

Water & Anti-privatisation Legislation

By Tony Holman QSO

I first wrote to leaders of all Parliamentary Parties in June of 2008 with the following proposition:

That there should be entrenched legislation enacted to ensure that our water supplies are protected from privatisation and from international control. That entrenched legislation should also be bolstered by the need for a prior citizens referendum.

Subsequent to the original letter to Leaders, further correspondence set out additional concerns about powers which already exist (under the *Resource Management Act*) which allow private companies to become “requiring authorities” and “network utility operators” with the powers of local authorities and government regarding water and compulsory acquisition powers under the *Public Works Act*!

The next aspect related to some of the key issues which have arisen as some local authorities and Watercare have looked at, or been using water as a commodity which (being so vital) could be used as a tax / rate / profit-making device – a bit like the infamous old ‘salt tax’.

Some of the principal problems with that approach include treating water as a “commodity” not as a right and essential to life, to agriculture and to industry. Immediately one moves from the human need and right to have good potable water at the lowest possible cost and to treat it as a privately owned / supplied commodity, one is rapidly moving to privatisation



and profit-making out of the “gold of this millennium.” A recent press article (Business section, NZ Herald) set out this approach very starkly.

So legislation also has to prevent public owners of supply and reticulation from being able to do things as exemplified by Metrowater and proposals relating to Watercare (largely pushed by Auckland City Council) and advocated in the article.

Any legislation relating to the ‘reform’ of Watercare and / or Auckland governance must ensure that all of the above matters are dealt with in the public interest.

Finally I note that a book entitled *Troubled Water*, highlights some of the principles and pressures on this most precious gift of life – water. It also emphasizes the worrying fact that only 1% of the water on this planet is fresh water and over half of that is already polluted, and that percentage is increasing quite quickly!

Having outlined those matters, I would now like to re-emphasize what I see as some of the political opportunities in this matter. Firstly, I believe that the protection argument (entrenching legislation, etc.) can be seen as one of wisdom, foresight and enshrining a fundamental human right and need.

Further, not only would that be good for the whole country, but any parties adopting these policies would have the moral high ground as the initiators.



I sincerely hope your Party will see the need both morally and politically for urgently adopting these policies. I look forward to constructive engagement.

Sincerely,

Tony Holman QSO



That letter to Party leaders received no substantive or supportive replies!

Since that time, a number of things have worsened.

Global warming is seeing a rapid reduction in fresh water as glaciers melt and rush to the sea. The ice sheets at the poles are doing likewise.

In New Zealand alone, our glaciers are retreating at an unprecedented rate, with huge implications for the future of water supplies for drinking and other uses, including power production.

Yet despite all of this, the Government is allowing private companies to take huge amounts of water from springs and other sources, bottle it for large profits, and sales here and abroad.

This, in my view, is totally reckless for a host of reasons, not the least of which is that some of the formerly pristine sources of potable water for domestic and industrial supplies is becoming polluted from infiltration of farming fertilisers and animal waste.

Life-giving potable water is a human necessity and right and should be fully protected in all ways instead of allowing increasing pollution of our remaining supplies and of selling our best water for the benefit of a few.

This whole problem needs to be made a very big election issue, while there is still something to protect and retain.