



Sarah Dawson

NZPI® Fellow Membership Award

31st August 2017

Sarah Dawson has a highly distinguished professional planning career that has spanned four decades and reflects a level of commitment and accomplishment attained by few. Her outstanding contribution to the Institute, her influence on the advancement of planning practice and her leading role in some of New Zealand's major planning projects, collectively warrants her recognition as a Fellow of the New Zealand Planning Institute.

Sarah's contribution to the planning profession and Institute has previously been recognised with the presentation of a Distinguished Services Award in 1999. That award acknowledged her role as Chairperson of the NZPI Canterbury Branch (1994-1996), as an independent planning commissioner (from 1997) and of course her significant contribution to the profession as a planner/resource manager and mentor since her career commenced in 1977.

Since 1999, Sarah has continued to support the Institute and the profession with thoughtful leadership, hard work and her time. She has taken an active interest in improving the practice of planning as well as seeking to make planning an attractive and fulfilling career for her colleagues. She is also acutely aware of the need to mentor younger planners and readily provides professional coaching and guidance to those who come under her wings.

She has demonstrated her leadership as an Accredited RMA Hearings Commissioner (with chair endorsement since 2014) and is a longstanding member of the local branch interview panel for candidates applying for NZPI membership. Sarah continues to contribute to planning education as a member of the NZPI Tertiary Training Institutions Accreditation Committee, where she has evaluated numerous planning programmes across the country, along with membership of the Lincoln University Planning Advisory Board.

Sarah has presented at numerous professional training workshops for both elected members and planners on subject matters including consenting practice, presentation of expert evidence, plan-making and case law. In 2014 she co-authored a think piece and presented at workshops, commissioned by the NZPI, to help planners understand the implications of the King Salmon decision, a case in which she was professionally involved.

Not one to shy away from planning projects that are complex, highly technical and of high public interest, Sarah has worked on many regionally and nationally significant projects. Between 1997 and 2003 she led a multi-disciplinary team of consultants to obtain a privately requested plan change and associated regional consents for a new town for 5000 people (Pegasus in North Canterbury).

More recently she has provided extensive policy and consenting advice in respect of numerous aquaculture and marine farming proposals in the Marlborough Sounds, including application and AEE preparation in respect of New Zealand King Salmon's expanded salmon farming operations, culminating in presenting planning evidence to the associated Board of Inquiry.

For many years, Sarah has been heavily involved in projects involving renewable energy policy and infrastructure as an advisor to Meridian Energy including consenting relating to the Manapouri and Waitaki hydro power schemes, along with a large windfarm in Southland.

Sarah's technical expertise, experience and professional manner result in her being highly sought after by local authorities. Waimakariri, Christchurch, Kaikoura, Marlborough, Selwyn, Ashburton and Queenstown-Lakes District Councils have all engaged Sarah to assist them in undertaking their plan review and consenting functions.

Sarah's vast experience and planning expertise has also been sought by Central Government where she was appointed as an inaugural member of the Minister for the Environment's (MfE) Advisory Board on Professional Development for RMA Decision Makers (2004-2008), as a member of MfE's Reference Group on Resource Management Amendment in 1998 and most recently she has been appointed by the Minister for the Environment to the Environmental Legal Assistance Fund Advisory Panel.

Sarah is one of New Zealand's leading experts in the preparation of Assessments of Environmental Effects, having project-managed a wide range of AEEs, including some for very large projects which involved highly complex scientific aspects, with complex ecological or biophysical systems. She is skilful at managing and coordinating the input of technical expertise, distilling technical reports, writing AEEs, explaining complex concepts and summarising technical findings.

She is also a leading proponent in formulating conditions of consent for addressing complex effects, such as those required to establish adaptive management regimes in environmental settings where knowledge and information is still evolving.

More recently, she was appointed as a core member of the Independent Hearings Panel set up to hear submissions and make decisions on the Replacement Christchurch District Plan. In this capacity, Sarah displayed exemplary professionalism and expertise when engaging with witnesses, drafting decisions and mentoring planners within the Secretariat staff over the 2 years that the Panel sat. The respect for Sarah's plan-writing skills saw the Panel appointing Sarah with the task of working with the Secretariat, submitters and Council officers through the "working hearings", definitions amendment and plan restructuring processes. Many planners, other witnesses and Counsel who appeared before the Panel can attest to her ability to quickly get to the heart of complex and wide-ranging planning issues, robustly testing evidence in a courteous and respectful manner. Throughout, Sarah's dry sense of humour was used effectively to diffuse tension and bring a touch of relief to the formal proceedings.

Sarah is described as having a very sharp mind, with incredible recollection and an 'eye for detail', while always able to 'see the big picture'. Professionalism, proficiency and personality are the hallmarks of Sarah's illustrious planning career. The NZPI congratulate Sarah on her elevation to Fellow and recognise her outstanding service to the profession and to the advancement of the practice of planning in New Zealand.

Planning is a valued profession, essential to achieving a better New Zealand

New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI) is the voice of planning in New Zealand. It is the professional organisation representing this country's planners, resource managers, urban designers, and environmental practitioners. Planners have a critical role in shaping New Zealand's future by helping to develop solutions to key issues, such as population growth, infrastructure needs, pressure on natural resources and environments, demographic change and transport.

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