

Northland Regional Council Minutes

Long Term Plan Hearing held in the Council Chamber
36 Water Street, Whangārei
on Wednesday 8 May 2024, commencing at 10.15am

Tuhinga/Present:

Chairperson, Geoff Crawford

Councillors:

John Blackwell
Joe Carr
Peter-Lucas Jones
Amy Macdonald
Marty Robinson
Tui Shortland
Rick Stolwerk

I Tae Mai/In Attendance:

Full or Part Meeting

Tāhūhū Rangapū - Chief Executive Officer
Pou Taumatua - GM Corporate Services
Pou Manawhakahaere - GM Governance and Engagement
Pou Whakaritenga - GM Regulatory Services
Group Manager - Community Resilience
Pou Tiaki Taiao - GM Environmental Services
Pou Tiaki Pūtaiao - GM Biosecurity
Corporate Strategy Manager
Corporate Planning Specialist
Governance Specialist

Secretarial Note:

- *It was advised that the hearings were being livestreamed with the content to be uploaded to council's website.*
- *The Chair reconvened the Long Term Plan Hearings at 10.16am and proceedings commenced with a karakia by Councillor Shortland.*

Ngā whakapāha/Apologies (Item 1.0)

The apology from Councillor Craw for non-attendance was noted.

Nga whakapuakanga/Declarations of Conflicts of Interest (Item 2.0)

As per standard practise councillors to make declarations item-by-item as the meeting progressed.

Summary of Hearings

Submitter 1: Gemma Parker (NZ Land Search & Rescue)

- Appreciation was extended to council for its funding support which had allowed NZ Land Search and Rescue to better meet the needs of Northland, which were described as 'wide and varied'.
- NZ Land Search & Rescue was a critical service that ensured there was a team of 100+ trained and equipped volunteers that was 'not just about hunters in the back blocks *[but]* a service we all need'.
- 45% of NZ Land Search & Rescue's costs were covered by central government funding but there was a shortfall of \$30k per group per year (Northland currently had two groups).
- The biggest deployment of volunteers to date was in response to the Christchurch earthquake and after 11 days the team had 'door knocked' on two thirds of doors in the city.
- Northland currently had a destination management plan encouraging the expansion of tourism. However it was noted, the NZ Land Search & Rescue team rescued on average one walker on the Te Araroa trail every two weeks during the peak of the season.
- Council was asked to continue to support the volunteers that gave hours of their own time and lost personal income to respond to call outs.

Submitter 2: Zac Franich (Surf Life Saving Northern Region)

Secretarial Note:

- *Councillor Stolwerk declared a conflict of interest in relation to his involvement with Surf Life Saving.*
- *The submission from Mr Franich was supported by the presentation 'Surf Life Saving is Core Business'.*
- Appreciation was extended to council for the ongoing partnership to help keep the community safe when 'enjoying our favourite playground'.
- Surf Life Saving Northern Region had experienced unprecedented growth in demand.
- Over the last 10 years Surf Life Saving Northern Region had conducted over 650 rescues where if services had not been in place it would have resulted in a fatality. There had been over 200,000 patrol hours as well as education provided to 16,000 people.
- The service provided by Surf Life Saving Northern Region covered 40 weeks; including the busiest holiday periods.
- NRC, along with central government and gaming grants, were the largest contributors to Surf Life Saving Northern Region's operational costs.
- Surf Life Saving Northern Region was open to having discussions with central government regarding funding but it was unrealistic to be able to address the shortfall, if NRC withdrew its funding, in a short time frame to be able to continue delivering a critical service.
- It was stated that if NRC withdrew its funding there was also a reputational risk.
- NRC was the only body, through its LTP process, proposing to demote funding for surf lifesaving. Clarification was also provided that it was a consistent model across the country for regional councils to fund surf lifesaving services given it was a service delivered regionally.
- NRC was encouraged to continue partnering with Surf Life Saving to keep Northland's beaches safe and deliver both organisations' core business.
- While it was acknowledged that clubs and patrol services were located at specific localities, rescues were carried out across the region.

Submitter 3: Rob McCaw (Coastguard NZ Tautiaki Moana Aotearoa)

Secretarial Note: This submission was supported by a presentation 'Northland Regional Council – Emergency Services Funding Presentation'.

