

MAYORAL COLUMN



Mayor Craig Little

The previous Coalition Government enabled transformative change for many of our regions with Wairoa one of the places that was able to thrive through the government's focus on rural areas.

Under the Coalition regime Wairoa received millions of dollars of investment through the Provincial Growth Fund, our Police numbers were increased, State Highway 2 was improved, we received funding to assist employment through

the Mayors Taskforce For Jobs and through the Minister for Whānau Ora, Peeni Henare, Wairoa was selected as a pilot for Localised Commissioning.

Central Government was interested in what we were doing, Ministers were always keen to visit Wairoa and were impressed with what they saw. And I must praise the Coalition Government and the current Government for its COVID-19 response which has been exemplary.

However, under this current Labour Government, we are seeing a very real risk of undoing a lot of the progress that went into revitalising our regions.

I AM A FARM OWNER AND AS SUCH I AM PARTICULARLY WORRIED ABOUT OUR FARMING COMMUNITY.

Farming is the backbone of New Zealand, and particularly Wairoa. Traditionally we have hung our hat on our agricultural sector. Now though, our farmers across the whole country are despondent.

The Government does not seem to be supporting farmers. We are watching our pastoral farms go into forestry with incentives from the government, while sheep, beef and dairy farmers seem to only face increased compliance regulations and costs.

Last year, the Labour Party made a pre-election promise that in the first six months of its term it would give local councils the power to determine what classes of land could be used for forestry. This was in response to concerns from some rural communities that too much productive land was being lost to forestry. Now Agriculture Minister Damien O'Connor has admitted these reforms have not happened and there is no timeframe for when this will be complete.

WE NEED THE GOVERNMENT TO ACT NOW, OR IT WILL BE TOO LATE TO STOP THE SURGE IN FORESTRY.

It seems to be a really uneven playing field between farming and forestry. The Government is not encouraging farming or our overseas markets like they do with other areas of New Zealand's exports. I cannot understand why our stock prices are so far behind Australian stock prices.

We struggle to get essential workers into the country, such as vets and fruit pickers, yet ironically the Government let the Wiggles into New Zealand! Our government no longer seems to be listening to its rural people and does not appear to be worried about the legacy it will leave behind.

I'M ALSO CONCERNED THE OVERSEAS INVESTMENT OFFICE ALLOWS PEOPLE FROM OTHER COUNTRIES TO BUY LAND IN NEW ZEALAND, BUT KIWIS DON'T HAVE THE SAME OPTIONS TO BUY LAND OVERSEAS.

The Government seems to be working within the short-term and not planning long-term for future land use. I am working with other Councils to see what can be done. We simply cannot allow the planting pace to continue at the rate it is.

Rural New Zealand is a significant contributor to our country's economy—and certainly propped us up during COVID.

The government seems to have a more centralised vision which makes it harder and harder for rural areas to prosper.

An example of this is the banks closing their doors in smaller communities. While this was not the government's fault, the government didn't discourage this from happening, and we now have a situation where banks have taken away the rights of citizens and are not giving back to their communities.

LOCALISATION IS SLOWLY BEING ERODED WITH THIS GOVERNMENT POSING THE BIGGEST RISK TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT THAT I HAVE EVER SEEN.

These blanket reforms appear to be taking a centralised approach to Three Waters, the Resource Management Act, District Health Boards reform and the review of Local Government.

The disappearance of localisation runs the threat of the disappearance of Local Government as we know it. There may be some efficiencies if localism is taken away, but do you really think someone in Auckland or Wellington is going to care about a water outage in Wairoa?

Central Government has come out with staggering figures around the Three Waters reform yet they are withholding vital individual council information that enabled them to come to these assumptions. This lack of transparency from the start is causing trust issues from councils.

The Three Waters reforms should be based on a legacy of a lack of Central Government funding and lack of a national regulator.

THERE MAY BE MERIT IN SOME OF THE AREAS THAT HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED IN THE THREE WATERS REVIEW BUT THE PROCESS HAS NOT INCLUDED IWI AND COMMUNITY SO THEREFORE ALL OUR VOICES HAVE NOT BEEN HEARD.

The Government is focussing on a big is better approach with several options for new national providers to overhaul the management of the country's Three Waters. We know bigger is not always better and that the one size fits all blanket approach does not suit Wairoa.

At the end of this month, I have a meeting with the Minister of Transport Michael Wood, and I look forward to reminding Central Government once again that it is not acceptable that State Highway 38, to my belief, is the only unsealed national highway in New Zealand, and that we want it sealed and we want parity with the rest of the country.

I also want to talk to the Honourable Minister Wood about the shortfall in Wairoa's NZTA funding. It is incredulous to me that there would be a shortfall in funding at this time when all Councils in New Zealand are facing increasing roading costs, we have an increased population so have more users on the road and in Wairoa's case a ridiculously high increase in logging trucks clogging up our roading network.

I would hate this government to be known as the government that took away localisation, particularly when their involvement with the previous government, as a coalition partner, saw so much positive traction for our rural communities.



FOR YOUR DIARY

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Tue, 22 June: 1.30pm

MAORI STANDING COMMITTEE

Thur, 24 June: 1.30pm

YOUTH COUNCIL

Mon, 28 June: 3.30pm

INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Tue, 29 June: 1.30pm

MEET THE MAYOR

If you would like to have a meeting with the Mayor, call the council offices on 06 838 7309 to arrange a meeting time. He is available to meet with people on Wednesdays.



CONTACT US

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