

Northland Mayoral Forum Minutes

Meeting held in the Whangarei District Council Chambers
Te Iwitahi, 7 Rust Avenue, Whangārei
on Monday 27 May 2024, commencing at 10.00am

Tuhinga/Present:

Chairperson, Vincent Cocurullo (*WDC Mayor*)
FNDC Mayor Moko Tepania
KDC Mayor Craig Jepson
NRC Chair Geoff Crawford
WDC Chief Executive Officer Simon Weston
KDC Chief Executive Officer Jason Marris
NRC Tāhūhū Rangapū - Chief Executive Officer Jonathan Gibbard
FNDC Chief Executive Officer Guy Holroyd

I Tae Mai/In Attendance:

Full Meeting

MP for Northland
NRC Governance Specialist

Part Meeting

DIA Partnerships Director (*Via audio-visual link*)
NZTA Director Regional Relationships Te Taitokerau (*Via audio-visual link*)
SeaCleaners Founding Trustee

Secretarial Note: The Chair declared the meeting open at 10.02am and extended appreciation to all members for their attendance.

Ngā whakapahā/Apologies (Item 1.0)

There were no apologies.

Confirmation of Minutes - 26 February 2024 (Item 3.1)

Report from Chris Taylor, NRC Governance Specialist

Moved (Cocurullo/Jepson)

That the minutes of the Northland Mayoral Forum held on 26 February 2024 be confirmed as a true and correct record.

Carried

Receipt of Action Sheet (Item 4.1)

Report from Chris Taylor, NRC Governance Specialist

Moved (Cocurullo/Crawford)

That the action sheet be received.

Carried

Update from DIA Partnerships Director (Item 5.1)

DIA Partnership Director, Vanessa Blakelock, joined the meeting and provided an update on the following key matters:

Local Electoral Reform

- The legislation regarding Māori constituencies/wards had been introduced the week prior.
- The Select Committee had announced the timeframe for the close of submissions being the following Wednesday at midnight (29 May 2024).
- LGNZ and Taituara were moving quickly to ensure a submission was lodged prior to the deadline.

Key points of the related discussion included:

- The Far North District Council confirmed it would be submitting on the provision for Māori wards and in favour of the electoral provisions to extend the timeframe for postal voting.
- Concern was raised that individual councils needed to resource local elections. All of the Northland councils were encouraged to submit on the proposal that the Electoral Commission take over the running of local body elections.
- Attention was drawn to the challenge to encourage a better voter turnout for local body elections. The example was provided in the Far North where there were 78 voting centres for general elections and only three for local elections. The DIA Partnership Director confirmed that while this was beyond the scope of the proposed changes to legislation there was merit in councils submitting on this point to make their position known.
- The Northland councils were also encouraged to submit on the 'unfunded mandate from central government'. It was estimated that each council would need to pay approximately \$10k to run a poll in conjunction with local elections regarding Māori constituencies/wards. It was stressed that if this was the direction of central government then it should also provide funding to facilitate the process.

Local Water Done Well

- It was anticipated that Bill Two would be introduced that week. This Bill outlined the Local Government Water Services preliminary arrangements.
- Central Government would be issuing its budget which would affect the timing of the introduction of the Bill.
- At such time the Bill was enacted 'the clock would start for the Water Services Delivery Plans'.
- Policy decisions for Bill Three were underway. It was anticipated this Bill would be introduced at the end of the year. This Bill would include the 'more enduring settings'.
- It was advised that the Minister would be releasing communications that week regarding Better Off Funding and the CEs were encouraged to touch base with the DIA Partnership Director if there were any questions.

