

IN THE MATTER OF:

The Draft Northland Community Plan  
2009-2019

May 2009

"The newzealandfarmers voice"



**Farmers of  
New Zealand**

PO Box 484 Whangarei 0140

### **Submission of Farmers of New Zealand Inc**

1. We do wish to be heard in support of our submission

2. Existing Council Projects:

2.1 We wish to compliment on the Councils management of the Northland Events Centre Project. While this was an emotional issue with the community evenly split across the region, including our membership we believe the final result was a good result for all. We also support the design build method undertaken by the Council and hope this method is used widely in the future being a very cost effective approach.

2.2 We wish to voice our concerns over the \$700,000 contribution planned for the Dargaville 50m swimming pool project. While we are not opposed to Dargaville enjoying a new pool we remain extremely concerned over the Kaipara District Councils management of this project. We have serious concerns over the quality of the pools business plan and of the Trust set up to manage this future public amenity. We have also been made aware of a Maori claim on the land designated for this project.

We believe NRC must act as a responsible manager of public funds. Unless the business plan meets an appropriate standard of quality, that the Trust deed protects the investment being made by ratepayers, that all the funding to ensure the pool can be constructed and managed is confirmed, that the Kaipara District Council has taken all appropriate and required steps to faithfully consult with its ratepayers, and that the land is unencumbered by Maori claims the proposed funding should not proceed.

We have serious misgivings about this project. While we realise it is not the responsibility of the Regional Council to interfere with the process undertaken by a Territorial Authority we believe NRC has a serious duty of care for the funds itself is responsible for. We would encourage the Council to undertake a serious audit and investigation of this project prior to any decision to allocate public funding.

We would also advise that we are contemplating proceeding with a request to the Auditor General to undertake a detailed investigation of both the financial management. Legal counsel has been briefed.

2.3 While we realise the current economic climate is a good reason for discontinuing with the current regional amenity rate we would suggest to Council that when economic times improve such a rate be reconsidered. There is a serious lack of regional amenities in Northland and believe NRC does have a role to play. Northland has been poorly served by District Councils in this area of essential infrastructure.

### 3. River Management

We support the NRC undertaking greater investment in this area. We believe NRC should be congratulated for the work it has undertaken in recent years. It is highly likely that the town of Kaitia would have been flooded in recent events if it were not for the timely intervention of the Council. The Council has taken unwarranted criticism by the media and from some territorial authorities over their river management. It is not justified.

Farmers of New Zealand would like to continue to participate and assist the council to better understand our regional catchments and develop objective and technically efficient management plans for their care.

Water management is and will always be an emotional issue for the farming community. Past schemes have not always optimised effectiveness due to landowners advocating for personal benefit rather than community benefit. While we understand the Council's legal requirement to consult it is important that each catchment plan is developed based on sound scientific and empirical evidence.

### 4. Enterprise Northland

We supported the review the Council undertook of this organisation. We have been a consistent critic of the performance of this organisation and remain so today.

We recognise that the current EN was formed based on national political and policy foundations and this has contributed to what we perceive to be a poor return on investment.

We remain extremely sceptical that Enterprise Northland post review will change. We believe any user of public funds must be accountable. This organisation must be measured against defined and real outcomes. Unless a clear return on investment can be proved we would argue that EN be dissolved and the function of Economic Development become internalised within the NRC.

### 5. Broadband

We believe this infrastructure is critical for Northland's future prosperity. It is akin to a modern road network and for our industry to perform, improve productivity and sustainability, communication infrastructure remains vital.

Over the last ten years this country has specialised in rhetoric rather than deed. We can no longer afford this luxury. We need a rural solution and need it urgently. We would support any action the NRC undertakes to improve telecommunication connectiveness.

### 6. Infrastructure Development Agency

We support the formation of an Infrastructure Development Agency (IDA). Whilst the current council may have competent expertise to manage current investments our democratic process does not ensure this will continue into the future. In general we have serious concerns over the standard of governance in local government though out the country.

The formation of an IDA will insulate regional assets from short-term political interests. It will also allow management of capital outside the constraints of the Local Government Act and therefore provided Northland with future opportunities. We support the transfer of Northland Port Corporation shares into the IDA.

Our only concern is appointment of directors to this important organisation. We must ensure directors appointed are of the highest calibre and experience. Living in Northland should not be a requirement. Such people are highly unlikely to respond to classified advertising and the current council appointment process.

We recommend to Council that they engage the appropriate consultants specialising in company directorships to identify and seek out the appropriate expertise for the council to consider.

## 7. Shared Services

We support the Council's idea of shared services. Our members suffer from differences of rules and approach across the region and in some instances across their farms. There are millions of dollars wasted by local government in Northland undertaking duplication and triplication of planning documents. As an advocate, and along with many others, we have to fund involvement in each and every planning process. It is expensive for us all.

