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(Young & Cairns, 2012)

ECan commissioners staying ur

RACHEL YOUNG AND LOIS CAIRNS Last updated 14:33 07/09

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The Minister of Local Government David Carter announces the future of ECan.

Prime Minister John Key says the work of Environment Canterbury (ECan) commissioners is not yet complete.

Local Government Minister David Carter and Environment Minister Amy Adams today announced ECan elections would not happen until 2016, despite a promise to hold elections next year.

Instead, a ministerial review of ECan's governance arrangements will be held in 2014.

"In reality, with the Christchurch earthquakes coming along, it was our view that if we wanted to have an operative water plan and the issues of water resolved once and for all for the Canterbury region, it was important to have another three years of commissioners," Key said.

"We want to go back to democracy, we understand the issues and we considered them very closely, but in the end the primary factor was that we thought there needed to be a successful outcome and the job wasn't yet done."

He said he had confidence in the people of Christchurch to pick the right people, but keeping the commissioners would deliver the best results for Canterbury.

The announcement was criticised by the Green Party, which said the Government was trampling on democracy by cancelling the planned election.

Green Party Christchurch and local government spokeswoman Eugenie Sage said the Government had acted in an

authoritarian way by removing people's right to vote without public consultation.

"There is no justification for denying Cantabrians a vote on who manages the region's water, coast, air and natural hazards, or how they are managed," she said.

Mixed reaction

Former ECan councillor Jo Kane said the Government was denying Cantabrians the right to democracy.

"They have stolen democracy. They have broken a promise to the people of Canterbury. Where is their respect?"

She said the Government was using the earthquakes as an excuse for holding on to the power when in fact it was about it wanting to control the region.

She doubted whether a regional council would be established again when the 2016 elections rolled around.

Former ECan councillor Rik Tindall said there was "no democracy" in the decision.

He was "quite astounded" that the legislation and promise to hold elections in 2013 had been broken.

"Right now, we have essentially got an operating dictatorship."

Tindall wanted the Government to reinstate the councillors that were sacked in 2010.

Federated Farmers said the commissioners staying on was the right move for the region.

Federated Farmers Mid-Canterbury provincial president Chris Allen said that since the commissioners were appointed they had achieved more than the "old failed council" ever did.

He said they had vindicated their appointment by building bridges with key stakeholders in the primary industries.

He acknowledged the decision was related to the "incredibly complex water policy".

"Right now, the Canterbury land and water regional plan is proceeding at breakneck speed because of the time limit of the commissioners. I honestly don't think anyone wishes them to act in haste so that we can repent at leisure."

Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu chairman Mark Solomon said the iwi supported the decision for commissioners to continue their governance of ECan.

He said ECan played a significant role in the environmental health of Canterbury's land and water-based economy.

"In our view, the commissioners have done a good job to date in addressing some very challenging issues," he said.

"Iwi and community participation in the Canterbury Water Management Strategy forums has been a very worthwhile exercise."

Forest & Bird conservation advocate Nicola Toki said the decision denied Cantabrians the right to have a say on how their freshwater resources were managed and was a deliberate move to allow more large-scale irrigation schemes in Canterbury.

She said the people in Christchurch were being "ripped off".

Commissioners 'highly effective'

In a joint statement today, Carter and Adams said the commissioners, under the leadership of Dame Margaret Bazley, had proved highly effective in addressing urgent problems with water management in Canterbury and in rebuilding key stakeholder relationships.

"The disruption caused by the earthquakes has made the Canterbury situation unique and the focus must now be on ensuring the region can maximise its full economic potential as Christchurch rebuilds," Carter said.

He confirmed a bill amending the Environment Canterbury (Temporary Commissioners and Improved Water Management) Act 2010, to extend commissioner governance until the 2016 local authority elections, with a ministerial review in 2014, would be tabled in Parliament today.

