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Chairman and Chief Executive's Report

We are pleased to present the Taranaki Regional Council's 2017/2018 Annual Report.

REGION'S STORY WORTH TELLING

We are pleased to present the Taranaki Regional Council's 2017/2018 Annual Report. Once again we saw solid progress across a wide variety of programmes and activities with a good financial result, and in the face of continued and complex challenges.

These regional achievements are due to much more than our own efforts, however. They are also the result of smart thinking and hard work by many others across all sectors. In short, Taranaki has a very good story to tell.

The Council has a central role in areas vital to regional life – environmental and resource management; protecting and improving native biodiversity; hazard management; public transport and transport planning; cultural and recreational amenities; advocacy; and ownership of Port Taranaki. We maintain a firm focus on supporting livelihoods, improving lifestyles and taking Taranaki forward.

The *At a Glance* section overleaf summarises the year's key outcomes in simple graphic form. But in three important areas, we saw outstanding developments that we believe put Taranaki in a league of its own. These merit detailed discussion below.

We also share the regional public's disappointment over developments at Yarrow Stadium, an asset that's owned by a Trust controlled by this Council. With the two grandstands found to be earthquake-prone and subsequently closed, we are working closely with partners and stakeholders to find the best solution. The future will become clearer in the next few months as engineers complete a complex analysis of issues and options.

FRESHWATER STATS: SPARKLING, NOT FLAT

For Taranaki, freshwater has always been a vital resource in cultural, economic and recreational terms. So freshwater management is rightly a core function and important priority for this Council.

In contrast to the 'doom and gloom' that pervades the national conversation on freshwater quality, Taranaki



continues to see impressive gains. The Council's own monitoring and trend analyses, reported during the 2017/2018 financial year and subsequently, paint a consistent picture: Continued improvements in the ecological health of the waterways we monitor, with very few sites deteriorating. .

Ecological health is regarded as the prime measure of freshwater quality. And given the tone of the national discussion on levels of nitrogen, it's interesting to note that these improvements in ecological health are largely taking place regardless of the nutrient trends at any particular site. Overall, though, an increasing number of sites have nutrient levels that are stable or reducing.

These results aren't a happy accident. An independent report by NIWA during the year found that Taranaki's long-running riparian protection programme is not only strongly associated with the improved ecological health in the region's waterways, but has also reduced E. coli levels.

Guided by solid previous research, improving ecological stream health has been the major goal of this Council's long-running and voluntary riparian fencing and planting programme. The NIWA report endorses and validates this approach, with reduced bacterial (E. coli) contamination being an additional benefit.

By the end of the 2017/2018 financial year, the Council had provided landowners with riparian management plans more than 5.1 million native plants, and a total of 85.7% of their streams were fenced and 71.7% were protected by vegetation. This represents a massive commitment by the farming community.

Soil conservation efforts in the eastern hill country, too, have a direct bearing on freshwater quality as well as reducing the risk and severity of flooding as a result of severe weather.

The Council has worked alongside landowners to prepare sustainable land management plans for 840 hill country farms, covering 67% of hill country land in private ownership.

Alongside these efforts, the Council also continued to work with communities and industry across the region to reduce or eliminate impacts from point-source discharges, and taking enforcement action when necessary.

BIODIVERSITY: RESTORATION LIKE NO OTHER

The closing stages of the 2017/2018 saw the announcement of \$11million-plus in Government support for *Towards Predator-Free Taranaki* a long-term predator control/biodiversity restoration project led by this Council.

The announcement was the result of an intense effort by Council management and staff to put together a business case justifying the support, which is funded through the Crown Company Predator Free 2050 Ltd.

The project started almost immediately the funding was announced and is already attracting the sort of solid community support – both urban and rural – that is vital to ensure its long-term success.

It is a true trail-blazer – the largest project of its kind in the world, and certainly nationally. We are confident it can succeed because of the years of work that has already gone into possum control in rural areas under the Council's *Self-Help Possum Programme*, the country's biggest predator-control programme by area.

More recently, the Council's voluntary possum control programme in New Plymouth has laid the groundwork and provided experience and lessons in urban predator operations.

Towards Predator-Free Taranaki is a key element of *Restore Taranaki*, a visionary and region-wide biodiversity restoration project coordinated by Wild for Taranaki, the regional biodiversity trust.

The region is ready, willing and able to break new ground in predator control and biodiversity restoration.

PUKEITI: WINNING THE VISITOR VOTE

We had been confident the public of Taranaki and their visitors would respond positively to the new Rainforest Centre and associated developments at Pukeiti, which opened during the 2017/2018 year. However, we had not expected such a dramatic increase in visitor numbers, which were up by 285% for the year as a whole.

The new centre gives our world-class garden a world-class visitor experience. It gives people an opportunity to visit regardless of the weather and time of year, and experience the wonderful gardens out of the rain and under a roof, and to take in the stories of Pukeiti.

Allied developments include a network of tree houses and an associated activity pack that also proved popular with children and their parents and caregivers.

The success of these developments gives us confidence as we work further to develop Pukeiti, not only because it's worthwhile in itself but also to add resilience to the Taranaki economy, with tourism rapidly emerging as an important regional industry alongside agriculture and hydrocarbon-based activities.

The Council's other two heritage properties, Tūpare and Hollard Gardens, also enjoyed greater patronage during the year, with their gardens and facilities being continually refined and enhanced.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The Council finished the 2017/2018 year with a surplus of \$962,000 (total comprehensive income). Total expenditure was \$26.6m. Overall it was a good result, noting that the general rates increases have been at or below the rate of inflation for the past few years (a 1% general rates increase in 2017/2018). The Council's balance sheet remains very strong, with no public debt.

