

Enhancing the Potential for Integrated Water Management in New Zealand Through Adaptive Governance

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Abstract

The mandate for making decisions on allocation of freshwater resources in New Zealand has been devolved to regional councils by the Resource Management Act (RMA) enacted in 1991. The RMA promotes a *sustainable management* approach to integrated management of air, water and land. Growing demand for an increasingly scarce supply of sustainably allocatable water under a relatively buoyant market-led export economy based on primary production has increased competition and conflicts between different stakeholders. Regional councils have found it difficult to satisfactorily address such conflicts under the current RMA institutional framework and conflicts have escalated in regions such as Central Canterbury. As discussed in this paper, the objective of the *Sustainable Groundwater Allocation Research* project is to identify and address the underlying causes of these conflicts with the aim of enhancing the potential for integrated water management in New Zealand through adaptive governance. Progress to date suggests that institutional arrangements for water governance that facilitate strategic planning based on collaborative multi-stakeholder processes with cognitive and social learning are key ingredients in this quest.