

MAYORAL COLUMN

HAPPY NEW YEAR

I would like to begin my first column for 2022 by wishing you all a happy and healthy new year. I hope you are all well rested and ready to take on a fresh new year.

I know the Wairoa District Council and its elected members and staff are future focussed with some exciting initiatives ahead that will shape the future of infrastructure and developments in our town and district.



Mayor Craig Little

As we have been stressing, it is important we plan today to ensure both current and future residents have infrastructure and services that are safe and future proofed.

On November 30 last year, Council adopted the Water Supply Bylaw, Wastewater Bylaw and Trade Waste Bylaws and a new Stormwater Bylaw for public consultation. These four draft bylaws will not become operative until we have consulted with members of the public and all feedback is considered by elected members.

These bylaw reviews will help us to meet the current and future needs of communities for the performance of regulatory functions in a way that is most cost-effective for households and businesses.

Council has also endorsed a new policy that will see housing developers make contributions for new infrastructure. Once drafted this policy will then come back to Council before also going out for public consultation.

The development contributions policy is in relation to creating a mechanism to equitably fund development-related infrastructure and has been prompted by the increased demand for housing developments in the district.

We are now experiencing major growth in residential development and other construction activity and while growth is positive for the district, each new development puts further demand on infrastructure and often requires infrastructure upgrades.

Without this policy, present ratepayers will face a much higher burden in terms of growth-related infrastructure expenditure. We need to ensure infrastructure such as stormwater, wastewater, water supply, transport and development for parks and open spaces and community infrastructure are funded by the developers.

Council will also be developing a walking and cycling strategy, which again will be completed in consultation with our community.

STAY VIGILANT

It is great to see that so far, COVID-19 has been managed within our community. We know there is a very strong likelihood of more COVID cases in our district and our best defence is to be prepared and be vaccinated.

There are currently community cases in nearby regions, plus we have the threat of the highly contagious Omicron strain looming over us.

Again, I urge everyone to become vaccinated, get a booster if you are eligible and follow all the guidelines such as mask wearing, using the tracer app, hand washing and social distancing to try and stay as safe as possible.

Make sure you have whānau and where plans and have everything you need so you are able to stay home if necessary and keep yourself safe.

SPEEDING MOTORISTS

Motorists exceeding the speed limit, particularly in residential areas, is a major safety concern.

From Council's perspective, as we announced last year, a speed and safety review of the Wairoa District Council roading network is underway.

The review will involve working collaboratively with other stakeholders, such as the Police, and engaging with the community and iwi and seeking feedback.

This review is a chance to look at the entire roading network, rather than one road in isolation, using a range of criteria to ensure the safety and speed requirements are appropriate.

There are a number of factors around road safety. The actual road, speed limits and traffic enforcement play a big part in keeping roads safe. However, motorists and education are also a major factor. We need motorists to drive to the conditions and observe speed restrictions.

I am aware that people have suggested different speed restriction methods, such as speed humps. These can be discussed as part of the district's speed and safety review, but speed humps and other speed restriction methods are often just a band aid fix and simply transfer the speeding issue to another area. We will be taking a holistic approach to this review and looking at different methods of how speeding is being addressed throughout the country.

Council encourages as many people as possible to engage in our speed and safety community consultation which will go public very soon.

Council also supports the Police focus on driving behaviour and encourages anyone who witnesses unsafe driving to report the incident and, if possible, the vehicle registration number to the Police.

FARM TO FORESTRY CONVERSIONS



Beef + Lamb New Zealand (B+LNZ) has revealed that the latest analysis of farm sales data confirms the increasing price of carbon in the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is driving the conversion of whole pastoral farms into forestry, particularly for carbon farming.

The latest independent report by Orme & Associates shows that in the first six months of 2021, 14,219 hectares of sheep and beef farmland were purchased with the intent for planting into trees (11,585 hectares of exotic planting and 2,634 hectares of planting of natives for honey).

This data is provisional and is expected to be higher, given there is a long lag in farm sales being formalised and more

sales are likely to have occurred in the first six months of the year but have not yet been formally reported.

Over 80 percent of the whole farms sold into forestry were in clear pasture, compared to 65.7 percent across the 2017-20 period. Additionally, there has been an increase in the amount of land sold in the Low and Moderate Erosion Susceptibility Classifications. The report also shows sales moving into new areas, including clusters of sales starting to emerge in regions such as Otago.

In addition, a further 8,832 hectares of sheep and beef farm sales in 2020 were formally finalised since B+LNZ's previous report in August, adding to previously reported data making up a total of 28,159 hectares purchased in 2020, 24,864 hectares of which was purchased for exotic forestry. This data shows that even with the effects of COVID-19 on sales, there is still significant momentum.

The report shows that the continued rise in the value of carbon is seeing demand and price points trend steadily upwards.

In 2017, 3,965 hectares of whole sheep and beef farms were sold into forestry. This increased to 20,227 hectares in 2018 and 36,824 hectares in 2019. This updated report shows a decline in 2020 to 24,864 hectares, most likely as a result of COVID-19. Based on discussions with real estate agents, land sales across 2021 are expected to surpass those in 2019 – meaning the amount of exotic planting will again far exceed what the Climate Change Commission has projected as a sustainable amount (25,000 hectares) per annum.

B+LNZ has joined Wairoa and other Councils in New Zealand in commissioning and funding a review of options around forestry and future sustainable land use.

B+LNZ chief executive Sam McIvor, says the carbon price is inarguably distorting the market with an increased effect on land values, but it's also changing the type of land sold and where. That's a major concern.

He believes there's a much better way to increase planting to improve environmental outcomes and that is the integration of trees on farms. He says farmers know their land best and that exotic planting can be integrated where appropriate – but it's about planting the right tree in the right place.

He recognises this issue is important to our rural communities who are concerned about the wider impacts of large-scale conversion of sheep and beef farms into carbon farming, which does not support the same number of regional jobs. Mr McIvor has calculated that losing 100,000 hectares of sheep and beef farmland equates to the loss of well over 1,000 jobs.

I agree with Mr McIvor and support his statement that New Zealand is the most sustainable producer of beef and lamb in the world and the Government risks undermining this position and gutting rural communities – unless it takes action now.

Earlier this week I travelled up the East Coast and was shocked at the extent of forestry planting and the obvious effect it is having on rural communities. We need to look forward and be aware of the future impacts caused by land use decisions that are being made today.



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