water Regional Plan (LWWRP)

The ORC are aiming to notify the new LWWRP by December 2023. It is in that document that we will see the minimum flows, allocation blocks and many other new rules. All the science and group sharing work completed for the water permit applications is a solid foundation for the catchment's position in the consultation and debate on the new LWWRP. The MCG is finalising budgets and project work streams. They are also reviewing any elements of science that may be needed to keep the catchment proposal strong.

The ORC were going to "note" recommended minimum flows for the LWWRP in their public workshop held last month. The majority of Councilors decided the science presented by ORC staff was not of an appropriate standard for this to go ahead. Matt Hickey and Roger Williams have been busy in the Technical Advisory Group championing the requirement for good science that has been peer reviewed. The requirement to have appropriate scientific review of the proposed minimum flow was a very good outcome.

The ORC are still looking to note minimum flow numbers for the Manuherikia FMU that are proposed for the LWWRP. However, there will be more work on the science before this happens.

Plan Change 7

The Environment Court released a decision on PC7 on 22 October 2021. A full copy of this decision can be found using the following link to the Environment Court website [Environment court PC7 decision](#).

In short, the decision is for 6-year roll over permits based on the water that you have been using. There will be no environmental mitigations such as residual flows or minimum flows unless they are already part of a consents conditions. There will also be no increase in irrigation area unless main line pipes are already installed for orchards and vineyards.

The applications which have been lodged with the ORC will need to be amended to remove environmental mitigation and update the planning component of the application to align with the PC7 decision. Further interpretation of PC7 will be shared as it becomes available.

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Permit applications

All permit applications for the Manuherikia were sitting on hold at the ORC until after a Plan Change 7 decision was made. Now that the decision has been made, the applications will continue to remain on hold until the ORC has time to digest the plan change. The ORC has indicated that in mid-November they will be able to present options for amendments and the next steps in processing these applications.

All irrigators can continue to operate under the original permits until the replacement permits are issued, regardless of whether the old permits have expired or not. This is because the applications were lodged 6 months before expiry and have Section 124 Rights (RMA).

That also means there is no urgency to respond to the next set of requirements from the ORC. All consultants in the Manuherikia will work together to be sure there is a consistent approach to the processing and amendments of the catchment applications and the MCG and permit holders will be looped into any decisions.

It is likely that we will recommend not rushing the Manuherikia applications as it will take the ORC a while to get into an efficient rhythm on processing the applications. Each applicant, catchment group and irrigation company will be updated on the processing of their application by their consultant as this process begins.

Ministry for the Environment (MfE)– Exemplar Catchment funding

The MfE have approved the funding for the Thomsons creek project as part of the Exemplar catchment programme. A budget of \$2.8 million has been approved over a 3-year period. The main aim of this funding was for improving water quality. The Thomsons project covers a wetland at the confluence of the sluice channel and Thomsons mainstem, fencing projects, galaxiia protection work, willow removal, and some planting.

A Thomsons Committee has been put in place to oversee this project with MCG committee members being a part of the group in a governance role. A technical group will sit to the side of this project committee made up of reps from DoC, Fish and Game, Aukaha and ORC, with the opportunity for the committee to utilize their expertise when and where required.

MCG actions in the last 6 months

- Matt Hickey has been our strong force battling for robust science to underpin any decisions on minimum flow. Matt worked tirelessly to ensure ORC did not note a minimum flow in September but pushed the science back to the TAG (technical advisory group). TAG have since met twice with Matt and Roger Williams representing irrigators. This is ORC led and will now focus on building an inventory of all science work completed to date, and then identify the gaps and seek to fill these.
- Anna as Chair has continued to keep an open conversation with key ORC staff and Councillors throughout the process of MRG (Manuherikia Reference Group) finishing, and the minimum flow noting process. Also staying in touch with media, involved in MfE exemplar catchment program on Thomsons creek, attending catchment group meetings, staying up to speed with consent applications.
- Budget and workplan development for this financial year, is near completion however this is a task that is always hard to nail down, with ORC throwing curve balls wherever they can. The Budget is yet to be approved by the Committee and will be circulated once approved.
- MCG is a member of the OCC (Otago Catchment Community) and members attended the inaugural meeting at Invermay. The Ida Valley catchment group is making great progress in getting started on Catchment improvement projects.

It is very important that we continue to work collectively as a catchment our strength as such a large collective of irrigators has already shown benefits when working with ORC. If you have not done so already can you please fill out a membership application form for MCG.