- Coastguard was the 'guardian of mariners'. It was stressed that service was for all boaties.
- Appreciation was extended to council for its funding contribution to date which represented approximately 35% of OPEX.
- NRC's funding had enabled volunteers to 'dedicate their time for the reason they joined; on vessels saving lives'. The funding has also helped ensure frontline services were in place where they needed to be.
- A heat map of incident responses demonstrated the distinct growth from Opotiki to the tip of the north. Common themes for responses included crossing bars, diving offshore rocks subject to tidal flows and rock fishers.
- Climate change was influencing the location in which people needed to go to catch a fish; pushing them further offshore and in more dangerous waters.
- Coastguard was seeing a general trend of 'more demand and not stopping'.
- In 2022, 18 Northlanders lost their lives from preventable drowning.
- If NRC withdrew its funding, the effect was described as significant with Coastguard then forced to make decisions as to where it could invest in volunteers, future development and also where it provided services.
- A new Coastguard unit was being established in Mangawhai due to increasing demand in this area. It was also equal distance between the existing units at Kawau and Whangārei.
- It was requested that NRC continue to support Coastguard and investing in this frontline service.
- Confirmation was provide that all NRC funding was spent in Northland
- Coastguard had a three year service level agreement/commitment with central government through Search & Rescue. However, Coastguard was ultimately a service charity and must retain a 'careful balance between central government funding and local funding for the benefit of local people'.
- Coastguard was continuing to expand its services and undertake preventative work so it was 'the fence at the top of the cliff'.

Submitter 4: Paul Ahlers (Northland Emergency Services Trust)

Secretarial Note: This submission was supported by the presentation 'Northland Rescue Helicopter'.

- NEST had been operating for 36 years and delivering 'critical care wherever you happen to be'.
- NEST was originally established and funded by the Northland community. The funding model had changed since that time.
- In 2018 Northern Resue was established as a result of a government tender; resulting in Northland partnering with Auckland. However it was stressed that while Northern Rescue was the operator, all assets were owned by the Trust.
- All of NRC funding was devoted to operational expenses. NRC's funding had remained static so there was effectively a 'tailing off' of funding due to inflation.
- It was stressed that NEST was part of council's core business in delivering the four well beings. It was also stressed that while Crown funding had increased over time the expectation of the Crown was there would be a local contribution.
- Support was shown for the continuation of a targeted rate which was transparent to the community as to what it was paying for.
- Local funding gave NEST a 'community license' with the ability to shape and dictate how services were rolled out. If the organisation was 100% funded by central government then this may not be the case.

- It was stressed that NEST's contract with central government had a nil margin and therefore the organisation was very susceptible to any changes in inflation or funding.
- NEST was 'extremely grateful for the level of funding over the last eight years'. It was stressed that it was important that community funding continued for at least the short and medium term.
- The LTP consultation process had demonstrated the level of support from the community for NRC to fund NEST.
- It was requested that the three NEST presentations recently provided to a meeting of the Federated Farmers be circulated to elected members.

Submitter 5: John Wansbone (Sport Northland Board of Trustees)

Secretarial Note: This submission was supported by the presentation 'Northland Sporting Facilities Rate – Building a legacy for generations to come'.

- A strong supporter of retaining the Northland Sporting Facilities Rate which helped create a 'thriving Northland' by providing access to healthy and safe activities.
- The rate had facilitated the development of substantial facilities across the region. Kaikohe Sportsville and Te Hiku Sports Hub were recent examples of this. It was stressed there was more work to be done in this space with a number of projects in the pipeline.
- The model was robust with a clear set of criteria to identify projects with merit and also to determine when they entered the investment pipeline. Such a model could be rolled out across the country.
- It was stressed that withdrawing the Northland Sporting Facilities Rate would 'be a complete failure to our communities and present a significant risk'.
- A case study reviewing the provision of indoor courts identified that Northland was nine courts short. Most of the current courts were also not competition grade. Case studies also quantified that Northland was lacking aquatic facilities.
- WDC had identified the need for a premier indoor events centre.
- Concern was raised that the Northland Sporting Facilities Rate had been presented in the consultation material alongside the Emergency Services Fund which could be misleading to the reader.
- The withdrawal of NRC funding was likely to impact on the time frames in which planned projects could be delivered. There were some projects potentially at risk, for example the Ruakaka Volleyball Arena.
- It was acknowledged that council was facing significant funding challenges and an alternate recommendation was to reduce the rate to a lower quantum.

