

**News Release**  
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**Record Groundwater Lows Further Justification for Scheme –  
Says Water Enhancement Committee**

Recent Environment Canterbury findings on record low groundwater levels further emphasise the need for a community water enhancement scheme, storing high flows from the Rakaia and Waimakariri rivers for use when water demand exceeds supply, says Central Plains Water chairman Doug Marsh.

“Reports of record low groundwater levels reinforce the conclusions of the Canterbury Strategic Water Study, published last October by Environment Canterbury and others. There is pressure on the region’s precious groundwater resource. Continuing to increase abstraction from aquifers is not sustainable. It will have adverse consequences for the groundwater and the lowland spring fed streams connected to these aquifers.

“At the same time, if we are going to sustain agricultural productivity in Canterbury – which, directly and indirectly generates export income representing between 60 and 70 per cent of Christchurch’s economic activity – water demand will continue to increase.

“This is the critical conundrum facing our region. Fortunately, the work undertaken over the last three years by Central Plains Water, corroborated by the independent findings of the Canterbury Strategic Water Study, demonstrates that a balance, simultaneously providing for the needs of the economy and of the environment, is possible,” he said.

Environment Canterbury reports that limited winter recharge of aquifers and growing irrigation demand has seen falls in groundwater, taking levels to record lows in many parts of Canterbury. This is impacting on Canterbury rivers, where flows have dropped considerably putting 40 water bodies under restriction. The impact is being experienced particularly around Dunsandel and the Upper Central Plains area, which will be served by the proposed Central Plains Water scheme, and in the Leeston, Doyleston, Springston and Greenpark areas, where a community water enhancement scheme will provide recharge to supplement groundwater levels.

“The proposed scheme, where high flows from the two major rivers are stored to reduce the pressure of takes from the smaller rivers and the aquifers, will quickly turn around record low groundwater levels. First we expect many groundwater irrigators in the scheme area will stop drawing from their wells and switch to a community scheme in order to reduce their power costs. Reduced takes as a consequence of this will increase groundwater levels. Second, increased irrigation over the scheme area on the upper plains will increase the recharge rates, topping up the aquifers down the plains.

“The Canterbury Strategic Water Study has identified that a potential serious problem exists. Environment Canterbury’s groundwater figures substantiate these findings.

Fortunately, the proposals developed through the Central Plains Water feasibility study over the past three years provide the solution – and will create unprecedented economic prosperity for the region as a consequence,” said Mr Marsh.

Central Plains Water was established in March 2000 by Selwyn District and Christchurch City Councils to investigate the possibility of water enhancement schemes between the Rakaia and Waimakariri rivers. It has developed proposals for a scheme based on a storage reservoir in the Malvern foothills and takes from each river to provide water for irrigation to up to 84,000 hectares.

**Further information:**

**Doug Marsh, Central Plains Water, 03 358 9755**  
**[www.cpw.org.nz](http://www.cpw.org.nz)**