All of the achievements outlined here would not have been possible without the skills, dedication and enthusiasm of Council staff, and the commitment people across Taranaki who share our broad goals. We thank them all.

We gratefully acknowledge the efforts and achievements of council staff during the year, ably governed by a team of Councillors providing clear direction, consistent with our mission.



David MacLeod
Chairman



Basil Chamberlain
Chief Executive



Reporting environmental performance

120

major consents monitored
and publicly reported on.

92%

'high' or 'good'
environmental performance
for major consents.

92.3%

dairy farms and all pig and
poultry farms complied
with consent conditions.



High level of environmental performance
by industries, councils and farming sector.

Planting and fencing streambanks

5.1m

plants put along streams by landowners.
430,567 in past year along 250 km.

86%

riparian plan streambanks
protected with fencing

72%

riparian plan streambanks
protected with riparian
vegetation.



Enforcing environmental standards

414

environmental incidents
responded to. Control
and cleanup initiated
where required.

200

abatement
notices served

67

infringement
notices issued.

Sustainable farming

840

sustainable land management
plans, covering 67% of hillcountry
land in private ownership.

87%

hill country being
managed sustainably



Restoring native habitats



95% of 13 Key Native Ecosystems monitored improving or maintaining condition.

14 new biodiversity plans covering 88 ha of ecologically important habitats on private land.
Total of 104 covering 4,522 ha.



Removing predators and targeting pest plants

\$11.6m funding for Towards Predator-Free Taranaki from Predator Free 2050 Limited over five years.

4,086

properties in self-help possum control programme covering 240,200 ha.

2,212

inspections for pest plants.

6.9% catch rate for possums on properties monitored. Within 10% target to significantly reduce effects of possums.

Monitoring nature's extremes

- ✓ Regional and district councils maintained Civil Defence readiness and response capability.
- ✓ new flood protection scheme constructed to protect Opunake township.
- ✓ maintained flood protection schemes in the lower Waitara, lower Waiwhakaiho, Waitotara, and Stony Rivers, and Kaihihi Stream.
- 5** flood warnings issued to protect people and property potentially affected.



Regulating use of natural resources

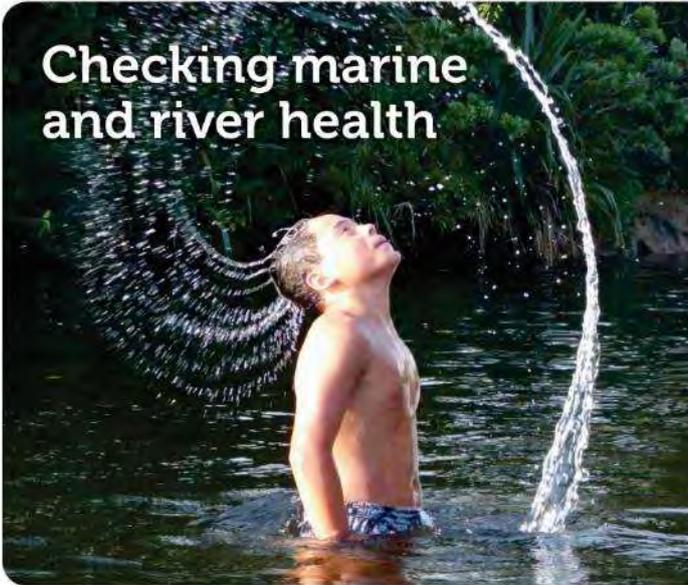
100%

resource consents processed in RMA timeframes over past 18 years.

100%

consents submitted on resolved through pre-hearing process.

Checking marine and river health



99%

coastal beaches samples met MfE bathing guidelines during summer.

80%

freshwater bathing site samples met MfE bathing guidelines during summer.

53%

freshwater ecological sites show significant trends of improvement and 2% showing significant decline.

67%

nutrient measures at representative surface water sites stable or improving (since 1995).



overall, surface water quality is improving

Public bus services and transport

624,286

passengers on region's public transport

44,098

subsidised Total Mobility passenger trips

\$54,000

for Ironside Vehicle Society to carry people with disabilities.



World-class gardens

285%

increase in visitors to Pukeiti.

Total of 141,111 visitors to Tupare, Pukeiti and Hollard Gardens. New Lodge for public and private events at Pukeiti.

Assisting Puke Ariki, heritage and culture

Funding four projects at Puke Ariki and one at Aotea Utanganui Museum of South Taranaki.



Ensuring clean air

Taranaki's air quality is good, with negligible contribution from human activities.



Yarrow Stadium

Hosting All Blacks test match against Argentina in September 2017.



Taranaki Regional Council is made up of eleven publicly elected Councillors as follows: David MacLeod (Chairman), David Lean (Deputy Chairman), Michael Joyce, Donald McIntyre, Tom Cloke, Craig Williamson, Charlotte Littlewood, Neil Walker, Matthew McDonald, Michael Davey and Bev Raine.

Sound financial performance



Council balance sheet remains very strong, with no public debt.



general rates increases at or below inflation rate for past few years.

Port Taranaki ownership \$5.46m

dividends from Council-owned Port Taranaki Ltd.



Educating future generations



6,543

students experienced class visits or field trips through the Council environmental education programme

16

environmental champions recognized by Council environmental awards.

Connecting people

engagement to progress Mt Messenger and Awakino Tunnel bypass projects

Building scientific knowledge

Range of resource investigations and applied research projects undertaken.



Supporting community initiatives

worked with Wild for Taranaki, iwi and grassroots community groups to improve Taranaki's biodiversity.

