

# **Verbal Submission on the Proposed Plan Change to the MacKenzie District Plan.**

## **Introduction**

My name is Susan Allan, I have a Bachelor of Commerce and Management Degrees from Lincoln University, and also a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of New Zealand.

I am here representing Sawdon Station, a family owner farming operation of approximately 7000 ha, on the boundary to Lake Tekapo Township. We run Merino sheep, and have diversified intensively into cropping. I also run a successful chartered accountancy practice from my rural location.

My family has farmed Sawdon for 84 years, and it is our livelihood, and I am extremely passionate about the MacKenzie and Sawdon. My Passion is shown in the attached article.

We need the option to diversify on our land; traditional sheep farming may not be sustainable into the future. Modification of the 'working landscape' is crucial for the ongoing sustainability of farming and the protection of the endangered and threatened plant species from introduced weeds and pest. This on Sawdon being Rabbits and Hieracium.

## **Mission Statement**

➤ *Fostering our community.*

This defined by the Oxford dictionary to read - Promote growth or development of a body of people living in one place.

- Is Plan Change 13 promoting growth and the development?

I suggest it does not. I emphasize there needs to be a balance between our ability to farm and the ability to diversify land use because of the changing national and world economic situations and the environment. Plan Change 13 is severely restrictive of our ability to diversify into other land usage that may be beneficial to the nation in the future. Plan Change 13 is a threat to our survival.

➤ *We will be progressive - Seeking out opportunities and leading from the front.*

- Is Plan change 13 seeking out opportunities for the region, and the overall nation?

We will be moving backwards by holding the MacKenzie Sub-zone as a museum piece.

➤ *Service - We are a service organisation. Providing efficient and cost-effective services is our prime responsibility.*

No Social or financial/economic impact reports have been completed for Plan Change 13. I doubt this is a service.

➤ *Sustainability - we are committed to the sustainable management of all resources of the District.*

Sustainable management requires a balance to be found that provides for the social, economic and cultural well-being of the community, while sustaining natural and physical resources and safeguarding the environment from adverse effects.

Plan Change 13 places too much emphasis on the protection of natural landscapes and vests draconian powers in local government to the extent that you will cease to become the authors of your own destinies and could well suffer financial ruin. Is this sustainability?

➤ *Integrity - we will always act in a caring, honest and fair manner.*

Farming has always been an integral part of this district and any change must have the farmer's wellbeing in mind to ensure the wellbeing of the community and to encourage the district to prosper.

One would have to ask does the council really care about the future of the farmers in the Mackenzie sub-zone, my extended family, and the future generations, and those people who choose to live in this district.

➤ *Takata Whenua - We recognise the Treaty of Waitangi and respect the values of the Takata Whenua.*

*[From Submission 103] – "During the preparation of Plan change 13, there was little or no engagement with Ngai Tahu and, as a result, the plan change in its present form fails to adequately recognise and provide for cultural values".*

➤ *Communication - we will tell our people what we are doing, listen to their feedback and be responsive to their needs.*

I find this a huge joke - No consultation was completed with the owners of Sawdon, at all. As quoted from Graham Densen's technical report L1 [Landscape assessment of issues arising from Public Submissions]

*"It is acknowledged that the disposition of 'x' and 'pink' areas was prescribed by me on landscape impact grounds and with insufficient opportunity for landowner consultations in most cases. This was due to time constraints in preparing Plan Change 13 rather than an intended lack of respect for owners."*

What was in the brief from the Council to Graham Densen? (Requested a copy of this brief on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2008, nothing sighted to date, will I have to go through the official information act?)

Time constraints cost the farmers adequate consultation.

➤ *Representation - we will speak up on behalf of the community. While many issues of vital concern such as health and education are not within our direct control we will strive to protect the interest of our people.*

Protection of the community with no social impact report completed? I feel that if a social impact report was completed at this stage of Plan change 13, it could show outcomes which could be more detrimental to the community, than you anticipate. We are Guardians of this land we hold as a farming unit, and if you take from us our financial sustainability, it is unlikely to have a good outcome to the community.

➤ *Team Work - we are determined to work together, Council and staff, as an effective team.*

I had pride in the MacKenzie District Council until I read, and considered the ramifications of Plan Change 13.

At this stage I hope the Major and Councilors feel some remorse for their actions, and listen to those people in your community, not the powers that be who sit on the outside and look in and whose agenda's do not take into account the impact of plan change 13 on the people who live and work in the Mackenzie Country.

