

14 October 2019

The Manuherikia river survives as a major contributor to our communities wellbeing. Everyone who lives within the catchment depends on the river in some form and to some extent. For the river and its associated ecosystems, wildlife, rugged beauty, farmlands, rural and urban populations to continue to function, we all need to take our particular relationship with the river as a part of the whole, as a privilege and not as a right.

All of us would be wise to embrace the Kai Tahu belief as presented to us at the Ōtākou Marae “that is that the Manuherikia is a living being which links us back to its natural beginnings and to the ancestors, and allows us to be part of its bountiful future”. It was not the Manuherikia that overestimated its capacity to support a permanent population of thousands, a tourist trade that brings many visitors, each wanting a coffee or two, or irrigation dependent thirsty land uses within its catchment. All this on top of a gold rush that ripped off the mantle and sluiced it down stream. We and our forebears made these changes, imposing them on the river. Now we are having to address these imbalances, each of us taking stock of what effect our needs/wants are having on the natural state of the river. It’s not just about us, it’s about the survival of the river as a living, vibrant, beautiful connection between us all into the future.

The Manuherikia River has faced huge changes over the last 160 years, we now need to separate out from all the demands we collectively place on the river, what would enable our river to survive and support its unique ecology from here on. If you want to experience the rivers unique ecology, you need only to walk to the confluence of the east and west branches, above falls Dam. Then return to the confluence with the Clutha Mata-au. You will experience two entirely different rivers flowing in the one catchment. The river needs to flow from its source to the sea carrying with it its own Mana, its own Mauri, and its own vibrant energy.

Despite all that has changed, the Manuherikia still inspires us to protect it and still has its own life force that we can resuscitate and bring back to full expression for future generations. Our scientists, our regulators and our government are all focused on the survival and health of the river - we need their help, yet we all know that the river we live by relies on you and me and our actions.

There will be no losers - we will all benefit from having the rivers future support for our endeavors. What we need to do is modify our expectations and adjust our exploitation, so they fit within the rivers capacity to survive and to provide.

There are three main values we have total control over:

- More natural flow - a flow regime that allows the river ecology to recover.
- Better water Quality - till all the water matches the Quality at the confluence of the two branches, above falls dam.

- More public access - Providing for community care and monitoring and river-based recreation.

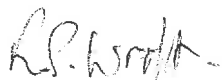
If we as farmers and residents are unable or unwilling to take a positive role in the protection of these values, then we need to ask what right we have to expect our river to provide for our needs into the future. Whatever it takes we should be doing it.

From 2021 into the future things will change, especially our expectations of the river. We may be proud of the outcomes and want to be recognised for what our advocacy on behalf of the river has achieved.

Central Otago Environment Society (COES) do not have an economic interest in the river, we have no vested interest. We are residents in the catchment and are passionate about our river. We like the rest of you have to be prepared to adjust our expectations. The return of the river to a balanced natural state is a long-term goal based on what the river presents today. We trust, with all river users working together, that the river will present better ecological health into the future, as a direct result of our collective efforts.

The real crunch comes when our aspirations are translated into a regulatory regime for the river, and via this to the commercial use of the waters by landowners and residents.

As a result of all this give and take, we at COES can only hope that, the river is given a life of its own, that it provides a positive and proud vision of how a river as bold as the Manuherikia could be. Linking future generations back to its past.



Ray Wright  
Chairman of COES