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**APPLICATION OF
ENVIRONMENTAL WEIGHTING
SYSTEM FOR QUANTIFICATION OF
MINIMUM FLOW IN WHANGANUI RIVER**

by

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ABSTRACT

Environmental weighting system is a technique for measuring the environmental sensitivity of reduced river flows. A points system with seven environmental categories was used to arrive at scores indicative of a location's sensitivity and commensurate with the maximum permissible volume of abstraction. The same score is used to estimate the environmentally prescribed flow or minimum flow.

This study deals with the applicability of an environmental weighting system to the quantification of a prescribed minimum flow using the Whanganui River as a case study. The minimum flows in Whanganui River have been subject to considerable debate since the construction of a series of intakes on several headwater streams in the early seventies for the purpose of increasing water volumes for the ECNZ power generation at Tokaanu and nine hydroelectric power plant stations on the Waikato River. In 1977, the NZ Canoeing Association requested that a minimum flow be fixed which in 1983, culminated in a recommendation of $22 \text{ m}^3\text{s}^{-1}$ minimum flow at Te Maire in December and January. A review of these flows was carried out in 1987 and the minimum flow was increased to $29 \text{ m}^3\text{s}^{-1}$ from December to May following a Planning Tribunal Hearing in 1989-90.

The results showed that one of the flow allocation methods was very restrictive to ECNZ operations while strongly favouring the requirements of fisheries and other instream uses. Two other options were examined under the demand conditions in the Whanganui River. They provided for an environmentally prescribed flow which was similar to that proposed by the Planning Tribunal Determination (1990), but each had slightly different abstraction proposals to meet suggested flows.

Under New Zealand conditions the technique was found to be useful in identifying the environmental constraints of competing demands for river water. However, in an already regulated flow regime the outcomes were hypothetical but still meaningful.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	i
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiv
APPENDICES	xv

CHAPTER	Page
 I. INTRODUCTION	 01
 II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	 06
2.1 INTRODUCTION	06
2.2 CZECHOSLOVAKIAN SYSTEM	07
2.2.1 Setting of Minimum Acceptable Discharge	07
2.2.1.1 For streams influenced by reservoirs	07
2.2.1.2 For downstream of the reservoirs	07
2.2.1.3 Other streams	08
2.2.1.4 Lower water classes	08
2.2.2 Demand Grouping	09

2.3 EUROPEAN COMMUNITY MEMBER COUNTRY APPROACHES	10
2.3.1 Initial Approach	10
2.3.2 Revised Approach	11
2.4 METHODS USED IN THE UNITED STATES	12
2.4.1 Instream Flow Quantification	12
2.4.1.1 Instream flow incremental methodology	13
2.4.1.2 Montana method	14
2.4.1.3 Maximum spawning area flow	15
2.4.1.3.1 Method A	16
2.4.1.3.2 Method B	16
2.4.2 Instream Flow Quantification Methods - a Discussion	16
2.4.3 Assessment of Flow Effects	19
2.4.3.1 Expert judgment	20
2.4.3.2 Systematic assessment	21
2.4.3.3 User survey	23
2.4.3.4 Formal survey	25
2.4.4 Multi-objective Programming	28
2.5 NEW ZEALAND METHODS	30
2.5.1 Fishery Considerations	31
2.5.2 Wildlife	32
2.5.3 Human Needs	33

2.6 CONCLUSION	38
III. ENVIRONMENTAL SENSITIVITY	40
3.1 BACKGROUND	40
3.2 THEORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL SENSITIVITY	40
3.3 EFFECTS OF RIVER REGIMES ON THE ENVIRONMENT	42
3.3.1 Environmental Sensitivity and River Regime	43
3.3.2 Low-Flows	43
3.3.2.1 Flow-duration curve	44
3.3.2.2 Low-flow spells	45
3.3.2.3 Frequency of low-flows	45
3.3.3 Precipitation and Low-Flow	45
3.3.4 Evapotranspiration	47
3.4 PROTECTION OF NATURAL LOW-FLOWS	48
3.5 THE CONCEPT OF ENVIRONMENTAL WEIGHTING .	49
3.6 SUMMARY	51
IV. METHODOLOGY	52
4.1 INTRODUCTION	52
4.2 RECOMMENDED APPROACHES	53

4.3 WHAT THE METHODOLOGY SHOULD ESTABLISH .	54
4.4 FEATURES OF A FUNCTIONAL METHODOLOGY . .	56
4.5 FLOW FIXING METHODS USED IN THE WHANGANUI RIVER	57
4.5.1 Physical Habitat Simulation (PHABSIM)	57
4.5.2 Instream Flow Incremental Methodology (IFIM)	58
4.6 PLANNING TRIBUNAL'S INTERPRETATION	59
4.6.1 Commentary	59
4.7 ENVIRONMENTAL WEIGHTING SYSTEM (EWS) AS STUDY METHODOLOGY	61
4.7.1 Environmental Categories	62
4.7.1.1 Fisheries	63
4.7.1.2 Angling	64
4.7.1.3 Aquatic ecology	64
4.7.1.4 Terrestrial ecology	64
4.7.1.5 Amenity	65
4.7.1.6 Recreation	65
4.8 MAXIMUM PERMITTED VOLUME OF ABSTRACTION (MPV)	66
4.9 WEIGHTING SCHEMES	69
4.9.1 Consensual Weighting	69
4.9.2 Formula Weighting	69