Also attached is the Vision statement for the MacKenzie District Council.

I am not going to spend time going through this but I would like Councilors to consider the statement

*"Democracy is respected and equal opportunity and the rights of the individual are upheld"*

With one foul swoop, the council plans to remove our existing rights to work and benefit from the fruits of our labour by oppressively restricting what we can and cannot do on our land.

While we support the need to tighten controls on "subdivision development" in the Basin, the current move to take away from our families the opportunity to financial benefit from all our hard work through this oppressive Plan change is draconian.

Imbalance between the rights of individuals and property owners and their freedom to develop and undertake activities on their properties in a rapidly changing world and the desire of planners to maintain our NZ landscape in a pristine condition - It is too narrow and restrictive.

Sawdon no longer supports Tenure Review, as freehold land with no property rights is valueless to us as land owners. Provision for future generations and debt reduction will no longer be possible.

The landscape does need some protection, but to place the protection in local government or government departments is **not** something I see as the best option for this land, particularly in the light of the cavalier way Plan Change 13 has been introduced.

Farming is part of the landscape - The tussocks are a result of grazing, if that is removed the tussocks will be replaced by trees, and rabbits. As a farmer and accountant I cannot accept blanket controls, which are over complex and would limit the ability to adequately fund the stewardship role we currently hold. Rabbit control on Sawdon this autumn and spring has cost \$26 per ha, is this sustainable, with no further diversification?

### **Nodes**

It is in the opinion of Sawdon that the nodal concept is fundamentally flawed.

I totally disagree with having to stand here and advise the following:

Sawdon requests the identification of an existing development around the Old Sawdon homestead. This is an established area with all the attributes of a node as identified in the Landscape Study. This homestead was built in 1924, and has been my home for 18 years. To exclude Old Sawdon from classification as an existing node, I find extremely insulting. This node is part of the amalgamated unit of the property, but considered as highly significant to the farming operation at Sawdon.

Also, the recorded homestead node is inaccurate, as the woolshed and haybarn has been excluded from the node.

There are other areas on the property that could be considered as areas of importance for nodes. One area is very largely developed. See photos.

These photo's show -

- ◆ Not visible from the road,
- ◆ The road is not visible from the developed land,
- ◆ Topography this landscape is such that appropriate subdivision and development can, occur without creating adverse environment effect.
- ◆ Well designed and sensitive developments, can exist without causing potential adverse effects.
- ◆ Huge investment - if this is underpinned the good work of past generations, our generation will lead to farming in the high country becoming obsolete.

This development has seen Sawdon go from an extensive grazing property, to an intensive farming operation.

Sawdon is open to a series of different diversification options, including eco-tourism. Plan Change 13 shelves all options available to us.

Communal type environments within a node will occur, which is not desirable to farming operations, or eco-tourism.

One would assume that without a detailed property inspection no one person can decide on the fate of no nodes, in areas of importance to this property.

Plan Change 13 is full of holes. Bringing in a Plan Change, with no guidelines (i.e. wrapped baleage on road frontage) is like bringing in a change in the income tax act, within taking into consideration the consequences. Would you personally be happy with this?

Plan Change 13 goes too far, it will deprive us of financial opportunity and threaten the future of our families. Everyone works to secure their future and the future of their families.

## **Conclusion**

Withdrawal of the proposed Plan Change 13.

Sawdon recommends that the Council;

1. Prepare a comprehensive district-wide landscape study, identifying areas of outstanding natural landscape, and sighting those areas under national threat, not only from subdivision, but also weed and pests,
2. Financial/economic assessment – from a suitably qualified expert,
3. Social impact assessment – from a suitably qualified expert,
4. Public Consultation,
5. Deletion of the nodal concept, or alternatively if the nodal concept is adopted, changes requested in this verbal submission be made. Including a site visit of Sawdon.

My future, the next generation and that of the future of farming in the MacKenzie High Country lies in the hands of the panel in front of me, the decisions of the council. I will not rest till this plan is withdrawn.

9<sup>th</sup> September 2008  
Susan Allan

# Up on the farm

*High country Chartered Accountant Sue Allan has the best of several worlds . . .  
Neal Wallace reports. Pictures: Brian High*





**Y**ou would be hard-pressed to find a more idyllic setting than Susan Allan's high-country home and office near Lake Tekapo in the South Island's Mackenzie Basin.