"Today's decision by the Government has not been taken lightly," he said. "We have considered the long-term effects and the importance of this region to deliver prosperity which will be essential for the rebuild of the city."

He said the bill acknowledged that the Government needed to do further work between now and 2016 on what would be the best local government structure for Canterbury.

"We look forward to a stable future for this region," he said.

Adams said Canterbury's freshwater resources had to be managed and governed effectively.

"The Canterbury region has significant economic growth potential but also faces significant challenges," she said.

"It is critical for New Zealand that the planning governance structure for Environment Canterbury is stable, effective and efficient.

"To keep the freshwater management work on track, we intend to retain the limited appeal rights on decisions made by Environment Canterbury on plans and policy statements relating to freshwater management."

Bazley welcomed the Government's move to extend the term of the commissioners.

Rebuilding an effective passenger transport service for Greater Christchurch was critical.

"While Metro is recovering from the impact of the earthquakes we are looking at both the short-term and long-term changes necessary to return it to providing an excellent service," Bazley said.

ECan would rebuild and move back into the central city as quickly as possible.

"This will play an important part of the revitalisation of central Christchurch, and the commissioners look forward to overseeing this process," she said.

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exeman #71 11:00 am Sep 08 2012

In the past long before reform Regional Water and Catchment Board are better handle water management as if planned amalgamation would be still be the same problem existed would be worthless.

Thanks for nothing Commissioners! #70 10:39 am Sep 08 2012

All ECAN have managed to give Christchurch since the earthquakes is piles of waste dumped in the city and on the outskirts which look like they will become a permanent feature, an unfair ruling on logburners in rebuilt houses, and an inefficient public transport system. All you have given the rural areas is water which is unfit to drink, allowed the farmers to continue polluting and Ngai Tahu to get what they want.

Richard #69 09:43 pm Sep 07 2012

Key must be getting lessons from Putin. If Labour were to win the next election what is to stop them getting rid of the current commissioners, appointing their own lot and extinguishing water-rights granted under the current regime which may be biased towards their own rural support base. The earthquake just seems to be an excuse. This all sounds a bit dodgy to me.

close to ecan #68 09:01 pm Sep 07 2012

For gods sake submit on the land and water plan! If you're anything other than a dairy farmer or employed as a consultant this thing is going to be a bloody disaster. More efficient, yeah easy to be more efficient when you have ar

agenda and make laws/ rules to fit a single lobby group!

Thomas #67 08:55 pm Sep 07 2012

another John Key Legacy to chc & NZ, give away NZ water rights to the Maori's and civil liberties of Canterbury... we remember all you have done.

Justice #66 08:46 pm Sep 07 2012

Democracy in action! Seriously people, IF you don't fight for it then DON'T expect to keep it or for that matter ever see again!

What a gutless nation we have become. Full of apathetic whinges with painted on arms and legs

peter+ #65 07:46 pm Sep 07 2012

great I have 3 more years of sanity with applications and measurable responses before it all falls apart again. Here's hoping they get time to sort out that myopic and self serving ECAN outpost in lyttelton and get rid of the self serving connivers harboured in the harbourside patch of what was once genuine ECAN warriors and are now an achronistic piece of the past.

cynic #64 07:40 pm Sep 07 2012

"Federated Farmers Mid-Canterbury provincial president Chris Allen said that since the commissioners were appointed they had achieved more than the "old failed council" ever did."

Is this politico speak for we can convert heaps more farmland to dairy, irrigate more and screw the rivers more?

sam #63 06:43 pm Sep 07 2012

We submit on this and that in order to make our opinions known to ensure cleaner water in Canterbury but no-one in Ecan is listening.. Farmers here are saying they're getting a better deal with more consents for water they shouldn't g protests fall on deaf Nat ears.. the only way forward is a directed Ecan rates revolt. I won't be paying my Ecan charge until I get my vote back and urge everyone else concerned about our polluted waters to do the same.

rates strike #62 06:42 pm Sep 07 2012

rates strike

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