4.9.3 Subjective Weighting	69
4.10 METHODOLOGIES USING WEIGHTING SCHEME .	70
4.10.1 The Goals Achievement Matrix	70
4.10.2 Development Potential Analysis	71
4.11 DERIVATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL WEIGHTING	72
4.11.1 Delphi Method	72
4.11.2 Revision of North Yorkshire EW Scheme . . .	75
4.11.2.1 Fisheries	76
4.11.2.2 Terrestrial ecology	77
4.11.2.3 Water-borne recreation	78
4.12 COMPUTATION OF DRY-WEATHER-FLOW	79
4.13 SUMMARY	81
V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION	83
5.1 INTRODUCTION	83
5.2 THE WHANGANUI RIVER EWS	84
5.2.1 Fisheries	86
5.2.2 Terrestrial Ecology	90
5.2.3 Amenities	94
5.2.4 Water-Borne Recreation	96
5.2.5 Angling Intensity	100

5.2.6 Aquatic Ecology and Miscellaneous	101
5.3 APPLICATION OF THE FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL WEIGHING SYSTEM	101
5.4 DERIVATION OF MAXIMUM PERMITTED VOLUME OF ABSTRACTION	106
5.4.1 Implications of MPV Restrictions to ECNZ Operations	107
5.5 DETERMINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PRESCRIBED FLOW (EPF)	111
5.5.1 EPF on Fisheries	111
5.6 OTHER POSSIBLE VARIATIONS USING THE ENVIRONMENTAL WEIGHTING SCHEME	119
5.6.1 Option I	120
5.6.1.1 Impact on TPD	123
5.6.1.2 Effects on fisheries	123
5.6.1.3 Effects on navigation	126
5.6.2 Option II	127
5.6.2.1 Impact on power generation	127
5.6.2.2 Fisheries	131
5.7 SUMMARY	131
VI. CONCLUSION	133
REFERENCES	140
APPENDICES	155

LIST OF TABLES

Tables	Page
2.1 Human Instream Uses	30
2.2 Summary of Requirements for Human Instream Use	36
4.1 Proposed EWS Framework for Whanganui River	67
5.1 EW of Fisheries	87
5.2 - A Summary of Thermal Preference and Tolerance Data (C) for Brown Trout (<i>Salmo trutta</i>)	87
5.2 - B Summary of Thermal Preference and Tolerance Data (C) of Rainbow Trout (<i>Salmo gairdneri</i>)	89
5.3 Ratings for Terrestrial Ecology	93
5.4 Amenity Score	95
5.5 Upper Reach EWS	97
5.6 Middle Reach EWS	98
5.7 Lower Reach EWS	99
5.8 - A Lower Reach Dissolved Oxygen	104
5.8 - B Lower Reach Biochemical Oxygen Demand	104
5.8 - C Lower Reach pH	105
5.8 - D Lower Reach Suspended Solids	105
5.8 - E Lower Reach Faecal Coliform Count	106
5.9 Relationship Between EW and MPV	109
5.10 Waikato Power Stations	109
5.11 Value of Water Diverted	110
5.12 Pre/Post Flows with MPV Restrictions	112

5.13	Relationship Between EPF and EW	114
5.14	Regression of Flows for Te Maire and Piriaka	115
5.15	Flow Pattern (Option I)	121
5.16	Valuation of Flow ex-Whanganui (Option I)	124
5.17	Flow Pattern (Option II)	128
5.18	Valuation of Power Output (Option II)	129

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
2.1 Depth and Velocity Limits for Safe Wading	35
5.1 Wildlife Population/Flow Relationship	92
5.2 Flow-Duration Curve with MPV Imposed	113
5.3 Actual and Fitted Values of Flow at Te Maire	116
5.4 a Phabsim Graphs at Kakahi (Food Producing)	117
5.4 b Phabsim Graphs at Kakahi (Brown Trout Spawning)	118
5.5 Flow-Duration Curve (Option I)	122
5.6 Flow-Duration Curve (Option II)	130

APPENDICES

I.A	Low-Flow Parameters	155
I.B	Computation of Dry-Weather-Flow	156
II.A	Comparison of Flow Patterns 1962-1967 (Pre-TPD) to 1975-1977 (Post-TPD)	157
II.B	Comparison of Flow-Duration Curve (Pre/Post TPD)	158
III	Option II Power Output	159
IV	Graphical Representation of Flow Preference for Rapid No. 84	160
V	Questionnaires and Backgrounder	161
VI	Hydraulic Diagram	167
VII	Plan of Western Diversion	168
VIII	Location Map of Catchment Area	169