

**UNDER**

the Resource Management Act 1991

**IN THE MATTER**

of a request to Kaipara District Council for  
Private Plan Change 81: Dargaville  
Racecourse by the Dargaville Racing Club Inc

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF RICHARD ASLPACH ON BEHALF OF THE APPLICANT**

**10 MARCH 2023**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 My full name is Richard Alspach. I am a farmer and have lived in this area for 50 years.
- 1.2 I have a background in farming and local government politics. I am a committee member of both the Dargaville Racing Club and the Dargaville Community Development Board, and I am authorized by both those organizations to present evidence at this hearing.
- 1.3 This evidence is in respect of an application by Dargaville Racing Club Inc for Private Plan Change 81: Dargaville Racecourse.

**2. PRIVATE PLAN CHANGE 81**

- 2.1 The Dargaville Racing Club (“the Racing Club”) has owned the Land at Awakino Point since 1925, and with the exception of the war years raced there every year until 2016. In 2019 the Racing Club received notice from New Zealand Thoroughbred Racing that there would no longer be any races held at Dargaville. A position that the Racing Club reluctantly had to accept. However the Racing Club did not accept the position of NZTR that the land at Awakino Point belonged to NZTR by virtue of the Racing Industry Act. The Racing Club considered that the land was a community owned asset, and it should be the community which benefited from any future use.
- 2.2 It took the Racing Club nearly eighteen months to reach a settlement with NZTR, which left the Racing Club substantially in control of the land. The Racing Club’s approach to deciding the land’s future was two fold. First, what was the greatest need of the community that the land might fill; and second, how could we enhance the value to return the greatest value, so that the community might benefit in perpetuity.

- 2.3 There has been a strong lobby, driven initially by Grey Power and then taken up by the Dargaville Community Development Board, to see a retirement village established in Dargaville. The DCDB spent several years building a business case and looking at various sites in Dargaville, to no avail. When the possibility of the Racing Club land came up, it ticked all the boxes.
- 2.4 Dargaville is desperately short of housing. The current vacancy rate is about 1%. The number of houses actually for sale in Dargaville is static at around 17. The housing shortage is a major inhibitor to economic growth in the area. Since the last census we have fallen into deficit in new builds of around 350. We need a kick start to get us into the race. Kaipara District Council ("KDC") in conjunction with the Provincial Growth Fund has initiated a number of growth employment opportunities. But where are these potential employees going to live? There is no benefit to Dargaville in having people traveling from Whangarei, or elsewhere, to work here.
- 2.5 In August 2020, the Minister for Regional Development granted funding to the "Race Course Development Project" to pursue a plan change the Project Outcomes being:
- (a) New employment, the preservation of jobs and the redeployment of workers in communities hit by Covid 19; and
  - (b) Investment toward a more productive, sustainable and inclusive economy, enabling our Regions to grow and support a modern and connected New Zealand.
- 2.6 The Minister when publicly making the announcement expressed the wish that the Racing Club and the Council would work together to find ways to release the economic potential of the racecourse site.
- 2.7 As to how the Racing Club intends to secure the future of the community into the future? The Racing Club has no appetite to become a developer, and once the plan change is approved intends to sell to a developer to complete the work. The proceeds will be invested with the Northern Wairoa Fund, administered by the Northland Community Foundation. Their policy is to grow the fund in line with inflation, and distribute surplus to the community. This in effect gives the community of Northern Wairoa its own mini ASB fund, just for disbursement here. That will be of huge benefit to sporting clubs, Marae, community groups etc. all of whom are struggling to some degree. This benefit will go on forever. The Racing Club has altered its constitution to enable this to happen, and that alteration has the approval of NZTR.

- 2.8 The Racing Club does not consider that this project is creating another town. Quite the contrary. In Dargaville all sporting and community groups are struggling for numbers; schools have declining rolls; the current health system dictates that money follows population. The Racing Club considers that a project of this size, in close proximity to Dargaville and above the flood plain (Cyclone Gabrielle stayed at bay), will enhance rather than detract from the existing town.
- 2.9 When the Racing Club embarked on this project enthusiasm for carbon forestry was barely being talked about. Now the area which feeds Dargaville is losing good pastoral land at about 4,000 ha per year, that is approx 50,000 Stock Units, which at \$100 per Stock Unit (and it is more than that) is at least \$5 million per annum which stops going through our local economy. Forestry income to a large extent does not stay local, farming income does. This constitutes an existential threat. The racecourse development can counter this threat by providing additional housing. It is not stretching credulity to say that without this development Dargaville's future looks grim.
- 2.10 While it is the Racing Club's land and plan change application, the Racing Club has developed the concept and done all of the planning in conjunction with the Dargaville Community Development Board and Te Runanga o Ngati Whatua. We collectively call ourselves the Tripartite Group.
- 2.11 The Racing Club is proud of what the Tripartite Group has put together and submitted to Council thirteen months ago. The Racing Club is confident that this project is a game changer for Dargaville.

**Richard Alspach**

10 March 2023