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Nelson helps in legal aid shortage

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An "acute" shortage of family legal aid lawyers in Blenheim means taxpayers are funding Nelson lawyers' travel to the town to help out.

Nelson lawyers taking on cases in Blenheim said they had enough work in Nelson and were only taking on the extra work in Blenheim to assist legal aid.

In response to questions from the *Nelson Mail*, the Ministry of Justice said there were eight Blenheim lawyers undertaking family legal aid cases.

It said two Nelson lawyers were helping out; one had four cases and the other only one client in Blenheim.

However, an informal survey of Nelson and Blenheim lawyers shows the situation is a lot more desperate than the statistics show.

The number of Blenheim lawyers taking on cases was as low as three or zero, with clients referred to Nelson to get lawyers.

A lot more than three Nelson lawyers said they had family legal aid clients in Blenheim.

Steven Zindel, of Zindels Lawyers, said three lawyers in his firm alone, including himself, travelled to Blenheim to do family legal aid work.

He said lawyers were being reimbursed for travel and accommodation in Blenheim.

He believed the family legal aid system was breaking down in Blenheim, and said the constant battle in bureaucracy and paperwork involved in family legal aid was part of the problem.

There was also more lucrative commercial law work available in Blenheim.

The situation in Nelson was not as bad, although it could be difficult to find lawyers for domestic violence or care and protection work.

Zindels lawyer Sarah McGovern said she went to Blenheim regularly and received "quite a few calls" from clients in Blenheim who could not get a family legal aid lawyer.

She was only aware of three Blenheim lawyers taking on family legal aid.

Ms McGovern said she also had calls from Women's Refuge saying their clients could not get lawyers and she was rung by a community law service with the same problem.

She had enough work in Nelson and it was frustrating to have to travel to Blenheim as it was time consuming because she was unable to drive and had to go by bus.

It was also inefficient and difficult dealing with clients in Blenheim as she had to do it over the phone or travel to Blenheim for meetings.

Getting documents signed and filed in the Blenheim Court was also a headache for Nelson.

The shortage of family legal aid lawyers comes as the Government is reviewing the Family Court in a bid to cut costs.

The review has been criticised with lawyers and counsellors warning proposed changes place children and lower income people at risk.

Sara Gracia, of Nelson firm Glasgow Harley, said she had clients call from Blenheim all the time.

She had suggested that the ministry might fund her and another Nelson lawyer to regularly spend a day in Blenheim, to enable them to take instructions and save money.

Nelson lawyer Michelle Duggan said she was rung once a month on average from someone in Blenheim asking for family legal aid.

Nelson lawyer Fiona Emery said she was working with three clients in Marlborough.

Other lawyers said they had inquiries from people in Blenheim unable to get lawyers for family legal aid.

Legal Aid Services acting director Neil Cooper said two lawyers in Nelson had volunteered to help with the shortage in Blenheim.

At least three other Nelson-based lawyers had also indicated they are willing to help if needed.

One Nelson lawyer had four Blenheim-based legal aid cases, while the other one had one case in Blenheim.

Nelson lawyers who travelled to Blenheim to undertake casework were reimbursed for travel.

Mr Cooper said the ministry monitored the availability of legal aid lawyers across the country.

The number of lawyers taking on legal aid work could fall from time to time outside the main centres where smaller communities may mean lawyers were prone to conflicts of interest, for example, when several parties from one family may each require independent legal representation.

There were 32 family legal aid lawyers working in Nelson, the ministry said.



Steven Zindel

A beefy catch



Howzat?: Former England cricketer Sir Ian Botham with a brown trout he caught on the Marua River.

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"Be thankful for what you've got, and look after it." That was today's message to New Zealand's trout fishermen from English cricketer legend Sir Ian Botham after two days of fishing in the top of the south.

Freshwater fishing is one of Sir Ian's passions and he drove from Dunedin to Owen River Lodge near Murchison after the end of the first England-New Zealand cricket test on Sunday to be

fishing on Monday morning.

He said the lodge was "right up there" as one of the two best he had visited in New Zealand, the other being Poronui Lodge just outside Taupo.

Monday on the Wairau River was unproductive but yesterday he hooked four brown trout in the Marua, landing and releasing three, all around 2.2kg (5lb).