Secretarial Note: The hearings adjourned at 11.36am and reconvened at 11.42am.

Submitter 6: Robyn Bigelow (Weed Action Native Habitat Restoration Trust)

- Appreciation was extended to the council for providing funding and expertise through its biodiversity team.
- The Restoration Trust worked across 10,000 hectares with volunteers investing over 4,000 hours in the past year including a significant number of public engagements and land owner visits.
- It was stressed that 'large scale infestations take resourcing and lots of tenacity' and 'Northland is the weed capital'.
- NRC's funding enabled the group to leverage further funding E.g. Foundation North.
- Council was urged to provide additional funding for High Value Area Groups and continue to resource its biosecurity team to ensure it had the capacity to continue to provide technical support to these groups.
- Clarification was provided that although road verges were a main vector for weeds the Restoration Trust did not work in this space to ensure the safety of its volunteers.

Submitter 7: Anna Hewitt (Parafed Northland)

- Ms Hewitt worked for Parafed, which aimed to make sport and recreation inclusive for all.
- In Northland 29% of the population self-identified as having a disability.
- Supported the continuation of the Northland Sporting Facilities Rate given there were a number of current and future projects that needed to be progressed to ensure everyone could access facilities to be active.
- The rate would ensure Northland had the spaces and places so everyone could enjoy the benefits of participating in sport and recreation.
- Many facilities were not designed to cater for the aged or those with disabilities and it was costly to retrofit to meet.
- The Pohe Island Bike Park, which had been progressed using the Northland Sporting Facilities Rate, was given as an example of success where those with disabilities could build confidence in a safe space.

Submitter 8: Angela Stolwerk

Secretarial Note: Councillor Stolwerk declared a conflict of interest.

- Supported the retention of both the Emergency Services Rate and Northland Sporting Facilities Rate.
- Drew attention to how easily someone could get into trouble in the water and the need to retail the professional skills of life guards in Northland.
- Relayed experiences from her previous nursing career of the importance of the emergency services helicopter service delivering urgent treatment.
- Noted that a 'kid in sport stays out of trouble'.
- It was stressed that 'Northland supporting Northlanders is key business, please continue to support Northland'.

Submitter 9: Amanda Bennett (Northland Regional Trails Project 2024)

- The Northland Regional Trails Project 2024 was intended to revitalise the Northland Walking and Cycling Strategy. The focus was to bring people into the North which would 'help all facets of Northland'.
- The submitter provided an interactive submission describing the journey of a family through Northland, 'spending quality and healthy time', with a wealth of experience on offer.

- It was requested that council continue to co - fund the Project Lead role for the next three years alongside the other Northland councils to support the Regional Trails Project.

Submitter 10: Libby Jones

- Supported the continuation of the Northland Sporting Facilities Rate to ensure the region had good facilities and infrastructure; which were key factors when families were considering visiting or living in Northland.
- The projects developed using the rate had been across the entire region allowing more equitable access to facilities. If the rate was discontinued then the focus would likely to be limited to the main centres.
- The projects to date had demonstrated the flow on social benefits, for example the Mangawhai Activity Zone and Skateboard Park.
- There were still a number of regional projects in the pipeline, for example the Ruakaka Volleyball Arena.
- It was stressed that there were significant well-being benefits over and above economic benefits through being part of a team and being active – which contributed to a ‘Thriving Northland’.
- Also supported the continuation of the Emergency Services Rate. It was a targeted rate that could not be spent for any other purpose.
- Concern was raised that the two rates had been pitched alongside each other in the consultation material which mixed the support for the two issues.
- NRC was encouraged to ‘continue to lead Northland in style’.

Secretarial Note:

- *Submitter Jonny Wilkinson (Taiho Trust) was absent.*
- *The hearings adjourned at 12.15pm and reconvened at 1.10pm.*

Submitter 11: Kath Manning (Waipu Cove Surf Life Saving Club)

Secretarial Note:

- *Councillor Stolwerk declared a conflict of interest in relation to his involvement with Surf Life Saving.*
- *The submission was supported by a video.*
- Loss of NRC funding would impact on the team of volunteers.
- Waipu was a busy beach and a lack of lifeguard services would put beach goers at risk.
- Concern that volunteers could burn out.
- The club maintained patrols between the flags, had a volunteer search and rescue squad, partnered with other agencies, facilitated junior surf programmes, assisted international visitors.
- NRC was encouraged to continue funding the emergency services to ‘keep our community safe and help us do what we do best’.