Soaring above the Basin overlooking her Sawdon Station homestead are the golden tussock-covered flanks of Mt Edward, from which the Two Thumb Range stretches away to the north casting a shadow over the Lake's glacial waters.

Across the Lake the ragged snow-capped peaks of the Southern Alps dominate the vista, and to the west is Mt Cook. In this dramatic environment Sue operates her Chartered Accountancy practice, and is her family's fourth generation to farm the 7,000ha pastoral lease Sawdon Station, which she runs with husband Gavin (Snow) Loxton.

Sue is passionate about farming and the Mackenzie, and working from home means she has the best of both worlds – able to swap a day in the office for a day on the farm, mustering the backblocks or cleaning out the woolshed.

"If Snow needs a hand drafting the sheep, I can help. And the children see both sides of our lifestyle and have the same lifestyle which I had as a child... this is the greatest opportunity you can ever give your children. Not only can I work in my office, but I can work in the paddocks as well."

The high country is undergoing major changes and Sue's business reflects that. Farmers make up about half her 200 clients with farm servicing and tourist operators the balance.

And while the Mackenzie may be dry land, it is not exempt from the growing interest in dairying, with farms established to the south, near Twizel, and nearby Fairlie.

Her accountancy business has grown to the point where it is at a crossroads: does she allow it to grow, meaning employing another accountant, or does she keep it at the current size? Tekapo's phenomenal growth in recent years as it develops into a large holiday home resort provides a range of options for her. It is an ideal mix for someone who, as a teenager, was keen on numbers and farming.

Sue left school in 1987 and started work as a typist, computer operator and receptionist in the Timaru office of Thomas Lawson, returning to Sawdon at weekends. Life until then had revolved around farm life and education at the relatively small Mackenzie College. On entering the workforce she quickly found her niche in accountancy, but wanted more. "I got bored sitting at a computer all day punching numbers. It wasn't me."

In 1990 she headed south to Cromwell and worked for Mead and Stark as an accountancy clerk. The move confirmed her enjoyment of the profession and helped her make the decision to study accountancy at university.

Aged 20 she went to Lincoln University, graduating in 1993 with a Bachelor of Commerce and Management, and returned to rural accountancy with G R Leech and Partners in Ashburton.

After a brief stint overseas in 1994, she returned to her beloved high country and for the next three years she commuted 200km a day from Sawdon to work at Foote Butterfield and Taylor in Timaru.

In March 1999 Sue branched out on her own, using her knowledge and love of the farming sector and farm accountancy to develop the business. That special rapport and a determination to give clients a better service have given her the "personal touch" and an ability to discuss issues such as wool prices, fertiliser rates, milk solids, drought issues and grass growth.

The transition from employee to businesswoman was easier because she had confidence in her experience and agricultural knowledge and from working in accounting for so long.

"Because I had done all the mechanics of preparing accounts, I understood where they were at and what the money was spent on."

She visits many of her farming clients in their homes, where they are at ease and more open to

**'Because I had done all the mechanics of preparing accounts, I understood where they were at and what the money was spent on'**



High country family, from left Joel (6), Sue, Snow, holding Safa, who is nearly three, and Ace.



Sue balances her professional activities with running a high-country sheep station and looking after two young children – Sara, nearly three, and Joel, six (above).



Sue at work on her practice newsletter with contract writer Chanelle Berge.

discussing issues and plans: “Most of my clients are in the same age group and have children of their own and tend to be more relaxed, knowing that I am also a farmer and understand where they are at.

“They ring all the time, 24/7. Some mornings the phone goes at 7am, and then sometimes at 9.30pm. My door is always open, as I know most of my clients are working and unable to chat on the phone between nine and five,” she says.

Visiting clients in their homes has also allowed her to help them run their businesses more efficiently. She offers a service of introducing clients to computer software, which enables them to monitor and understand their business better. It also allows them to keep a detailed record of farm inputs such as fertiliser used, application rates and

seed varieties, and to monitor where their business is and where it’s going.

Books were also more presentable for year-end, saving them money in accountancy fees. “Gone is the day of a shoe box in the corner!”

Farm visits also allow her to see what clients are doing, such as buying a new tractor or car, sowing new grasses, or changing from a capital livestock business to trading – all important taxation issues and best sighted before year end. And of course although here is a one-person business, Sue points out she has a network of expertise to call on within the Institute on issues such as tax and farm management.

She balances her professional activities with running a high-country sheep station, looking after two young children – Sara, nearly three, and Joel, six – and fronting up to what she views as growing threats from bureaucracy and environmentalists which impose new restrictions almost daily.