"It was fantastic, I loved it," he said.

"We got winded off on the first day but you can't do anything about that. It wasn't meant to happen, but it did."

Sir Ian, who is travelling with his wife, Lady Kath, said he would be back.

"I've been to Nelson before, but never spent any quality time, so it's been nice."

Fishing was a very important part of his relaxation, he said, and he had just acquired some fishing rights for a river 10 minutes from his Yorkshire home.

"I disappear off to the river whenever I can. I find it very therapeutic. I think a lot of people would be better if they started doing it."

Last night on Twitter

(@BeefyBotham) he posted pictures of himself with trout caught yesterday, commenting "How beautiful is this five-pounder? Don't you love New Zealand?"

The couple were leaving the lodge this morning to drive to Wellington, where Sir Ian will be providing Sky TV commentary on the second test, beginning at the Basin Reserve tomorrow.

England would win, he said, even though he had been impressed with the Black Caps' effort in the first test.

"They stuck to their task, but we don't need to play cricket on

wickets like that."

Owen River Lodge owner Felix Borenstein said Sir Ian was a very experienced and skilled fisherman and knew that conditions could work against catching fish.

"He took it on the chin that the first day was a bit tough, and was certainly talking with Kath about coming back here next year."

Owen River Lodge, which bills itself as New Zealand's finest five-star-rated luxury fly fishing lodge, has a tariff of \$575 per person per night, and provides guided fishing at \$745 per day. The tariff includes meals and the loan of equipment.

No relief in sight as the big dry worsens

Helen Murdoch

Drought is reaching one in 15-year levels in parts of Tasman, with extreme fire danger, record low river, groundwater and soil moisture levels now being seen around the district.

Conditions are not expected to improve soon, with Sunday's forecast of rain now off the MetService radar and replaced with some showers between Monday and Thursday.

Tasman District Council environment and planning manager Dennis Bush-King said today the council was now managing the situation on a week-by-week basis.

The council was following up a

number of cases of overtakes by permitted water users and has issued some infringement notices.

"The sad news is that there are some people who have not managed to comply with the water restrictions.

"People need to be careful with what water they can access. There is still another four weeks of irrigation demand for many growers. Urban users also need to continue their good efforts to reduce water use."

However, the demand for water dropped over the past week as users complied with the requests to cut water use.

"The drop in river levels has reduced and groundwater levels on the Waimea Plains are now ben-

efiting from the earlier introduction of water restrictions even though they too are still falling."

The council's Dry Weather Taskforce last night agreed to hold water restrictions at stage 3 (50 per cent) across the Waimea Plains in light of some coastal irrigators turning off their water pumps to avoid further saltwater intrusion.

Mr Bush-King said the monitoring of coastal wells showed the salinity had crept up, but was not yet at significant levels.

Meanwhile, the Waimea River at Appleby Bridge continues to fall and is now flowing at 900 litres a second, down from more than 1000l/sec last week.

Inland Wangapeka, Tapawera Plains, Baton and Stanley Brook

zones remain at stage 1 (20 per cent) cuts but the disappearance of parts of the Motupiko River has seen that irrigation zone shift to stage 2 (35 per cent) restrictions from next Monday.

Eleven remnant Wai-iti zone permit holders, outside the Wai-iti Dam zone, have moved to stage 1 restrictions. Irrigators in the dam zone remain unaffected.

Mr Bush-King said the dam was continuing to release stored winter water. It had at least another 40 days' supply.

He said the Riwaka zone was holding up well thanks to flow-sharing by irrigators and the Anatoki and Tadmor zone continued to operate under restrictions.

However, surface takes in the Moutere zone were not permitted. Motueka's groundwater level was holding up despite the Motueka River getting low, he said.

Urban water users were reminded that hand-held hosing of productive gardens only was permitted on odd and even calendar days, corresponding to property numbers, between 7pm and 9pm.

Car washing and the use of sprinklers is banned. This applies to Richmond, Mapua-Ruby Bay, Brightwater, Hope, Wakefield, Tapawera and their rural extensions. It also takes in rural water supply schemes of Redwood Valley, 88 Valley and Dovedale, and the owners of private domestic wells in areas subject to rationing.

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