City and Regional Deals

- DIA anticipated having the draft framework to the Minister shortly. This would then be presented to Cabinet mid-year with a formal announcement expected late June/early July.
- Consideration was being given by the Minister as to how cities would be selected and how many.
- It was expected that there would be an initial cohort and then as the model matured, subsequent waves.
- The DIA Partnership Director encouraged the Northland Chief Executives to share an informal indication of their priority projects for the region 'for my own knowledge and advocacy.'
- It was reiterated that the Joint Regional Economic Development Committee (JREDC), in conjunction with Northland Inc. Limited, was the vehicle for confirming the list of priority projects. This Committee was workshopping the prioritisation of projects on 7 June 2024.
- DIA was encouraging the Minister to be clear on the selection process, whether it be focussed to a select number of regions or a broader 'call out'; noting that the latter created significant work.
- Many councils had been active, advocating projects with the Minister and DIA but ultimately it was the Minister's decision as to how to proceed.
- There were a range of opinions expressed as to whether an indicative list of priorities should be shared with DIA. It was noted that some of the councils were yet to workshop the matter and there was a risk sending a ranked list prior to it being socialised with elected members. On the other hand if Northland was slow getting a list put forth then it could miss out entirely.

In conclusion

- There was general agreement to provide the DIA with a 'direction of travel' with the caveat that the JREDC was yet to go through the prioritisation process (the DIA Partnership Director and NRC CEO to be the conduit for this information).
- It was suggested that each council should formalise the delegation to the JREDC to finalise the prioritised list of projects for the Regional Infrastructure Fund. This to be included on the next JREDC meeting agenda for discussion.

Update from the MP for Northland, Grant McCallum (Item 5.2)

The MP for Northland, Grant McCallum, provided a verbal update. Key aspects included:

- It was stressed that Northland need to be seen to be working as a team. "The Better organised we are, the more focussed we are as a region and a unified approach". Government wanted to work with regions that were organised and 'ready to go'.
- The MP for Northland confirmed his commitment to advocate for Northland and work with the other MPs.
- The Northland MP also articulated his support to find for a solution to the Brynderwyns and that the 'best bang for buck to grow Northland is the expressway'. It was stressed that it would be powerful for Northland as a collective to present its case to Wellington.
- It was further suggested that a powerful signal would be a newspaper advert stating that the Northland Expressway was the region's number one priority, with all key Northland parties as signatories; including iwi, local MPs and local government.
- It was stressed that there needed to be a pipeline of committed projects that were collectively supported regardless of the government of the time.

- Government's focus was projects that supported economic growth and the provision of housing. It was noted that new sources of investment and funding solutions would be required to achieve these outcomes (a solution to the Brynderwyns was an example of this).
- It was reiterated that there needed to be 'a unified voice from the north' to ensure that central government supported Northland projects.

Transport Update (Item 5.3)

Director Regional Relationships Te Taitokerau, Steve Mutton, joined the meeting to provide a verbal update. Key aspects included:

- The draft GPS had been released in March 2024 and was very focussed on NZ's prosperity, freight moving efficiently and getting people where they needed to go efficiently and safely.
- The government had set an ambitious agenda focussing on boosting the country's economy.
- The draft GPS set a balance between new projects and maintaining existing infrastructure.
- There were four key focus points, being economic growth and productivity, increased maintenance and resilience, safety and value for money.
- A key part of the GPS was looking for new ways to fund ambitious investment.
- The GPS was clear there would be more investment in Northland, including an increase in maintenance (including a State Highway pot hole intervention programme), a keen focus on the corridor between Auckland and Northland and also through the State Highway Investment Proposal (SHIP) which each Regional Land Transport Committee was required to give effect to through their Regional Land Transport Plans.
- It was stressed that while new funding and resourcing would result in changes it wouldn't happen overnight.
- It was well acknowledged that Northland relied heavily on its state highway network and that it played an important role in connecting diverse communities.
- The GPS acknowledged three roads of significance (RONS) in Northland being, an alternative to the Brynderwyn Hills, Whangārei to Port Marsden and Port Marsden to Te Hana. It was noted that when RONS were constructed they would result in a lift in safety performance by addressing critical areas.
- The region was still recovering from the series of weather events, for example the Mangamuka Gorge had been out since mid-2022.

