

MAYORAL COLUMN

STAY SAFE AND BE PREPARED

COVID-19 related travel restrictions have been lifted this week with the opening of Auckland's borders.

This will mean Aucklanders travelling to and through our district. I urge everyone to have the required COVID testing before travelling and to ensure you follow all the required rules.

I know Auckland whānau will want to be reconnected, but it is also important we keep our Wairoa people as safe as possible.



Mayor Craig Little

Recently, we saw an example of how risk can be minimised by people following the rules. The Hawke's Bay District Health Board confirmed there were positive COVID-19 cases in the Wairoa district, but these people were low-risk, were self-isolating and there were no locations of interest.

Double vaccination remains the best protection. If you are hesitant about receiving your vaccination, please talk to people who you trust, seek factual advice and be informed by trusted sources.

People are also urged to plan and be prepared so if you need to self-isolate or stay home for a period of time you are able to. Make sure you have food supplies, fluids, and baby, pet or other specialised needs, hygiene products and medical and cleaning supplies.

It is also important to follow the COVID guidelines, such as mask wearing, sanitising, social distancing and using the tracer app.

Anyone who is feeling unwell or has COVID symptoms, even if they are mild, should get tested for COVID-19 as soon as possible.

Please be kind and support each other and our communities during this challenging time.

SUSTAINABLE LAND USE

The Wairoa District Council has been joined by 13 other Councils, Local Government New Zealand and Beef and Lamb NZ, in commissioning and funding a review of options around forestry and future sustainable land use.

A combination of strong log prices and a substantial increase in the price of Carbon and Climate Commission recommendations has resulted in an unprecedented demand for land to be converted to forestry. The Climate Commission has recommended planting 680,000 hectares of new native and exotic trees by 2035 to meet our global emission reduction obligations.

The legislation governing forestry in New Zealand is very permissive and regulations make Plantation Forestry a permitted activity in the National Environmental Standard for Plantation Forestry (NESPF) on all the Red Zoned highly erodible land.

Council is currently unable to place more stringent conditions than exist in the NESPF. Currently, there is no regulatory control on Carbon, only forestry which is excluded from the NESPF.

Lawrence Yule, from Yule Alexander, has been commissioned to provide options for the management of this issue and he has been in regular dialogue with Ministers, Councils, MPI, Foresters and Political Parties to try to find a collaborative solution.

The work is not anti-forestry but does seek to strike a balance in terms of long-term land-use, protection of rural communities, management of fire and pest and the supply of production timber and the associated exports and jobs.

This work is now well advanced, and we expect to see an options paper in the next two weeks followed by a one-day summit with all affected parties in mid-February 2022.

There is significant community concern about whole farm conversions to forestry, however, current policy settings provide few options for managing this. Government regulations are currently under review and this work will provide important input into any changes.



THREE WATERS

Wairoa's elected members are united in their opposition to the government's decision to legislate to mandate local councils to hand over their drinking water, wastewater and storm water assets to four new multi-regional entities.

The government's decision does not reflect the concerns of communities and councils and the government needs to slow down and listen to the New Zealand people. Our country's three waters issues date back to the 1980s when the government stopped funding three waters. How could the government of the day, and subsequent governments, expect Councils to deliver these services and meet the government's changing requirements around these services with no funding?

It is very concerning the four new entities that will be created will have to borrow significant amounts of money for infrastructure to provide the required services.

This reform takes away local voice and local ownership.

THOUGHTS FROM SOME OF OUR ELECTED MEMBERS ON THE GOVERNMENT'S THREE WATERS REFORM:

Jeremy Harker: My main concerns over the government's three waters plans are: the accuracy of the data used by the government to make its decision; its claim that it will save money but increase employment is nonsensical; the lack of genuine engagement with the Wairoa District Council despite reassurances they wanted to hear our views; the governance structure, which is a multi-layered, myopic and severely bureaucratic and I have little confidence in a government endorsed centralised organisation's ability to deliver effective three waters service to an area that covers the top of the South Island and over a third of the North Island.

Denise Eaglesome-Karekare: I'm not happy we are being forced to hand over our community assets. I acknowledge that like other communities we have issues with asset condition and performance. Currently our water assets are performing as they should, but some are coming to the end of their useful lives and the cost to replace them will place an extra burden on our community. However, I believe we are well placed to take on these challenges. Wairoa deserves safe, reliable, and affordable water services that support good health and sustainable environmental outcomes. However, the government's proposal of creating four publicly owned water entities is not the best outcome for Wairoa. If we can persuade this Entity to look at a model that has a regional lens on our three waters, which is what Hawke's Bay proposed in the beginning, then I believe we can still achieve our desired outcomes. We can ease the rate burden for all our ratepayers and maintain some form of control over our assets and our future.

Danika Goldsack: Three Waters Reform can only make Wairoa worse off. We are set to become a small part of a huge Entity C and there is no way a Wairoa voice will be heard due to the scale, size and complexity of this Entity. We would be better served by a Hawke's Bay entity which would ensure our ratepayers, who own our water assets, would not miss out on equitable three waters services. There is also the concern that the formation of these four entities will in turn lead to privatisation of our water in New Zealand.

FOR YOUR DIARY

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING

Tuesday, December 21, 10am.

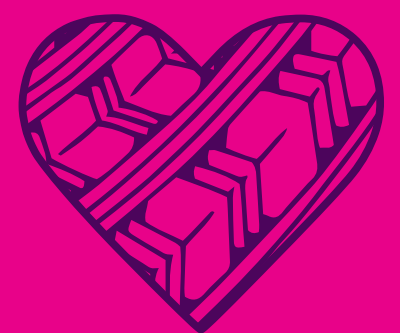
Under Level 2 all meetings will be held by video conference, the link will be available on Council's website.



CONTACT US

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

TAUTOKO WAIROA



SHOP LOCAL