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### **Time for new direction**

The current controversy around proposals for large scale intensive dairy farming in the McKenzie Basin highlights the need for new directions to inform decision making, says Murray Gibb, chief executive of Water New Zealand.

“These proposals have attracted a large number of submissions, along with accusations of illegal processes against the local district council, and calls for central government intervention.”

“This matter will probably turn on the potential effects of intensification of land use on water quality.”

“The questions that should be asked are whether there is enough resource and good processes available at the local level for robust decision making, and if not, what changes are required.”

“Leaving aside the merit or otherwise of these cases, they do highlight the need for a properly resourced national agency to take the big picture decisions that are simply beyond the capacity of regional and local councils,” said Mr Gibb.

“An Environmental Protection Agency has been established under the phase one RMA reforms, but its functions and powers have yet to be fully defined. The Government is also committed to improving economic and environmental performance with amendments to key legislation and new policy directions.”

Calling for an expanded role for the Agency, Mr Gibb said it needed to be strongly science based, have a robust policy development skill base, and be adequately funded and staffed to allow it to step in and support well reasoned decision making in situations such as this one.

“20 years ago we disbanded the National Water and Soil Directorate when the Ministry of Works was disestablished. While no-one wants to return to the past, an agency such as the Directorate would have had the science capacity to inform decision making round land use effects on water in regard to the McKenzie Country dairying proposal.”

“We can no longer afford economically or environmentally, let alone strategically, to allow RMA decision making to remain mired in controversy, counter claims and accusations, endless litigation and less than adequate science.”

“There are better ways to do these things. We should use them,” he said.

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