The Brynderwyns

- Work had continued to progress despite 'minor weather interruptions'.
- The project was currently 'slightly ahead of original target' and still on track to open by the end of June 2024.
- It was stated that the team had done an 'outstanding job' of getting the soil removed off the hill with work continuing 24/7. During the day the focus was getting earth moved and during the night, when this couldn't occur, paving works, drainage and curbing was undertaken.
- An independent report had been commissioned and released regarding why the recent slip occurred, why this wasn't identified and whether the work being undertaken was appropriate. The report was supportive of the work being done, commended the crews and reported that it was a combination of the soil and rock types that caused the slip. This had occurred on part of the hill which could not be accessed to map out safely and was geologically complex. The area was 'in a critical state of stability' and the earthworks being undertaken at its base had accelerated the slip. To prevent further occurrences the loose soil was being cut out to get back to rock surface.
- The Northland Corporate Group was commended for their work to highlight the importance of the connection and their work had been shared with the relevant NZTA teams.

- Assurance was provided that NZTA had a large team looking at the Northern Corridor with an announcement due shortly. Consideration was being given to new financing models and how external investment could expediate work.

The Mangamukas

- This project was currently on track to open the before Christmas.
- To date the team had successfully completed work on three critical slips with three more near completion. There was work remaining on 12 slips which were smaller.

Other Matters

- The Summer maintenance programme had ended with almost the whole programme completed.
- It was acknowledged there were 'real issues in Northland regarding the quality of the network'. A new Regional Manager had been appointed with extensive experience in the Waikato and the team were 'optimistic' this would result in positive change.
- Through the quality assurance programme contractors had identified some gaps/challenges which were being addressed as a matter of priority.
- It was anticipated that the Loop Road works would be completed mid-2025.
- The Community Driver Testing Model being trialled in the Far North had been a success with a substantial increase in pass rates.

Key aspects of the following discussion included:

- Appreciation was extended to members for highlighting specific and local roading issues.
- While the 'scabbing' of road surfaces was cosmetic it was stressed that it was not good enough for the community.
- Concerns had also been raised that there was a lack of repairs being undertaken before resealing. It was advised that NZTA had completed the biggest reseal programme in Northland and assurance was provided that the NZTA Director Relationships was active asking questions and using national resources to review the Northland network.
- The Minister had set up a Road Efficiency Group which would be accountable for maintenance, driving efficiency and reduction of costs. The NZTA Director Relationships had been appointed the Chair of the REG by the Minister and was given the mandate to appoint members (two independents, an independent consultant, LGNZ representative and an NZTA representative). While there was no specific Northland representative, many of the members did not align to a particular region.
- Confirmation was provided that the NZTA Policy Team was currently undertaking an emergency works and FAR review given the recent weather events had placed pressure on the entire framework. The intent was to implement changes to ensure policies were easier to interpret and better aligned with legislative requirements. It was also to encourage councils to look at how they could build resilience through their RLTPs.
- Attention was drawn to the tragic fatality on Russell Road and the importance for road safety to be sufficiently funded. Assurance was provided that 'this government is trying make safety clearer' and that road safety budgets were being moved into state highway and local road improvements so that each council could decide how it was best applied and 'any decision needs a safety lens'.

Presentation: SeaCleaners (Item 5.4)

SeaCleaners Founding Trustee, Hayden Smith, was in attendance to lead the discussion. Key aspects included:

- SeaCleaners had been in existence for 22 years and had started Northland operations 6-7 years ago. The organisation had raised \$2.2m to clean up local waterways and engage communities to understand the impact of litter in the waterways.
- The challenge was securing a sustainable source of funding. Due to the inability to do this SeaCleaners had been forced to stop Northland operations at Christmas and put staff members on hold.
- The cost to run the Northland operations was \$300k +GST and SeaCleaners had raised \$250k for the coming year.
- Operations had just recommenced with the Founding Trustee being out on the water and 'dealing with the issue first hand'. It was advised that it was noticeable the difference 5-6 months of inactivity had made.
- There was a level of frustration having to 'fight month in month out to support what we are doing when we all love the ocean so much and benefit from tourism'. SeaCleaners' application to the Waste Minimisation Fund had been declined. They had also met with several Ministers seeking support. NRC and FNDC had previously provided funding of \$25k per annum.
- SeaCleaners would be the first organisation in New Zealand to be a plastic credit provider on the PCX market, whereby each tonne of waste could be sold to corporates to pay for credits for plastic production. SeaCleaners were being audited for efficiency as part of the plastic accreditation programme.
- SeaCleaners was not just about operations it also promoted education; for example working with oyster farms to promote best practice. SeaCleaners also supported recycling initiatives such as sending material to Future Post in Waiuku to make farm fence posts.
- It was stressed that it was critical Northland kept its beaches clean and it was proposed that the Northland Mayoral Fund should be prioritising this kind of work. It was suggested that members could follow up with their Waste Minimisation Managers.

