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Dam impressive, Labour gives it the tick

DIANE JOYCE Last updated 07:48 17/10/2012

The Ruataniwha Dam proposal has been given the tick of approval by Labour - providing it passes the "robust" scrutiny it will come under during the consenting process.

Labour's primary industries, biosecurity and food safety spokesman Damien O'Connor, and Shane Jones, spokesman for transport, fisheries and aquaculture, Maori economic development and infrastructure, were in Hawke's Bay last Wednesday.

They were taken through the project's details by the Hawke's Bay Regional Council, visited the proposed Central Hawke's Bay site and had a "casual conversation" with some of those opposed to the dam.

After their meetings, Mr O'Connor said the figures supplied by the regional council made a "very good case . . . potentially providing a big economic boost for the region".

However, he said, there were many issues still to be resolved, among them cost, ownership, capital input and resource consenting.

Mr Jones said the proposed site, which had been "highly modified" by farming, made sense.

"It is an obscure part of the country that [will cope] with such a large structure."

Those opposed to the dam told the MPs they were concerned at potential effects on the Tukituki River of intensified farming made possible by the project. The regional council estimated the \$230 million dam could irrigate an extra 25,000 hectares in Hawke's Bay.

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Labour no to water storage funding

By Lawrence Gullery
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A Labour-Green coalition is unlikely to fund a water storage scheme, like the one planned for the Ruataniwha Plains, if it was elected to Government in 2014.

Labour Party's representative in Hawke's Bay, Stuart Nash, said Labour was not opposed to the principle of water storage in the region.

"However, Labour will not be funding water storage schemes if elected in 2014, especially in these tough economic times when the government needs to be prudent in its spending.

"That aside, why should ratepayers and taxpayers who live in the city and barely make ends meet be required to fund a scheme that will result in a



STUART NASH: Water storage should be funded privately.

massive capital gain for around 150 farmers, who then pay no tax when this gain is realised?" Mr

Nash, a former Labour list MP, said if the scheme was profitable and made economic sense, the private sector had the ability to fund it by farmers borrowing from the banks against significant increase in farm returns and values.

"The only exception is if say, 143 of the 150 farmers had signed up to the scheme, but it needed a couple more to make it viable, then Labour may consider some sort of bridging finance to ensure that 95 per cent of farmers were not disadvantaged by the actions of a few."

He said he was not personally opposed to a water storage project but it must be environmentally sustainable and not put the assets of ratepayers at risk. It must also be economically viable. "So far, the Hawke's Bay

"Labour will not be funding water storage schemes if elected in 2014."

Stuart Nash, Labour

Regional Council has not convinced me that this is the case.

"Also, I wonder if spending \$280 million of economic development money on a dam is a wise use of ratepayers and taxpayers money. There are other projects that will generate greater, more sustainable wealth and jobs for the Bay."

Green Party's spokesperson on environmental issues, Eugenie Sage, said the party would want to keep and invest in the country's energy companies.

"Not sell off our assets to subsidise mega dams and irrigation schemes like the Ruataniwha; as Government is proposing to do with the proceeds of asset sales.

"The Green Party supports clean rivers, lakes, streams and aquifers."

Ms Sage said there needed to be national standards for freshwater which limit agricultural intensification in catchments vulnerable to pollution.

"Our focus would be on cleaning up rivers such as the Tukituki not making water pollution worse from more intensive agriculture."

Rainy — but cold in no hurry to arrive

Briefly

Hospital flight

A 70-year-old man with suspected cardiac arrest was flown to Hawke's Bay Hospital by The Lowe Corporation Rescue Helicopter yesterday. He was at a