

Media release

Wednesday, 12 May, 6.00pm

For immediate release

Groups rally at ECan for better water protection

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A coalition of local groups including Aotearoa Water Action, NZ Rivers, Save Our Water South Island, Forest & Bird and Extinction Rebellion Ōtautahi are hosting a gathering at Environment Canterbury's offices in Christchurch on Thursday, 13 May, at 12pm. The rally comes in response to ECan granting consent for a 10-year extension of the highly polluting Mayfield–Hinds–Valetta (MHV) irrigation scheme, which began in 2010.

“ECan have failed in their duty of care, because they have treated the health of our water as something to be balanced against economic gain. As predicted, the intensive dairy stocking these schemes support have had a destructive impact over the past decade on the health of our water, land, biodiversity and human communities,” says rally organiser Sara Campbell. ECan granted the MHV irrigation consent rollover without public consultation.

“We are constantly being excluded from decisions that affect us. Doctors and freshwater experts are bringing their expertise to the table in the conversation about Canterbury’s water crisis, yet these perspectives are ignored to make way for industrial agriculture,” says Siana Fitzjohn, a resident of Selwyn and spokesperson for Extinction Rebellion Ōtautahi. “Laws that allow the public to be shut out of these decisions need to change, immediately.”

The groups claim that ECan are not acting within their principles and strategic direction. Angus Robson helped organise a public meeting on the MHV scheme last month.

“There is a huge gap between ECan’s principles and their behaviour,” says Robson. “While ECan’s strategic direction emphasizes facilitated diversification of land use, this latest consent rollover shows they’re directly enabling highly polluting land use. What’s worrying is that many councillors do not recognize this gap.”

Two more big irrigation scheme rollovers are in the pipeline. The groups want ECan to be accountable for protecting Canterbury’s ecosystems for future generations.

“What is the plan, ECan? Destructive irrigation and intensive dairying lead us down an expensive dead-end road for Canterbury water. For the sake of our climate and our rivers, we need a transition plan toward sustainable farming that works for nature,” says Forest & Bird spokesperson Nicky Snoyink.

Gen de Spa, member of the Ashburton–Hinds Zone Committee, will also speak at the event on Thursday. “I’m keen for us to move towards the whole community addressing water, climate and mental health issues together, and helping farmers overcome them.”

The groups will gather at 12pm after the Environment Canterbury council meeting at 10:30am. The groups will hear from a range of speakers and co-ordinate advocating for solutions to the Canterbury water crisis.

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