

Report to Kaipara District Council and Community - Council Meeting 18 December 2012**From John Robertson, Chair of Commissioners**

Now that the Commissioners have a communication strategy in place to advise the community of the progress being made to attend to the issues facing the Council, there is a good and regular feedback being received into the Chairman's mailbox. From this it is clear that:

- Most people are pleased that the Minister appointed Commissioners.
- Most people are supportive of the Commissioners addressing the issues that the Council faces.
- Most people want those who were responsible for getting the Council into its current financial state to be held accountable.

There are a number of themes that are in the messages to the Chair. These include the need to restore trust and confidence in the Council, and impatience for the report of the Auditor-General.

A number of those responding advise that they had been withholding their rates, but since had decided to pay them. A number are holding to their position not to pay, based on erroneous advice that they are receiving from ratepayer associations claiming that their rates, both past years and current year, are "illegal" and therefore not payable.

Some respondents are unhappy about the District Plan. Some of this is related to their view that the District Plan inhibits growth and development. Some is related to the frustration that they have felt as they have attempted to subdivide or develop their properties. The division in the community over the District Plan is evident in the demands from the two ratepayer associations. The Mangawhai one has demanded that Commissioners do not change the proposed District Plan. The Kaipara one has demanded that Commissioners throw it out.

Finally, a number of respondents are finding certain rating policies hard to accept. The differential rating policies are those most under challenge, by dairy farmers and by some lifestyle block owners in particular. Other than these specific rating issues, which are to do with equity, there is a general acceptance that rates needed increasing and a general acceptance that rates must be paid to fund the provision of public services.

This feedback from the community is helpful. The Commissioners have been appointed to lead the Council through to October 2015. Leadership requires the bringing together of a number of elements, including having a consultative and open relationship with the community.

Commissioners have brought many competencies to the Council table, including Chief Executive experience in local and regional government, and governance experience in the private sector. We have assigned one another key areas to attend to and monitor, drawing upon the skills that each Commissioner holds.

Together, the team of Commissioners has developed strong and respectful working relationships.

Clarity of Goals and Priorities

Organisations under stress need to move quickly and effectively from a state of crisis to one of stability. As they plan for their journey, they need to set clear goals and priorities. The longer the journey takes, the greater the transitional cost.

The experience brought by Commissioners with respect to Kaipara District Council's organisation development is being applied. The Commissioners moved promptly to support the executive and staff. They have developed relationships with key support partners, including the Minister of Local Government, the Local Member of Parliament, the Department of Internal Affairs, Bankers and Treasury advisers.

Within the first month of appointment, Commissioner expectations were relayed to the Chief Executive with respect to financial management and budgets. Governance structures were put in place to monitor performance.

Specific projects to address specific challenges have been established. The largest two of these projects are:

- Attending to the past rating irregularities. This has been prioritised, so that the confusion and uncertainties in the community over these matters is removed. The Commissioners have moved at speed to review the options to deal with the procedural and technical issues of the past. Legislation to attend to this matter has been flagged today.
- Addressing of the principles that determine rating policies, and addressing the priorities for and levels of Council investment and expenditure. Commissioners want to come to conclusions on these matters early in 2013 rather than to leave this to 2014. This will require amendments to the Long Term Plan, adopted by 30 June 2013.

Both these projects will put pressure on staff, as they cope with these on top of their normal operations.

Raising the Bar - Transparency and Accountability

There are two other clear and consistent messages that the Commissioners are hearing from the community. They reflect dissatisfaction with the past ethos of Council leadership, particularly around transparency and accountability. Raising the bar in this respect is important to secure the community's trust and confidence in the leadership of the Council. Not only does this require a more open approach to the way the Kaipara District Council conducts its local government going forward; it also requires the opening up of the books, so to speak.

The Office of the Auditor-General is assisting with this. Its report on the Mangawhai community wastewater scheme will reveal how this project was delivered, and where accountabilities for poor project management lie. This report is likely to answer many questions.

There is another question that the community seeks answers to. This relates to information surrounding the departure of the previous Chief Executive. The Council's current Chief Executive has the responsibility for determining whether requests for information relating to the departure of the previous Chief Executive should be released. To date, his judgment has been that it should not.

Commissioner Engagement

Commissioners continue to engage with community groups, as they seek advice on matters around community aspirations and development. Since the last Council meeting, engagement has been with a range of groups who promote the Kaipara District, including groups involved in social and economic development.

Formal meetings have been held with:

- Sport Northland
- The Raupo Drainage Board
- The Northland Civil Defence Emergency Management Group
- The Kaipara Harbour Joint Political Committee

In addition to these meetings, the first meeting involving Commissioners of the Taharoa Domain Governance Committee has been held. This is a sub-committee of Council. We are pleased to announce that Mr Ric Parore is to chair this committee. Stakeholders from the community attended the meeting and were involved as discussions took place around the vision for this special place.

The Passing of a Leader

Commissioners attended the tangi for Kaumatua Hugh Nathan yesterday at the Oturei Marae. Locally and nationally, we recognise Hugh for his leadership and his considerable community service over ninety years. Just three months ago, he spoke at the hui to welcome Commissioners to the Kaipara. We thank Hugh for his generosity and goodwill.