Talk about adding insult to injury.
First the resource consent hearings for the proposed Turitea wind farm are whipped away from the people of Palmerston North, then they are told they'll have to fork out nigh on half a million dollars to pay for the privilege.
The Environment Minister "called-in" Mighty River Power's consent application because it was of "national significance" and should be decided by a board of inquiry, not the Palmerston North City Council.
The problem with that - apart from the fact the hearing process has been taken away from the people who will be most affected by its outcome - is the city council is obliged to make a submission to the board of inquiry.
If the consent process had been left with the local authority, it could recoup the costs of gathering detailed information and evidence upon which to base its decision.
Now the consent application has been called in, the city council is merely a submitter, and the cost of having a say on behalf of its citizens - $475,000 - will have to be picked up by ratepayers.
As reported in today's Manawatu Standard, the Government wants to make it easier to call in resource consent applications. The Resource Management (Simplifying and Streamlining) Amendment Bill would see more consent decisions taken away from local authorities and heard by an Environmental Protection Agency the Government plans to establish.
Why not just scrap the RMA altogether? There seems little point in retaining it if central government can simply call in any application of "national significance" (a term that seems destined to be interpreted as "political significance") and put it before a board of inquiry appointed by the Government.
The Government clearly believes it is justified in taking major consent hearings away from local authorities, and perhaps it is, but it could at least have the decency to pick up the tab it has left behind.
In its submission on the RMA bill, the city council said local authorities need to be able to recoup costs if consents are called in. It's hard to imagine the
Government being so generous when it has no incentive to be. The interests of local people - those who must live next door to the outcome of consent decisions - have been slaughtered on the altar of "national significance", and local authorities have been told to pay for the funeral.