Northland I Forward Together - Strategic refresh (Item 5.5)

Report from Darryl Jones, NRC Economist

There was general support for the final revised version of the Northland I Forward Together (NFT) strategic collaboration document be taken to each respective council for endorsement.

Secretarial Note: A copy of the Northland | Forward Together strategic collaboration document to be sent to the MP for Northland.

Local Waters Done Well (Item 5.6)

WDC Chief Executive, Simon Weston, provided the presentation 'Local Waters Done Well Update'. Key aspects of the presentation and related discussion included:

- The Northland councils need to agree on the work to be undertaken to meet the requirements of Local Waters Done Well (LWDW). A report would then need to go to each council seeking endorsement.
- Ultimately the Northland councils must meet the NZ water standards, be financially sustainable and resolve individual problems.

- This work would be led mainly through the Chief Executives' Forum in conjunction with Rational Consultants who had done a lot of work to date in Northland and had a good background of knowledge. Rationales were also working for Tauranga so were 'pooling an interesting array of knowledge across New Zealand'.
- In June councils were required to prepare an Establishment Plan which analysed the individual councils and where they sat compared to current standards. An assessment would also need to be made whether individual councils could afford the investment.
- Funding requirements would need to be confirmed June/July 2024 with an update from the DIA in September 2024.
- Concern was raised regarding affordability to the ratepayer. In response, it was stressed that councils would need to ensure their rate charging for water was sustainable and they weren't borrowing to artificially keep water costs low.
- WDC and KDC had offered to be test cases for the development of Service Delivery Plans to provide an opportunity to hone the process.
- Attention was drawn to the number of waste water plants in the Far North which also had a very low rating base and the need for a new funding solutions.
- It was stressed that as long as the Northland councils could look after its water network and be financially sustainable then it was meeting the requirements of the LWDW. If not then the current frame work 'provided a huge amount of flexibility' in terms of options.
- A lack of support was demonstrated for a CCO model, with additional costs to set up governance and several examples of CCO models performing poorly around the country.

In conclusion, there was general agreement there would be merit providing an update at the next Northland | Forward Together Strategic Planning Workshop (2 July 2024, hosted by NRC).

Knowledge Hub approval (Item 5.7)

Key aspects of the discussion included:

- A meeting was being held with the Minister Tertiary Education and Skills later that day to further socialise the concept.
- Education statistics in Northland were poor and it was stressed the region must do better.
- The concept was a knowledge hub/precinct base in Whangārei. This would include the refurbishment of Forum North and the transformation of the current Auckland University base to accommodation.
- WDC had submitted the concept into the fast tracking consenting process.
- A central component would be the Polytech (given Universities tended to 'come and go')
- NRC registered the fact it had no current plan to relocate and that this must be taken into careful consideration if the proposal progressed. In this manner it was requested that a presentation be provided to NRC elected members as an early 'heads up'.

Sport Northland Update (Item 5.8)

The report from WDC Councillor, Phoenix Ruka, was acknowledged. It was requested that FNDC Councillor, Babe Kapa, being the second local government representative on the Sport Northland Board also provide an update.

Round the Table - Strategic Priorities (KDC, WDC, FNDC, NRC) (Item 5.9)

- All the councils were currently working through the final stages of their Long Term Plan processes.
- It was stressed that Northland needed to 'be seen as stable' and that governance was a critical part of this.

Whakamutunga (Conclusion)

The meeting concluded at 12.39pm.