

MAYORAL COLUMN

THREE WATERS

Central Government's Three Waters Reform is one of the most radical proposals I have seen during my time in local government. I thought the 2015 proposal to amalgamate the five Hawke's Bay councils was a scary time. But at least we were able to join as a region, common sense prevailed, and the proposal was overturned.

The Three Waters Reform is a national approach, but it carries with it serious ramifications for small communities like Wairoa. We are told we will be better off, but the figures that are being used and supplied by Central Government simply do not stack up.



Mayor Craig Little

Wairoa's stance is that we would prefer status quo with additional external funding but we don't believe the government will agree to this simple fix. Therefore, we are working with the rest of Hawke's Bay to see if we can develop a regional approach as we cannot see Wairoa benefitting from the government's proposal. We have joined the other four Hawke's Bay Councils to review the analysis and modelling behind the Government's proposal to transfer the delivery of Three Waters from Councils to four multi-regional entities.

Our Council has also run a series of public meetings to discuss the consequences of the Three Waters, Resource Management Act and Local Government Reforms, and will continue to meet with our community. It was great to see the few people who did turn up to the meetings take an interest, and I encourage others to engage with us. It is so important that our community understands what the impacts of proposals like the Three Waters could mean for us.

THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT QUESTIONS WE HAVE BEEN ASKED BY OUR COMMUNITY THAT WE SIMPLY DON'T HAVE THE ANSWERS TO.

Questions like, will it be the people who are directly connected to the Three Waters, ie, predominantly those who live in town, who will pay more?

Presently rural septic tank owners pay an annual fee and a blanket charge of 10% towards Three Waters. What will this charge look like under a new entity?

Will Wairoa's remoteness mean higher costs for our people to receive these services?

Every area of New Zealand has such vastly different Three Waters requirements. Why can't the government prioritise and fund the issues and develop a future plan for the whole country that doesn't involve creating new entities?

Under the government's proposal, Wairoa District Council would be part of an entity that runs from the East Coast down to Wellington and the top of the South Island. Wairoa's current debt, Three Waters staff, and income would make up one percent of the combined 21 local councils in the entity. How are we ever going to have a say and have our local voice heard when we only make up one percent?

How will this new entity even work without totally duplicating the services Councils already provide?

Currently, Council's rates carry a UAGC (Uniform Annual General Charge) which is apportioned across the entire district for services that most residents benefit from irrespective of property value. Administration of billing etc is absorbed within the UAGC – how will billing be charged out by the new entities? How will this even be administered? There are so many anomalies, such as Māori land, DoC land, etc. which is currently all sorted by local Councils and all on one rating bill.

Is this the start of the removal of other services from local government? You might not always agree with the decisions that Councils make but we are accessible, local and available. We understand our communities and you can vote and have your say through your elected members. Under this proposed new entity, I cannot see how Wairoa, with its one percent, can have a say at all.

Mahia residents personally invested millions of dollars into the Mahia

sewage scheme - will they be reimbursed?

In Wairoa, Affco receives a reduction in its water rate based on the significant contribution it made to our water supply? This is a mutually beneficial arrangement that saves Affco investing in its own supply and provides a significant contribution to the fixed costs of the Wairoa water supply. Without Affco, town water would be more expensive. Will a new Three Waters entity recognise this contribution?

The Wairoa District Council manages \$103 million of Three Waters infrastructure assets on behalf of our ratepayers. So far, the government has given us \$11 million as part of the post-Covid stimulus, plus they are now dangling another \$18 million. That only represents 18% of the value of our assets. Will our ratepayers be reimbursed?

And as we are all very much aware, what happens when our assets get taken over by these four large entities and then privatisation occurs? Who will benefit from the sale of our assets? No government can promise that won't happen.

Figures we have been given by central government as part of the Three Waters review indicate the Wairoa District Council would need to spend \$1.6 billion on Three Waters, over the next 30 years. We believe this figure is way too much and is eight times what Council is forecasting on spending and six times what Council indicated in the Request for Information paperwork it filled out for the Department of Internal Affairs at the beginning of this process.

Our Council was recognised as a high performer in the Three Waters space, higher than other bigger councils, so it is very confusing why, if we have such a high performance, our forecasted spend would be so high?

An independent assessment has confirmed there are a lot of assumptions and overstated inflated numbers being presented as part of the Three Waters proposal.

Under the proposal Wairoa would be part of a collective debt currently just shy of \$1 billion, income would be \$485 million. This will negatively skew Wairoa as Wairoa District Council currently has little debt and good investment.

There is so much at stake for all communities across New Zealand. Our community is telling us they do not want to lose ownership of their assets and Council will continue to look at all options and advocate on your behalf.

THE WHOLE PROCESS HAS BEEN A SHOCKER. LOCAL GOVERNMENT IS EXPECTED TO CONSULT AT EVERY LEVEL, YET CENTRAL GOVERNMENT HAS PLOUGHED THROUGH WITH THIS PROPOSAL WITH HARDLY ANY CONSULTATION AND IGNORING THE CONSULTATION PROCESS THAT THEY EXPECT LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO CARRY OUT.

I really urge as many people as possible to become informed and join us on our campaign to get the best for our district. For more information head to Council's website www.wairoadc.govt.nz

RIGHT TREE IN THE RIGHT PLACE

Land use is a very hot topic. I would like to make it clear that I am not against forestry. In fact, I firmly believe in the right tree right place approach.

For our district of Wairoa though, I do not believe that further blanket planting of forestry is in the best interests of our community. I also think we must be very wary around carbon forests, this is new territory and we do not yet fully understand the future ramifications of carbon forests.

Wairoa and the Tararua District Council are encouraging a collaborative approach from other like-minded councils who share our concerns and hopefully through a strong united voice we will be listened to.

Councils throughout the country are doing a lot of good work individually but we haven't been working together for the greater good of future land use. It is encouraging to see that by joining together momentum is being gained.

SHOUT OUT TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

I would like to shout out to all our volunteers who keep our town ticking. We are such a fortunate community that we have so many people who just naturally put other people first and are so giving of their time.

I attended the recent Wairoa Lighthouse Lions Quiz Night which raised money for Ozanam House in Palmerston North.

WHAT A FABULOUS NIGHT AND ALL MADE POSSIBLE BY THE HARDWORKING LIGHTHOUSE LIONS VOLUNTEERS.

What a fabulous night and all made possible by the hardworking Lighthouse Lions volunteers.

It is groups like this, and the Rotary Club, which do so much great behind the scenes work, and I know there are so many appreciative people. Both these clubs are always looking for new members, so if you would like to be part of a fun and dedicated crew which makes a positive contribution to our community, I encourage you to join up.

Volunteers of course aren't limited to service groups. Recently my uncle, Dinty Little, received a RSA gold star which is the highest honour awarded to those who have rendered significant service to the RSA or to New Zealand. I was a very proud to see Dinty's 68-year contribution to the RSA recognised.

Wairoa fire fighters were also recently honoured with long service awards. Congratulations to Jock Thompson who received a life honorary medal recognising 48 years of voluntary firefighting. It is people like Jock, and our St John ambulance volunteers who quite literally save lives in Wairoa.

Plus, there are volunteers across sports teams, schools and clubs, youth activities, the people who deliver meals and wheels and make annual causes like Daffodil Day possible. Thank you to all of you for the difference you make.

The work of so many volunteers in Wairoa is part of what makes our community so unique.

FOR YOUR DIARY

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

COUNCIL FORUM

Tue, 24 August: 1.30pm

COUNCIL MEETING

Tue, 7 September: 1.30pm

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Tue, 14 September: 1.30pm



CONTACT US

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