



NEWSLETTER

April 2013

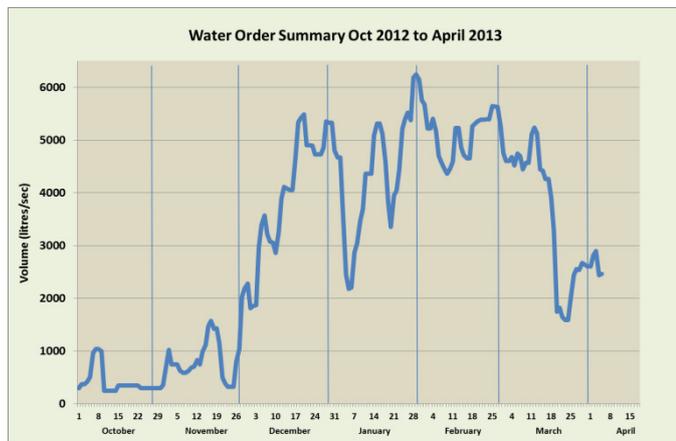
WELCOME

The irrigation activity is starting to wind down so in this newsletter we have a look back at what has been a season where the true value of water storage has been clearly demonstrated. There are a few things to consider before the end of the season and also a look ahead at the activities planned for the winter period.

ACTIVITY ROUNDUP

Irrigation

Our high level of irrigation demand took a dive in mid-March when we got a few days rain throughout the catchment providing about 25mm on the lower country and up to 45mm around and behind the dam. Kakahu irrigation has remained low since that rain but there has been a gradual pick up in the lower catchment. The rain and colder temperatures we have seen early April has slowed things again. We are currently supplying about 2.7 cumecs. The chart below shows the pattern of the season's water orders up to the start of April.



Lake Storage, Dam and Power Station Operation

The lake remained near full until mid February when the inflows fell away and the irrigation demand continued to remain high. In March our minimum environmental flow stepped up significantly from 3.5 to 7.5 cumecs and this increased the drawdown rate from the lake. The lake level dropped steadily through the beginning of March and we were forecast to reach 50% full (385m) by the end of the month. We convened a meeting of the OEFRAG group to discuss the potential for restrictions before the end of the season but it had rained the day before the meeting and the outlook was no longer as serious. At this stage, we don't envisage any issues with water supply for the remainder of the season.

We are the only major scheme outside of the Waitaki River schemes that has been able to maintain 100% supply throughout this season. The well-publicised drought conditions that have prevailed throughout the company have had little

impact in our region because of the reliability provided by the storage in Lake Opuha.

Our generation in March was slightly below forecast but that is the first month since the start of the financial year and we remain well ahead on a year to date basis.



REMINDERS

Water Use Against Seasonal Allocations

We have included in this mail-out an update on individual's water use for the season to date. Some of you will have received advice that your water use this season is approaching or has exceeded 80% of your annual allocation. Under the Irrigation Supply Agreements, your normal monthly water charges provide for up to 80% of your annual entitlement (100% = 5,625m³). For water ordered or used beyond this, additional charges apply.

We have been in touch with several users earlier in the season as their water ordered approached 80%. Several of these irrigators have come back to us to say that they have not used all the water that they ordered and they often haven't cancelled their orders when they have turned off. I'm afraid this excuse doesn't wash with us anymore. We collate all the water orders every day and water is released from the dam based on these orders. I feel that there have been sufficient reminders to everyone about ensuring they order and cancel their water orders in a timely fashion. We often follow up with irrigators if we are aware that they are not using water and they still have an order standing but ultimately the responsibility lies with the users. We will be doing a final calculation at the end of the season and advising those who have used over 80% of the applicable charges.

I am aware that, in previous seasons, the monthly invoices (for SCFIS at least) have included an update of each irrigator's water use to date. Our current system has not enabled us to do this this season but we are endeavouring to have a system in place next season to provide this information to all users, so as to avoid any surprises. Ultimately of course we would like to see water meters in place and on-line so both irrigators and OWL can better monitor actual water use.