Submitter 12: Ann Neill (Piroa Conservation Trust)

- Supported NRC’s continued funding of High Value Areas.
- Highlighted the work of the Piroa Conservation Trust in the Piroa Brynderwyns High Value Area. The Trust had worked closely with the community on its conservation efforts extending from the ‘rugged hill side down to coastal areas’.
- The Trust had a partnership with the Airforce to deliver its aspirations on the ground.

- Community Groups were the most effective 'vehicle' to deliver this work and effective in leveraging money to scale up its operations. For example, the Trust had received an MPI grant to deliver catchment projects.
- The group was trapping one hundred times more than six years ago and the area covered was also two hundred times bigger.
- The Trust was also working closely with Māori on a number of projects such as fish passage and riparian planting.

Submitter 13: Craig Deal (Northland Fish & Game Council)

- The Northland Fish & Game Council was established under the Conservation Act to manage, maintain and enhance the sports fish and game resource. A large part of this role was to advocate for fresh water and game habitats.
- The Northland Fish & Game Council wanted to ensure there was sufficient funding in place to give effect to the Freshwater Plan at such time it was implemented by NRC.
- The Freshwater Plan would be valid for part of the Long Term Plan's ten year span so need to be included.
- Sufficient resourcing needed to be in place to enforce the Freshwater Plan and also to ensure that the monitoring of freshwater attributes was sufficient.

Submitter 14: Tracey Risetto (NZ Automobile Association Northland Council)

- There needed to be a regional approach to deliver joined up services for roading and transport.
- The regional council had a unique role for managing the transport requirements for Northland including strategic planning, road safety and administration.
- It was stressed that a regional approach was fundamental for Northland to grow and prosper.
- A four lane expressway demonstrated how transport infrastructure could change lives and was critical to release the economic potential of Northland.
- The Northland region needed to advocate with one voice.
- The regional council was an integral part in the delivery of land transport with two elected members appointed to the Regional Transport Committee (RTC), in accordance with the Land Transport Management Act. The primary function of the RTC was the preparation of the Regional Land Transport Plan.
- Northland had the highest road fatalities per head of population.
- The NZ Automobile Association Northland Council supported the retention of NTA as the regional delivery vehicle for transport services.
- It was acknowledged there was not enough funding to do the work required to keep Northland's roads at a standard that was fit for purpose. The recent severe weather events had also had a significant impact.

Submitter 15: Tony Phipps

- Mr Phipps was a 40 year resident and ratepayer of the region.
- Advocated for the continuation and potential increase of the Water Resilience Fund.
- Stressed that many in the region did not have adequate access to water for daily basic needs and it was a basic human right to access freshwater.
- Approximately 40% of the population were not on a public supply. 90% in the case of marae.
- NRC had shown leadership by establishing the Water Resilience Fund which had also demonstrated that 'inroads can be made by keen local providers'.

- Advocated for the continuation of the Emergency Services Fund (at least for the life guard services and NEST), until there was alternate funding in place.
- Advocated for joint shared services with the councils; 'if done well they are more successful at achieving objectives'.
- Concern was raised that the Northland Transportation Alliance could be disbanded with the region falling into the 'same cycle' with one or two of the districts under resourced.

Secretarial Note: Apologies were tendered by Ngaire Sullivan for non-attendance (Kiwi Coast).

Submitter 16: Marise Stuart (Lake Omapere Trust)

- 'A lake is a land covered by water' and was capable of being occupied in the same manner as land covered by a forest or stream.
- The footprint of the Lake had been awarded to the Trust via a legal decision in the 1920s.
- The Trust was 'proud of being in a relationship with NRC'.
- The lake was described to be in 'a state of total collapse'.
- The Trust had three strategic imperatives, all based on a scientific approach; being water quality, restoration of the environment and sustainability.
- An operational focus would be adopted going forward to reduce the nutrient content from the lake; for example targeted dredging, re-establishment of taonga species, riparian planting and sediment traps.
- There was potentially an economic return from the dredged sediment with the Kiwi Fruit industry already showing interest.
- All farmers surrounding the lake had provided letters of support to the Trust.
- The Trust was set to proceed with initiatives as soon as funding was available.

Secretarial Note: The Hearings adjourned at 2.04pm and reconvened at 2.12pm.

