

By email

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Kia ora

Letter to Wairarapa Mayors - areas of mutual interest

Congratulations again on your election as the Mayors of Carterton, Masterton and South Wairarapa District Council. I trust you and your Councils will have a productive three years.

As we start the triennium, I wanted to indicate some broad areas of mutual interest where I see our two organisations having more direct engagement and where it will be important to ensure our councils are well connected. I look forward to having a conversation with you about these topics.

As a regional council our specific responsibilities continue to be environment management, flood protection and land management, provision of regional parks, public transport planning and funding, and metropolitan water supply.

In the Wairarapa, I'd like us to continue to work together to plan for sustainable growth, resilience, and a thriving environment, while balancing affordability for our ratepayers.

Regional Planning

As you will have heard last Wednesday, regional spatial planning is facilitated by Wellington Regional Leadership Committee (WRLC). The WRLC includes all mayors, iwi, the ministers of housing and transport, and the regional council. Greater Wellington provides the secretariat for the WRLC.

The work of the WRLC is taking on greater importance with RMA reform putting regional spatial planning firmly on the table. Some regions are well advanced in this area, while some urban growth partnerships, including WRLC, have already created a future development strategy.

The WRLC secretariat is currently developing a regional spatial ambition that will assist authorities in the region and the government to better plan for growth and reposition the region for future economic

development. The regional spatial ambition will support the region, through WRLC, to put forward co-investment proposals with the government. It also has the potential to isolate projects for a regional deal.

Flood protection and urban growth

A key area of focus will be continuing to work collaboratively on planning for housing and urban growth in resilient locations—specifically avoiding areas vulnerable to flooding and sea level rise. And where there are exiting plans, like the South Wairarapa Spatial Plan and the Eastern Growth Area Structure Plan, working with you to bring them to life. Or working with you to develop those plans where they are in progress.

We will need support and engagement from you over the next three years as we manage the risk of flooding and its impact on people's homes, farms and businesses in the coming triennium. We are currently progressing 15 flood resilience projects in the Wairarapa (co-funded by Government following Budget 2024), which are critical in future proofing community, infrastructure, cultural taonga and the economy. Across the Wairarapa we are trying to give rivers more room to move, using a mixture of traditional river management techniques and nature-based solutions to balance flood protection with environmental benefit.

We have now completed our optioneering work for flood protection on the urban reach of the Waipoua and will need to work together with Masterton District Council and others to carry out this important work. Over the coming triennium we will be reviewing the Lower Wairarapa Valley Development Scheme, which provides drainage and flood protection around Wairarapa Moana and the lower Ruamāhanga.

Meanwhile water resilience has been identified as a critical priority for the Wairarapa. The risks of inaction are significant, but with a coordinated approach and joined up leadership the Wairarapa can build a resilient water future that supports its people, economy, and environment.

Rail

Metlink (Greater Wellington) runs most trains across the network, including those serving the Wairarapa. Over the past two years the Wairarapa Line has been completely overhauled, including the Remutaka Tunnel, with the installation of new track, sleepers and allast. This has futureproofed the line and paved the way for the new trains. The staffing shortages experienced by Wairarapa commuters earlier this year have been resolved, and we thank your community for their patience while we worked through that.

We now look forward to the delivery of the new Tūhono trains - 18 five-car battery electric multiple units which will service the Wairarapa and Manawatū lines. Planning is now underway for this service, including station upgrades, passing loops and a new maintenance depot in Masterton. We look forward to continuing to work closely with your Council as we bring this vision to life.

Rail Station Upgrades

Greater Wellington owns all the train stations on the Metlink network, other than Wellington Railway Station. Some of these stations are showing their age. We plan to develop a business case for the comprehensive upgrading of stations across the network as part of ensuring safe and accessible journeys and encouraging more people to use public transport. This may also include proposals for new stations, where the business case, cost-benefit analysis and affordability for ratepayers supports such infrastructure.

Enhancing the natural environment – parks and pest management

The Wairarapa is well known for the beauty of its natural environment including Lake Wairarapa and the Ruamāhanga River, as well as its rugged coastline. In the last triennium we identified land for a new Wairarapa Regional Park. During this triennium we want to work in collaboration with you, community stakeholders and mana whenua partners towards formalising a regional park in the Wairarapa.

We also want to work with you to build on our work in the pest management space in particular where it protects the Wairarapa's significant agricultural economy and native biodiversity. I'm pleased to share with you that we are close to ridding the region of rooks, which will mean less stress and better economic outcomes for local farmers. Our pest animals' team have led the way for other North Island councils, using helicopters and other innovative techniques to carry out these operations. But effective pest control isn't easy, or cheap – it's taken 30 years to get to this point, and we are very close to having that work pay off while keeping a sharp focus on affordability for ratepayers.

Local Government Reform

Local government reform was signalled by the Government last week. Greater Wellington supports reform that engages the community and our mana whenua partners and recognises the benefits of both localism and regionalism. We believe there continues to be a strong role for regional councils in areas such as river catchments, environmental management, flood protection and public transport, which are all best managed at scale. We look forward to working you on responses to the Government's proposals.

Resource Management Reform

While acknowledging the 'Plan Stop' announced by the Government earlier this year that will remain in force until resource management reforms are enacted, we look forward to working with you to progress our mutual priorities in new and innovative ways.

I look forward to working with you and your council supporting our communities to thrive and prosper now and in the future.

Ngā mihi



Daran Ponter
Haemana | Chair