

MAYORAL COLUMN

THREE WATERS

The Government has offered us \$18 million as part of its latest investment package into the Three Waters Reform.

My concern is this is a sweetener that will have huge strings attached.

Wairoa's allocation is part of a \$2.5 billion investment to ensure local councils are no worse off, and in fact better off, from the restructure of water assets as part of the Central Government Three Waters reform process.

I see this additional funding as a carrot dangling in front of us to attract Councils to opt in to the Government's Three Waters Reform proposals. This could also be seen as a bribe. Why couldn't we have had this type of investment without also facing the threat of Three Waters being moved away from Local Government and into the hands of four new entities, which could be privatised at a later date and lost forever.

You only need to look at the reform of the electricity sector to see what can happen. And don't forget electricity is connected right across the country, yet electricity prices have spiralled out of control.

The funding is designed to protect Councils from any negative financial consequences of the asset transfer. That, to me, makes it sound like the proposal is already a reality, despite the fact there has been no consultation with iwi and community.

Everything local Councils do is about democracy yet here we have the Government making decisions without listening to their communities across New Zealand.

As a Council we will be looking very closely at the package that has been announced with our initial focus being on the implications for our community. We need community and iwi engagement so we can start to figure out our position on Three Waters.

The Government's Three Waters reform proposals have raised many questions for Council and our community/iwi. There are issues still to be worked through and there are many unanswered queries.

While Local Government New Zealand should look out for the sector's national interests, which I don't believe they have in this case, our Council's mandate comes from our community/iwi, and we will be meeting with our community/iwi over the next few weeks to hear what you have to say.

IT IS GREAT TO SEE THE GOVERNMENT HAS FINALLY RECOGNISED IT NEEDS TO INVEST IN THREE WATERS.

This investment will help bring our infrastructure and service delivery up to standard, but that still leaves the burning questions - why do we need radical change and the creation of four regional water service entities, which in our case includes the East Coast down to Wellington and a big stretch of water called the Cook Strait- how ridiculous is that?

Wairoa should be excited to have received such a significant investment, but the reality is between the Three Waters Reform, Resource Management Reform and Local Government Reform we might be left with the best Three Waters infrastructure we have had in decades and no one here to benefit from it, ie, Wairoa could be absorbed into a Super Council.

The Government has given us no guarantees we will continue as we are. Our local Council and the way we operate may become a thing of the past. What is next after Three Waters, will roading and other Council services be taken away?

I am fearful that 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.

We need to be mindful that what suits big metro cities may not be required in small rural communities like Wairoa and can result in unintended consequences. I would be disappointed if these unintended consequences impact negatively on our district.

Under the Three Waters proposal the Government is suggesting huge savings across the board and 8000 new jobs. We all know with centralisation savings are often at the sacrifice of small and isolated communities like Wairoa. If 8000 jobs are going to be created, why can't they be created and funded by Central Government now? I

believe Wairoa will lose its expert and specialised staff. It will be a brain drain for Wairoa with everything carried out from a more centralised location.

We have had no significant decision makers visit our town to see our unique situation. You cannot make radical change like this by looking at figures only, surely Central Government should have taken our iwi and communities on this journey.

In Wairoa we are committed to providing safe drinking water and ensuring our Three Waters services are the best they can be. However, under this proposal there are no guarantees that Wairoa will get better results than they would under continued council operations. Add to that the fact there has been no transparency with the review process, and it makes it very hard to have confidence moving forward.

The latest funding will be able to be used by Councils to support the Three Waters reforms and focus on other local wellbeing outcomes associated with climate change and resilience, housing and urban design and planning, and community wellbeing.

The Government has signed a commitment to work together with Local Government New Zealand to engage and consult with councils and other stakeholders over the next six to eight weeks and beyond.

It is important we have all the information and implications in front of us before we make any decisions. Is opting out of the process still an option? will Councils still exist if Three Waters is controlled by other entities? what will we lose next? We are already seeing resistance and backlash from Councils across the country. We will continue to keep you informed.

CELEBRATION OF OUR LOCAL CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The social fabric of our community was showcased earlier this month when our new Chief Executive Officer, Kitea Tipuna, was welcomed into his new role with a powhiri at Takitimu Marae.

This was a special occasion with our people full of pride at the appointment of a local man into this prestigious position.

The event saw a series of speakers celebrating Kitea's achievement. The highlight though was the pure pride that shone through. I believe Kitea is the first 'local' person to be appointed as a Wairoa District Council chief executive and the first time tangata whenua has been appointed. Kitea didn't get the job because he was local, he was appointed based on his ability and because he was the best of the applicants.

Kitea has always told us that whānau brought him home because he wanted to be closer to his mum and his family. We are thrilled to have Kitea in this position and look forward to his involvement in the work that is ahead of us.

RALLY HAWKE'S BAY

Stones will fly on Saturday when around 70 top drivers and their crews take part in Rally Hawke's Bay, which will include stages on Wairoa roads.

The Rally Hawke's Bay round of the National Rally Championship will attract top NZ drivers, including former World Rally Championship competitor Hayden Paddon, and top domestic drivers Ben Hunt and Hastings competitor Grant Blackberry to some of our local roads. Drivers and co-drivers will navigate their way along three different stages within the Wairoa District which will see them travelling on Cricklewood Road, Waihi Road onto Waireka Road and Mohaka Coach Road. Just as a note any damage to the roads will be paid for by the event organisers.

The event will include a service area for the drivers and crew along Marine Parade which will be closed to vehicular traffic from 8am - 5pm. This will create an ideal opportunity for members of the public to be able to walk around the main street area and see the rally cars and drivers while also supporting local businesses.

WAIROA WAS ALWAYS GOING TO BE THE WINNER

Congratulations to the Athletic Senior One rugby team which won their division of the Poverty Bay rugby competition.

The final was against another strong Wairoa rugby team, Tapuae, with a final close score of 22-15 to Athletic.

I attended the final and it really was a great game, the final score could have gone either way in a very close nail-biting game right to the final whistle. I was very proud to be sitting in Gisborne watching two Wairoa teams play in the final. I commend both teams for their top rugby and representing our town so well. It was also great to see so many local supporters attend the game. I take my hat off to both teams and all the crew who help them out and cheer from the side-lines. This was a demonstration of grassroots heartland rugby at its best.

FOR YOUR DIARY

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

COUNCIL MEETING

Tue, 27 July: 1.30pm

MATANGIRAU RESERVES BOARD

Mon, 2 Aug: 3.30pm

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Tue, 3 Aug: 1.30pm

MAORI STANDING COMMITTEE

Thurs, 5 Aug: 1.30pm



CONTACT US

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Newly appointed Wairoa District Council Chief Executive Officer Kitea Tipuna with his Mum Mere Tipuna



Wairoa Mayor Craig Little with newly appointed Wairoa District Council Chief Executive Officer Kitea Tipuna