Permission for pastoral lessees to develop land from native cover to more productive grasses is becoming more difficult to get, and even permission to poison rabbits required, in her case, a 51-page resource consent application.

Local councils are introducing more controls over day-to-day farm operations, she says, and she fears that “restrictive, draconian powers” will make it impossible to farm the high country in the future, which would obviously be extremely detrimental to the high country and for that matter, the nation as a whole.

She says high-country people feel they are under attack by central government – for many, their landlord: a new process for setting rents could see the rent on Sawdon Station increase 1792%, with the Government planning to start charging rent for amenity values such as mountain and lake views.

This is despite lessees not being able to earn income off those values, and other controls restricting their ability to increase farm production or diversify. Pastoral lessees are limited to grazing animals and must get permission to disturb soil or vegetation.

For example, Sawdon wants to sow 45ha of lucerne adjacent to an existing block they have already developed. Land Information New Zealand has declined the application, saying three endangered plant species grow on the block. But Sue says a scientist they employed found the plants





on other parts of the station and told them he would be surprised to find them within the 45ha block. Two of these plants can be bought through the internet.

The lucerne crop would increase productivity and therefore the viability of their business but it seems to her as if their landlord is not listening to them and doesn't want to work with them.

In this case, Sue asks, why do lessees have to employ scientists for advice? Why aren't government departments, who have the necessary information and knowledge of these plants, advising high country lessees?

Farmers feel as though the Government does not want them or their sheep in the high country and that they are being backed into a corner, she says. More of her time is being taken up with issues that have little to do with accountancy or the daily business of farming, complying with rules and regulations and trying to ensure the family's fifth generation will have the

option of taking over the farm.

"This generation is more green than the last, plus we have the knowledge to manage the land which has been passed down from previous generations. This land needs to be looked after, and I don't feel

### 'The future of the property is not looking good'

the Government has the passion that we have or the knowledge that we have.

"I have seen a lot of the high country over-grazed because of rabbits, and with the introduction of RHD [rabbit haemorrhagic disease], we have had a chance on Sawdon to develop land in the past 10 years. We can intensify the farm operation by development, thereby managing the native areas of importance to the nation by grazing it every two to three years, but that option has been stymied."

Sue points out that instead of working with pastoral lessees, large tracts of the high country were being taken out of leases, locked up in the conservation estate and left to an over-stretched Department of Conservation to manage.

Land continuously evolves, she says, and locking it away does not mean it is being looked after any better than when it was part of a working farm. Rabbits, wilding pines and the weed hieracium do not respect boundaries.

"It all points to a bleak future for stations like Sawdon and New Zealand's high country farming culture . . . with restrictions on the development of the property, tenure review, rent review, rabbits and the drought which we have had for three years, the future of the property is not looking good."

Sue Allan may always have a solid grassroots accountancy business, but she fears for the future for the next generation of high country farmers. ■



# Mission Statement

## "Fostering Our Community"

### **Leadership**

We will be progressive - seeking out opportunities and leading from the front.

### **Service**

We are a service organisation. Providing efficient and cost-effective services is our prime responsibility.

### **Sustainability**

We are committed to the sustainable management of all the resources of the District.

### **Integrity**

We will always act in a caring, honest and fair manner.

### **Takata Whenua**

We recognise the Treaty of Waitangi and respect the values of the Takata Whenua.

### **Communication**

We will tell our people what we are doing, listen to their feedback and be responsive to their needs.

### **Representation**

We will speak up on behalf of our community. While many issues of vital concern such as health and education are not within our direct control we will strive to protect the interests of our people.

### **Team Work**

We are determined to work together, Council and staff, as an effective team.

# Vision Statement

## Our Vision For The Mackenzie District

### **Mackenzie District will be a district in which:**

- We foster the unique attributes and strong sense of community that makes the Mackenzie District special.
- Our natural environment is protected and enhanced in balance with achieving social and commercial objectives.
- A dynamic economy provides employment and investment opportunities consistent with the quality of life aspirations of existing and future generations.
- Democracy is respected and equal opportunity and the rights of the individual are upheld.
- A variety of sporting, recreational, cultural, spiritual, welfare and educational resources are available to enrich the lives of our people.
- Safe, effective, sustainable water, waste, communication, energy and transport systems are in place.
- People are encouraged to use their skills and talents for the benefit of the community.









