

ALIL – John Van Polanen Citation

In 2014, to mark 25 years since the incorporation of Ashburton Lyndhurst Irrigation Limited the Directors elected to create an ongoing outstanding service award.

The award is to be presented on an irregular basis at the discretion of the Directors to mark outstanding service to the Company and the progression of irrigation in our community.

Over the years many people have made huge contributions to the progression of our co-operative company – whether they be directors, staff or shareholders – this award has been created to recognise these individual contributions – of which there have been many.

The recipient of the award – is John Van Polanen - John and Joanne van Polanen have been shareholders in the company since its inception in 1989. Subsequently John completed 15 years in a governance role with the company – 10 of those years as Chairman.

I would just like to read a short citation that will give you some background to John's contribution to the company

Prior to 1989 the Ashburton Lyndhurst, Mayfield Hinds and Valetta Irrigation schemes, along with the RDR were owned by the Crown and administered by the Ministry of Works.

The irrigators on the Ashburton Lyndhurst scheme were represented by the Ashburton Lyndhurst Irrigation Association – a group of farmers who met with the Ministry of Works annually to discuss operational issues and set the annual charges.

John and Joanne van Polanen entered dairy farming around 1980 as sharemilkers. They progressed through various sharemilking contracts in different areas until the purchase of their first 90 ha dairy farm at Winchmore in 1988. The farm was supplied irrigation water from Ashburton Lyndhurst Irrigation Scheme. Over time John and Joanne were gradually able to expand their farm area and by 2018 they farmed around 580 ha in the scheme command area.

In 1989 the irrigation scheme was privatised by the Government of the day. This was the beginning of the farmer owned co-operative that is now Ashburton Lyndhurst Irrigation Limited (ALIL). Today it has approximately 244 shareholders and covers an area of almost 30,000 hectares.

John was first elected to the ALIL board in 2002 when the scheme's farmers were almost entirely borderdyke or flood irrigated. The annual costs to the farmers were relatively low but the overall model was quite inefficient incurring substantial delivery losses. On-farm application was almost entirely flood irrigation which was also inefficient – using more water than required and causing leaching of nutrients.

Around this time the groundwater zones were classified by Ecan as over-allocated and red-zones introduced. Irrigation New Zealand emerged from recess strongly through this period and they began promoting irrigation efficiencies. The development of overhead spray irrigation rapidly started to replace the borderdyke's.

In 2005 John was appointed to a sub-committee of ALIL to investigate the feasibility of supplying water via a piped network to 4,000 ha (referred to as "Stage 1 and now known as the Green Line). The piping proposal would substantially reduce delivery losses and use gravity to create pressure, virtually eliminating all energy requirements. The farmers in the pilot area would all be required to change their water application technology from flood to far more efficient overhead spray irrigation (centre pivots etc).

By 2007 John was the Chairman of ALIL and leading from the front. The “Stage 1” project was a “green-fields” project that was hugely forward thinking and unique for Mid Canterbury irrigation at the time – eliminating both water losses and energy costs. It involved the cooperative raising significant amounts of capital and gaining commitment from all shareholders to underwrite the project financially. After gaining shareholder support the project was driven forward and commissioned in 2008.

While regarded as a bit of a learning curve, it was quickly deemed as a resounding success by the Stage 1 shareholders.

In 2008 John was appointed as the ALIL director representative on the Board of RDR Management Limited (RDRML). This is the over-arching water delivery mechanism to which supplies irrigation water to ALIL and MHV; stockwater to Ashburton District Council (ADC) and water for electricity generation to Trustpower. John was appointed Chairman of the RDRML board in October 2011 and remained in that role until June 2018. Throughout those years John was able to skilfully navigate some of the competing interests between the shareholders.

With the resounding success of the Stage 1 piping project, and driven ahead by the Board under John’s leadership, between 2010 and 2013 ALIL completed a feasibility study in regard to piping the remaining 25,000 hectares.

A special meeting was held by the Company in November 2013. In excess of 80% of the shareholders voted in support the stage 2 upgrade proposal for the company to undertake the upgrade at a cost in excess of \$100m.

A contract was signed in December 2013 and over the years from 2014 to 2017 John oversaw what was the second largest civil engineering project in the South Island at the time was completed.

Where other companies had failed to gain support for such a large undertaking – Ashburton Lyndhurst managed to succeed. The “yes” vote was largely attributed to the visible and proven success of the Stage 1 project, and also the huge amount of time that John and the then scheme manager Jess Dargue spent visiting individual shareholders to answer their concerns and provide detail in regard to the project

John provided ALIL with strong and steady leadership and a desire to move the district forward. He always “led from the front” managing a high workload which took from around 10 hrs/week and up to 40 hrs/week during the very busiest periods. He has a determined, “get the job done” type of attitude.

John you were just the right person to be leading the company during these major redevelopments. You successfully led the co-operative through the biggest change in its history and ALIL is now at the leading edge of water, energy and production efficiency, and consequently has vastly improved environmental management.

Much of this commitment was made for little personal financial gain but to benefit the shareholders and the community as a whole. He could not have made such a contribution without the support of Joanne who kept the farm and household running in his absence and we acknowledge her significant indirect contribution.

We all salute your achievements John and ask you to come forward and receive this memento from the Company.