

Media Release

2 April 2013

Pauline Elliott

For Transparent Hawke's Bay

**Transparent Hawke's Bay calls for 'time out' on CHB dam process**

As concerns over the Ruataniwha Dam proposal surface widely, newly formed group, Transparent Hawke's Bay, has engaged Wellington law firm Chen Palmer to proceed in seeking a delay to the consent application process, due to be lodged with the Environment Minister in early May.

"Much has been claimed by the Regional Council about the environmental and economic benefits of this \$600m scheme, but at no time has sufficiently complete information been available to allow appropriate consultation, or to build confidence that this massive investment will deliver on stated aims."

The group's concerns relate to the lack of appropriate consultation; lack of reliable information and transparency around both environmental issues and financial arrangements; and the potential impact on ratepayers.

"It is not clear how ownership of the scheme will be structured, or who will effectively own water contracts, now and in the future. There is still considerable uncertainty around viability for farmers, and no clarity around exposure to risk for Hawke's Bay ratepayers."

Transparent Hawke's Bay is calling for a pause to the consent application process in order to seek greater consultation and independent peer review of economic and environmental modelling, before the application is lodged with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). "The EPA process under a Board of Inquiry is time-bound, and does not examine financial and economic issues."

"We will first take our case directly to the Environment Minister, arguing that the people of Hawke's Bay deserve, but have been denied, a genuine opportunity to consult on whether or not the proposal stacks up as a sound investment for this region. Only when there is independent evidence supporting the integrity of assumptions made, and a vote of confidence from the people of Hawke's Bay, should the matter be taken up by the EPA. Transparent Hawke's Bay will pursue all available steps to achieve this end."

"We are talking about the biggest investment undertaken in Hawke's Bay; the highest debt level of any Regional Council; and the biggest water storage project in New Zealand. The people and ratepayers of Hawke's Bay have a right to expect confidence in the actions and investments of our Regional Council, and the right to a transparent and accountable process."

Transparent Hawke's Bay is focused exclusively on open processes, reliable information, and public involvement in councils' decision-making.

ENDS