Shares for Sale and Lease

A reminder that we still have significant parcels of both SCFIS and Kakahu shares for sale and for lease. Contact Christine for details.

Water Metering and Telemetry

For those water users that have water meters with fixed dataloggers and even with telemetry installed, it is suggested that you check on a regular basis that your water use data is being recorded and will be available to forward to ECan at the end of the season. Most telemetered systems can be checked on line and provide a much more reliable system than the older style, fixed dataloggers.

Winter Maintenance – your help please

If you are aware of any issues with the distribution races or water delivery systems in your area that we should be addressing during the winter maintenance period, we would appreciate a call from you with the details. Please contact Steve or Chris or call in the office to discuss. Thank you.

Emailed Accounts and Correspondence

We have continued to have a good response to our offer to email monthly accounts instead of posting them. This move provides a cost and time saving to us and, we hope, is convenient to those of you who have requested this. Please contact Christine if you would prefer to receive our correspondence by email.

Opuha History Books Available

A reminder that we have copies of 'A Dream Fulfilled' available from the office.

OTHER NEWS

River Flushing Flow Trials

We carried out a flushing flow trial on 13th February to test if we can release a flow sufficient to dislodge the algal growth (mainly didymo and some phormidium) that has flourished again this season in the Opuha River. The tests were of mixed success but have provided very useful information on which to base our planning for future mitigation measures around our flow release regime and also for our plans to upgrade the downstream weir.

It is very clear to me from the draft report I have received from NIWA on the February trial that there is still a long way to go within the freshwater science fraternity in understanding just what it is that triggers the algal blooms and what an appropriate management regime might be. Of interest to me is what is referred to as the "Didymo Paradox" where it has been observed that didymo flourishes best in clean (low nutrient), low temperature, fast flowing water which is quite the opposite to the general perception of conditions that encourage most algal growth. Within our catchment, didymo is most prevalent in the stretch of water from below the dam to Skipton's Bridge.

Irrigation Training Day

A very successful training day for irrigation managers and operators was held in Pleasant Point Rugby Clubrooms on the 4th April. The course was presented by IrrigationNZ and attracted 21 participants of which 13 were from Opuha schemes. The day comprised 'classroom' sessions and discussions covering all aspects of irrigation from essential water and soil physics through to regulations and consents, irrigation scheduling and testing the performance of irrigation systems. In the afternoon the group went out and carried out some performance tests on Mill Farm's new pivot irrigator (thanks to Hayden and Roger Cartwright)



Participants on the IrrigationNZ Training Day carry out field tests on Mill Farm's new centre-pivot

and then returned to the Clubrooms to crunch the numbers and evaluate the results. All participants were provided with a very comprehensive set of information booklets that cover all the important aspects of good irrigation practice.

As a follow up to this course, we have decided to purchase a kit to enable any of our irrigators to carry out basic testing of their irrigation system as outlined in the training course. (who else is likely to have 20 plastic buckets and measuring equipment available for a once or twice a year use!?).

Land and Water Regional Plan

We are aware of several landowners within our catchment that are applying for water or land use consents and have come up against the challenges presented by the new Plan. These 'challenges' arise both from the new approach required by the Plan with a focus on the impacts of the proposed land use on the receiving (water) environment and also from ECan's difficulty in assessing and evaluating the consent applications against criteria that is yet to be established.

Fair to say that there is a rising frustration about the delays and expense that is being experienced during this transition period of the new Plan implementation.

At a scheme level we are continuing to work with IrrigationNZ who are leading the representation of irrigators in the hearing process for the new Plan and also looking at ways we can develop or implement our own systems that may be necessary to enable all our landowners to continue to operate productively under the new Plan.

AN Water within Levels Plain Irrigation

LPIC shareholders should receive a letter outlining the opportunity to subscribe to some additional water via LPIC's 'AN Water Consent'. I must apologise that this letter was not distributed earlier as intended but I suggest this drier season may have some irrigators considering whether their current water entitlement is sufficient for their needs.

Regards

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