Submitter 17: Bill Rossiter

- Mr Rossiter had held the role of a councillor for 15 years
- It was suggested that if council was concerned about increasing costs it needed to undertake 'a forensic audit for wasteful spending'. Similar processes had been carried out during Mr Rossiter's time in council.
- It was further stressed that when council was approached for funding it needed to further investigate the validity of the request.

Submitter 18: Alan Agnew

- Stated that the NEST helicopter was effectively 'NRC's baby' and that the associated rate was for the benefit of all ratepayers. I
- It was also stated that NEST should retain its base in Kensington (providing a comparison to Western Springs Speedway). The location was ideal being close to St Johns Ambulance and with direct access to the hospital.
- Did not support daylight savings.
- Did not support the proposed relocation of the airport to Ruatangata due to fog issues.
- Continued to support an indoor bowls facility in Whangārei.

Submitter 19: Glen McMillan

- It was stressed that when councils were considering infrastructure they must consult with the disabled community and specifically consider accessibility.

- Walkways and accessways could be completely inaccessible if there was no provision of kick rails or if there was the inclusion of steps instead of ramps.
- It was further stressed that the disabled community wanted to have the same access as any member of the community.
- Mr McMillan offered to work directly with the councils to find practical solutions to ensure the construction of infrastructure was accessible to all.

Submitter 20: Tania McInnes (GBT Ventures Ltd)

- Strongly encouraged Northland to lead the way in terms of local government reform.
- Attention was drawn to the fact the 'crisis was unlikely to ablate' and 'challenges were only likely to intensify'.
- It was reinforced that there was a 'need for strong leadership and new ways of thinking'.
- Practically local government needed reorganisation to ensure it was resourced to respond to increasing challenges and opportunities.
- It was suggested that Northland should be the test case as to how things could be done differently.
- There were a wide range of opportunities available to Northland, such as the supply of natural food options to Auckland and finding a solution to retain the younger generation.
- It was acknowledged that it was a challenging time but council must face these big issues as opposed to 'keep putting on sticking plasters'.
- Changes needed to be driven at a local level to prevent being dictated by local government.
- Ms McInnes undertook to circulate an associated presentation to councillors.

Submitter 21: Ron Ford and Rebecca Williams (Tutukaka Coast Ratepayers & Residents Association)

- Councillor Macdonald was acknowledged for her involvement with the Tutukaka Coast Ratepayers & Residents Association.
- The community sent a strong message that it valued the environment (examples included sedimentation and loss of biodiversity).
- With the combination of WDC and NRC rate increases, the community was facing a significant increase in rates.
- It was questioned whether more efficiencies could be found to reduce rate increases.
- The Association supported the council focussing on core business but questioned NRC's proposal to withdraw funding from emergency services given they were 'life changing'.
- Concern was raised regarding the resilience of the Tutukaka community with 'one road in and one road out'.
- Concern was also raised regarding the impact of tourism with rubbish, waste and loss of biodiversity. Council was encouraged to adopt a 'creative, collaborative approach to find solutions'.
- The Association was keen to explore emergency preparedness and ensure the community was equipped for future events.
- WDC was working directly with the Association and NRC was encouraged to join this collaborative approach.

Submitter 22: David Mullan (Northland Sports Coalition)

- The Northland Sports Coalition advocated for the ongoing development of sport in Northland and 'greater participation in play and sport'.
- All 43 members of the Coalition supported the continuation of the Northland Sporting Facilities Rate.

- The population in Northland was forecast to increase and there was already a shortage in sporting facilities, such as pool space and indoor courts.
- The Northland Sporting Facilities Rate was integral to the establishment of facilities across the region.
- Northland was not currently thriving in terms of mental well-being, health and obesity.
- The Northland Sport Coalition urged NRC to consider the implication of removing the Northland Sports Facilities Rate.

Martina Tschirky

- Encouraged NRC to invest more into environmental management to meet existing and future challenges.
- Stressed the region was at a 'cross roads' in terms of weeds and 'if a hard push was not made now the problem of invasive weeds could become insurmountable'.
- Northland's wet and warm climate encourage the growth of weeds and climate change was only likely to exacerbate the problem.
- It was further stressed that there was a need for an awareness campaign and strong leadership in this space.
- The submission also made reference to flood risk management and the need to invest now given costs were only going to escalate.

Whakamutunga (Conclusion)

The Long Term Plan Hearings concluded at 3.08pm with a karakia by Councillor Shortland.

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