



SUMMARY OF WAIKATO MAYORAL FORUM MEETING MONDAY 12 AUGUST 2019

THREE WATERS

A Cabinet paper on strengthening the regulation of drinking water, wastewater and stormwater had no real surprises, the Waikato Mayoral Forum heard.

A new water regulator will be established with a range of responsibilities and functions. However, the scope, roles and institutional form of the regulator will be considered by Cabinet in September.

In the meantime, the Department of Internal Affairs is doing a stocktake of regulation across New Zealand, the forum heard. It's not just looking at the policy environments, but regulation implementation too. As part of this work, the DIA is looking at case studies, including in the Waikato.

Waikato Regional Council chief executive Vaughan Payne told the forum that a "common theme of this work has been around context". For example, it's easy to collect data and statistics around consents and compliance, he said, but there's always a story behind it.

ESSENTIAL FRESHWATER

Essential Freshwater, looking at how to improve New Zealand's water quality through policy and regulation, is close to being released for public consultation.

The Government has had four advisory groups working on the *Essential Freshwater* package. Waikato Regional Council chief executive Vaughan Payne told the forum that the likely reduction of nutrients and the standards are pretty high to improve the ecosystem.

He said in trying to turn around the impacts of over 150 years of land use intensification in a short time will have economic and community impacts. He told the forum that work on the economic impacts showed they will be significant if the pace of change is too fast.

He said the regional sector group had been advocating for regulations to stop decline, but for the rate of improvement to be left for local communities to decide alongside what's affordable.

Forum chair Alan Livingston said the reforms highlighted the shortcomings of a three year election cycle with Labour keen to show, in some tangible manner, that they are making a difference. However, the regional sector has been battling to impress that while we support change, it shouldn't disrupt the positive work underway already and should be mindful of the capability and feasibility of implementation.

Forum members were encouraged to attend the LGNZ Freshwater Forum being held in Wellington on 24 September, where there would be more detail on the freshwater proposals, the economic, capacity, capability and feasibility implications, the implementation challenges and where priority should be given.

REGIONAL WATER SERVICES COLLABORATION

The Waikato Mayoral Forum has endorsed a business case which will see negotiations get underway with nine councils to enter into a multi-parting funding agreement.

The ultimate goal is to establish a centre for excellence for waters in the Waikato.

Dawn Inglis, Regional Asset Technical Accord manager, said one of the learnings from Havelock North is that compliance systems only go so far.

“A risk-based approach requires a better understanding of the impacts on our communities, capability within the sector, emergency preparedness and incident response, as well as asset management.”

She said a *Waters Collaboration Unit* was an opportunity to look at challenges ahead for local government in the waters space.

The *Waters Collaboration Unit* will initially comprise two staff, but will bring together staff from each council every two months to share their knowledge, issues and experiences. The collaboration will ensure the Waikato is able to demonstrate the benefits of working together to prepare for the anticipated new regulatory framework, and also ensure the benefits are achieved as quickly as possible.

The nine participating councils have indicated that the initial term of the collaboration be set at 22 months to allow for rigorous review prior to the next long term plans being adopted in 2021, the forum heard.

The scope of the collaboration will be revisited in 2020/21 to ensure the planned activities are appropriate and still aligned with central government direction prior to the commencement of the 2021-2031 Long Term Plans, the forum heard.

The nine participating councils are Hauraki, Waitomo, Taupō, Waipā, Thames-Coromandel, Matamata-Piako, South Waikato, Ōtorohanga and Hamilton.

WAIKATO RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The Waikato Mayoral Forum has thrown its support behind the region’s councils working together on climate change.

The decision was made during the final meeting of the forum for this triennium and followed a report on climate change action in the Waikato region.

Waikato Regional Council and forum chair Alan Livingston said, “Climate change is a real issue with real impacts for our communities, so working together on actions makes good sense. That’s why the proposal was unanimously supported in principle.

“Forum members also noted the opportunity to have their district’s carbon footprint calculated as part of updating the existing Waikato greenhouse gas inventory, and indicated support for contributing to the cost for this work,” Cr Livingston said.

Hazard assessments indicate that over the next century the Waikato region can expect sea levels to continue rising and more extreme weather causing river and coastal flooding, droughts and severe coastal erosion.

A report to the forum from Waikato Regional Council chief executive Vaughan Payne said Waikato councils are at the “forefront of managing risk to New Zealand’s natural and built environment through mitigation and adaptation actions”.

“However, councils cannot address these issues by themselves. All parts of society, a diverse range of actions and policy approaches are required to effectively manage the risks climate change presents.”

With respect to mitigation, Mr Payne said councils can play an important role by working with communities to reduce emissions.

While all Waikato councils are factoring climate change into policy, regulatory, operational and corporate support areas, he said it was important to work together with all Waikato sectors to adopt an agreed climate change action roadmap.

The roadmap would step through current and planned regional activities as part of New Zealand’s transition to net carbon zero by 2050.

