

**BEFORE COMMISSIONERS APPOINTED ON BEHALF OF OTAGO  
REGIONAL COUNCIL**

RM20.005

**IN THE MATTER**

of an application for  
resource consent

**ALBANY HEIGHTS  
LIMITED**

Applicant

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**BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF JONATHAN THAYER ON BEHALF OF  
ALBANY HEIGHTS**

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**GALLAWAY COOK ALLAN  
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DUNEDIN**

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## **Introduction**

1. My name is Jonathan Thayer. I am the orchard manager of Albany Heights. Albany Heights owns land that is to be irrigated by water taken from the Amisfield Burn which is currently occurring pursuant to permit no. 95789.

## **Scope of Evidence**

2. The purpose of this evidence is to:
  - a. describe the way that we use irrigation water on our property.
  - b. Set out the background of irrigation developments that we have undertaken in anticipation of renewing our deemed permits.
  - c. Set out remaining plans that we have
  - d. Discuss the importance of the irrigation water for our operation.

## **The Albany Heights Property**

3. The property is made up of a 2.06 hectare vineyard which is irrigated using drip irrigation. This irrigation system is fed from a petrol pump gaining access to water from our lower dam. This vineyard is leased to our neighbours Chard Farm who manage the day to day running of the site.
4. On the upper terrace a 12.5 hectare central leader cherry orchard has been developed which will be irrigated using under tree micro sprinklers. This is fed from the dam on the top terrace using an electric irrigation pump. This will be the first season this system has been used.
5. The lower dam on the property, which is fed from the 9 mile race, services not only ourselves but Chard Farm and Mark Mason's Vineyards. During the growing season we share the water in this reservoir to meet everyone's needs. This water is mainly used for irrigation during the growing season, however during the frost

fighting season (September- Mid November), under tree irrigation may be used to fight frosts depending on the severity.

### **Development of land-use and associated infrastructure**

6. We commenced development of the 12.5 hectare cherry orchard on the top terrace over the last two years. Significant land works have been undertaken at the site to prepare it for planting and make it practically operable for horticulture for the long-term future. These site works included removing existing briars and scrub, deep ripping the soil with a bulldozer and then removing exposed rocks. Once this was complete the land was contoured to remove steep faces and fill in gullies where possible to make the site as safe as possible. After that, the soil was disced and levelled to complete the pre-planting site works.
7. A completely new irrigation system has been recently installed, with top of the line pump and sprinklers to allow maximum efficiency. To facilitate this we also completed significant power conveyance and transformer upgrades to supply electricity to the site, to run the main irrigation pump, supply a new seven bay maintenance shed and new spray sheds.
8. We have also completed the development of a 12.5 million litre dam for extra water holding capacity and to service the newly planted cherry orchard. This “upper dam” is fed by a large diesel pump on the edge of the “lower dam”. The lower dam on the property has been raised and strengthened to again allow more water holding capacity for not only us but the other two users of the dam. These two projects seek to secure a reliable supply of water for us during the critical parts of the season.
9. We also plan to upgrade the vineyard pump to a fully electric system rather than using a petrol pump. The extra land next to the existing vineyard has the potential to be developed also and is something that could interest us going forward.
10. The work that we have completed to date has an intended life of 35+ years and we have invested in it based on this. There is no reason that this site cannot remain productive for 100+ years with a tree replanting program and continuous upgrades to irrigation and technology. Current spending on planting and

upgrades exceeds \$2.5 million. We have heavily invested in the long-term sustainability of this site and a term of 15 years would be unacceptable as this would be less than half of a lifecycle of a cherry tree.

11. We expect the Cherry orchard to take 6 years to reach full production and 15 years to gain a return on investment, however fruit growing can be very unpredictable and is highly susceptible to seasonal fluctuations. As a result our return on investment may be longer or shorter depending on this. This site will employ two full timers, 5-6-part timers for tree care and pruning during the off season and 50+ pickers during harvest. This orchard will be managed by New Zealand Cherry Corp on behalf of Albany Heights and fruit will be packed in Cromwell using New Zealand Cherry Corp staff.
12. Irrigation water is hugely important for us and without it, we do not have a business. We have no other sources of water on the property. Water is extremely important, not just for keeping the crops alive, but for allowing us to produce the highest quality product possible. To ensure high quality cherries are grown access and timing to water is critical. Without sufficient water, cherry size and quality will be poor, fetching lower returns and making the business model unsustainable.

Jonathan Thayer

Orchard Manager, New Zealand Cherry Corp

22 August 2020