In our extensive experience in RMA processes much of what is imposed or promoted by individual councils not always has a mandate from their communities. Rather changes evolve from personal agenda's around a council table or within the Council's planning department. The current review (rewrite) of the Kaipara District Plan is case in point. This exercise by a cash strapped council has more to do with personal agenda's rather than any need within the community. This lack of professionalism must cease for the future prosperity of Northland.

We support not only the idea of shared services and a single planning framework but also a single planning department for the region. Such an entity would have the resources to undertake work itself rather than use outside consultants. It would be able to attract good staff and would provide consistency of policy and rules urgently required across the region.

We would argue a good planning framework along with good transport and communication infrastructure will deliver far more regional prosperity than any other activity.

## 8. Northland Local Government Restructure

While we hold serious misgivings regarding the 'Super Council' proposed for Auckland we believe there are significant benefits to be obtained through a review of how local government services are delivered in Northland. While there has been some talk in the media from various territorial authorities about possible solutions none seem to involve good analysis and an appropriate level of investigative rigor.

We would ask as a part of any consideration of shared services that the council consider funding an objective analysis of local government service delivery for Northland. Identify the problems that exist, or are perceived to exist, and publish options for public consideration.

We sincerely believe the Regional Council should, and must, take a leadership role in this area.

## 9. Regional Growth Programme

We support the Council in its approach to developing a holistic approach to future public investment in Northland. Particularly in the current economic climate it is imperative that any investment delivers the optimum economic and social leverage. Investment in roads does much more than make road users safer or quicker to their destinations. It has economic and social impacts across a wide range of areas. These need to be identified and roads or any infrastructure investment decision must take the wider benefits into account.

If this Growth Programme achieves this holistic approach future prosperity will be optimised.

## 10. Rescue Helicopter

We believe this service is critical for the Northland region and support any move that ensures the financial viability of this service. We must continue to not only ensure the service is maintained but the service continues to operate with the best equipment and personnel.

Northland is a wide geographic area with poor roading infrastructure and a large number of 100km highways in poor repair. When accidents occur they are usually bad ones. In addition our farming communities operate on land with often steep and unstable terrain that can also reflect the severity of accident.

Since the government and the Northland District Health Board has closed local A&E and a number of full service hospitals in the region it is imperative that this service continues without concern over funding issues.

If there is a requirement for local funding that is probably the most efficient and cost effective approach for Northland. The current methods involve a much higher cost of collection

Therefore we support the NRC becoming a funding agency for this essential service with two provisos. These are:

- a. That NRC advocate for an increased percentage of taxpayer funding. We believe that funding of emergency services should be a taxpayer issue rather than a ratepayer one. The Council forced to consider local funding is due solely to central government not meeting its promised responsibilities.
- b. That NRC ensures that any public funds provided are managed appropriately. There must be public accountability for the provision of public funds. The Council must ensure there is a process to ensure that the funds it provides are managed correctly and in the best public interest.

## 11. Sustainable Water Allocation Plan

We are sceptical of the need for this investment at this time. As landowners and water users we do not understand the need for this project.

We expect that this project will eventually add costs to land operations and we question the benefits.

We would ask the Council to empirically justify the need for this project at this time. What evidence does the council have that requires this information and a regime to provide certainty of supply?

We remain suspicious that this project is based in individual agenda's within council based on academic or philosophical belief rather than real empirically proven need. We ask the council to provide evidence that this is not indeed the case.

## 12. Climate Change

We support the Councils policy on climate change responding to Central Government direction rather than taking a leading role. This is a complex and emotional issue that may have wide and negative implications for the future of Northland.

As an organisation we remain climate change sceptics in so much as we are highly critical of the proposed government solution. We are also critical of the inclusion of ruminants as a pollution

source. We do not believe agriculture has been treated fairly in this debate and scientific rigor around net emission rates remains highly questionable.

## 12. Regional CCO Shared Services

We support the NRC's proposal to establish a new CCO in partnership with other Regional Governments. One has to question why it has taken such a long time for such an obvious idea to occur.

We applaud this approach taken by NRC.

## 13. Summary

We have seen the Council take a much stronger role in regional leadership in recent years. We support this move and ask that it continue. We would support a much greater level of leadership being exhibited at a regional level.

We agree with the emphasis on leadership, economy, infrastructure, and environment. The NRC is not solely an environmental watchdog. It has a much greater and wider responsibility than a narrow emphasis on environment and RMA. In fact it will never fulfil its environmental role unless all the other issues identified are addressed as well.

We support the general direction the Council is taking and look forward to working with NRC to deliver successful regional outcomes.

WE WISH TO BE HEARD

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