The forum heard that work was underway to organise a Waikato climate action summit being held on Saturday, 21 September, supported by the Waikato Plan Leadership Group and Waikato Regional Council.

The summit will bring the community together to hear from speakers on climate change issues globally, nationally and locally, as well as to talk about current local actions and to agree on achievable collective action to inform the Waikato Climate Action Roadmap.

REVIEW OF TRIENNIAL AGREEMENT

The process for developing a triennial agreement for 2019-2022 has been agreed by the Waikato Mayoral Forum. The agreement sets out the protocols for communication and coordination among the councils during the three-year term, together with a statement of the process for consultation on proposals for new regional council activities. It also signals the intended work and activities of the forum. Forum members asked that the agreement emphasise that it is not a formal committee, as per the Local Government Act, and therefore is not open to the public. As such, it can make recommendations but not binding decisions.

DIRECTION ON WASTE TO ENERGY

The Waikato Mayoral Forum has agreed that waste to energy is the way forward and a sub-committee of interested councils will work to progress options to make it commercially viable for Auckland, Waikato and Bay of Plenty.

THOROUGHbred INDUSTRY OPPORTUNITIES IN THE WAIKATO

There is an opportunity for the Waikato to become the centre of excellence for New Zealand's thoroughbred industry, the forum has heard.

Thoroughbreds contribute \$430 million to the Waikato economy – 2 per cent of the region's GDP and 28 per cent of the industry in New Zealand. A delegation from Waikato's industry to the mayoral forum said racing’s contribution to the national economy is similar to the fishing and wine industries.

The delegation said the industry is at a low ebb and “the impression is that this is the racing industry's last chance”. They have large land holdings, with under-utilised and ageing assets.

That's why the Cambridge Jockey Club, Waikato Racing Club (Te Rapa) and Waipa Racing Club (Te Awamutu) have joined as equal partners.

One option they are exploring is dissolving the three clubs and creating just one super club in either the Waipā district or at Te Rapa, or perhaps in other locations such as Matamata, Te Aroha and

Rotorua. It would cement the Waikato as a hub for the thoroughbred industry in New Zealand, the forum heard.

There was general support from the mayoral forum for the initiative, and in particular for a centre to be established in the Waikato.

WAIKATO PLAN UPDATE

There has been a reinvigoration of the Waikato Plan over the past six months, with the value of the document being seen by central government agencies.

That's the message received during an update on the Waikato Plan to the mayoral forum.

A testament to the visibility of the plan is that co-chair has been invited to meet with Minister Jones, and other government agencies are also starting to see the value of the document.

A report to the forum highlighted activity over the past six months, which had seen reinvigoration of the Waikato Plan. This was backed by an update from Amanda Hema, who was introduced as the Waikato Plan senior project manager.

Ms Hema outlined progress being made on a number of workstreams, including health and employment opportunities and connecting youth with decision-making. She said there had also been "amazing work" happening in the housing space.

Lindsay Cumberpatch has been working on the regional housing initiative, which has a vision of "every person and every family in our region will be well housed".

The report, being peer-reviewed by Deloitte, provides a stocktake of housing across the region, as well as a matrix on who's doing what in the housing continuum – from emergency to social, and market housing. It also includes a suite of actions and priorities.

Mr Cumberpatch said "we are the only region tackling this with a regional evidence base" and "we have taken a systems thinking approach to identify the levers we can push to influence change".

Establishing a Community Lands Trust is one initiative identified, with Hamilton City Council supporting the idea in principle, agreeing to provide \$2 million over the next two years.

"But to work it has to be regional," Mr Cumberpatch said. The initiative would see land, held in perpetuity, and offered to registered community housing providers for development. It would be on the "clear understanding the land is leasehold and then people would own their unit".

Research by Deloitte showed the cost of land had increased by 50 per cent.

"That's staggering, it's why so many people can't get into the housing market. The whole idea of this initiative is to take the cost of land out of the housing equation," he said.

TE WAKA UPDATE

Te Waka was launched 12 months ago and has ticked off the projects it promised and is gaining momentum, the forum heard.

However, Te Waka Board of Directors chairperson Dallas Fisher said the Waikato's relationships with Wellington "are not strong", but through the Waikato Plan the region "is starting to get some traction".

Mr Fisher told the forum he felt there needed to be a collective focus on five critical things for the Waikato to enable focused conversations, and to achieve the best for the region.

HAMILTON-AUCKLAND CORRIDOR PLAN

A milestone in the Hamilton-Auckland Corridor Plan was due to be reached, with the new Future Proof partnership to be signed at Hampton Downs just three days after the Waikato Mayoral Forum meeting. For more information, visit www.futureproof.org.nz.

REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES

As part of the induction process for councillors following the October 2019 local government elections, a combined meeting of councils will be held in late November. It will look at regional collaborative initiatives, such as three waters, climate change, Future Proof and shared services.