

MAYORAL COLUMN

OUR COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

What a wonderful community we live in. I attended the fabulous Taste of Wairoa food and wine event held at the Gaiety Theatre.

The Wairoa District Council and Hawke's Bay Tourism paired up to bring a five-course dining experience to Wairoa as part of the Hawke's Bay Food and Wine Classic (FAWC) event.

The food, cooked by talented locals Mere and Andrea King and Emma and Tracey Morten, and wine, matched by sommelier Kenny Tahuri, was all terrific.



Mayor Craig Little

A big shout out to Rubyanne Edwards, Austin King and their team on delivering such a great afternoon – and we look forward to more local FAWC events like this one.

A Taste of Wairoa followed on from the Māori Film Festival, which I also attended, and was again reminded of the calibre of our people and the great work that goes on to make things happen in our district. Thanks to Leo and his team for making this event happen.

ALSO, CONGRATULATIONS TO AMBER FORREST AND HER TEAM AT BEAUTY ANTIX WHICH TOOK OUT THE NATIONAL TITLE OF NEW ZEALAND BEAUTY CLINIC OF THE YEAR.

This high achieving Wairoa business was presented with the top award at the New Zealand Beauty Industry awards at the Hilton Hotel in Auckland.

It was fantastic to see Amber credit her win to her staff and the Wairoa community.

In closing I would like to remind you all that another Wairoa business success story, The Limery, will feature on Country Calendar on Sunday evening (July 11). I'm certainly looking forward to watching it.

LONG-TERM PLAN

Council is a supporter of the Wairoa Star, but I was disappointed with the inaccuracies in the Wairoa Star's Long-Term Plan (LTP) story run on front-page last Thursday. We tried to point out where the story was wrong, and I would like to address the most significant errors in order to correct the record.

In relation to the auditor's changes the Star printed, "Nevertheless, the LTP was adopted..." This is misleading. The LTP was not adopted in spite of anything. Prior to adopting the LTP the Council had already confirmed the changes recommended by the auditor. These recommendations were based on the same information but provided further clarity and consistency of information with the reclassifications better reflecting the content of the plan.

In this case, the auditor's job is to guide Council and ensure our LTP is accurate and complies with regulations – which it did. There is no nevertheless – you are either compliant or not.

The auditors don't sign off the letter of representation for the Long-Term Plan as stated in the Star's story. As the Mayor, it is my role to read, and providing I am satisfied, sign off the letter of representation - which I did.

There were a series of other mistakes which added to a very confusing article. I would like to assure the public Council followed the LTP requirements in adopting the plan.

The 2021-2031 Long-Term Plan describes Council's activities and the community outcomes it hopes to achieve over the next 10-years. Following the adoption of the Long-Term Plan, elected members passed the resolution to set rates for the next year, effective from July 1, 2021. This year's average rates increase is expected to be around 10%.

As I have already said the next four years will be hard but there is light at the end of the tunnel. By re-setting our trajectory now we will ensure we are in a position to look after future generations. However, to achieve financial sustainability we need to be rating to recover these ever-increasing costs, many of which relate to legislative change and compliance requirements that we must adhere to.

Council has also revisited its fees and charges with adjustments made, also effective July 1, to ensure the costs that are being charged reflect the actual costs of providing the services.

Our goal remains to make Wairoa the best it can be both now and for generations to come. I believe the way Council is positioning itself now will help ensure we can meet our future challenges.

KIWIBANK

While I know many of our residents are struggling with not having a local bank branch, I would like to remind you all we do still have the Kiwibank Franchise operating from Hammer Hardware.

Lauren Johansen and her team offer a range of face-to-face banking services from everyday deposits and withdrawals to setting up internet and phone banking and making loan referrals. Using an instore tablet customers can join Kiwibank on site to set up internet banking, open accounts and other self-service options.

I congratulate Lauren and the fact she has been able to retain a banking service operating from her business. It is great our town has this support.

Lauren is also keen to work with other local service providers to help ensure that particularly our elderly and vulnerable have access to this much-needed banking facility.

THREE WATERS PROPOSAL



Three Waters delivery, the current reform process and the recently released proposal is a hot topic.

From the outset I have expressed my concerns about the way Central Government has handled this reform, particularly around the lack of transparency and lack of engagement with iwi and communities.

New Zealand's Three Waters issues are caused by a legacy of under investment by Central Government and the lack of a national regulator. The Three Waters proposals do not address these issues and a genuine review with achievable solutions for the whole of New Zealand is needed - or Wairoa will miss out again.

I have no confidence in this review which has cost our communities a significant amount of money and will create more bureaucracy within the government.

WE HAVE HAD NO SIGNIFICANT DECISION MAKERS VISIT OUR TOWN TO SEE OUR UNIQUE SITUATION AND I DO NOT BELIEVE YOU CAN MAKE RADICAL CHANGE LIKE THIS BY LOOKING AT FIGURES ONLY.

We will be talking with our immediate neighbours to hear their thoughts, but given the current situation I am not convinced this is the right option for Wairoa. If the future of the Three Waters is going to be like the review process so far Wairoa would have to consider opting out.

At the moment we have specialised staff based in town so if there are breakdowns/emergencies/ issues we have people on the job to keep our infrastructure working. Under the proposed East Coast and top of South Island system we will lose our specialised Wairoa based people which will mean delays in sorting issues, particularly during extreme weather events or emergencies.

I am also concerned about the Three Waters assets which are owned by the Council on behalf of the community. If the assets were transferred to another entity, then you would hope the ratepayers would be compensated or reimbursed for their investment, otherwise it could be seen as confiscation.

The proposed geographical grouping, which includes the East Coast of the North Island down to Wellington and takes in the top of the South Island, is simply ridiculous. Imagine the cost of flying across the Cook Strait, surely, they are not thinking of piping the Cook Strait within a budget that Wairoa is part of?

Wairoa residents know that being part of a big entity will not work for us. We are not a one size fits all district. But the reality is if we opt out against the government's wishes we may be left out in the cold. I hope the government will not undemocratically remove the opt out option and treats all Councils, regardless of whether they opt in or out, with the same respect.

There are no guarantees that under this proposal Wairoa will get better results than they would under continued council operations. I am still hoping for a period of genuine consultation and also to receive a lot more solid evidence about how our community will benefit under this proposal. We will be talking with our community and iwi on this important topic, again a Central Government process which will cost local councils.

FOR YOUR DIARY

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

COUNCIL FORUM

Tues, 13 July: 1.30pm

COUNCIL MEETING

Tue, 27 July: 1.30pm



CONTACT US

Wairoa District Council
Queen St, Wairoa
info@wairoadc.govt.nz
(06) 838 7309

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

Wairoa District Council
Queen St, Wairoa
info@wairoadc.govt.nz
(06) 838 7309