

MESSAGE TO WELLINGTON

from Taranaki's civic leaders

With campaigning well under way for the elections on 23 September, it's again time to lay out Taranaki's priorities for action by the incoming Government.

The region's four local authorities – the New Plymouth, Stratford and South Taranaki district councils and the Taranaki Regional Council – did this before the 2014 elections. The Government subsequently delivered on many of these priorities, most notably with a significant investment to improve SH3 north.

But there's still work to do in other areas, and new imperatives have emerged – particularly the need to diversify. Taranaki's economy remains strong, with the nation's highest regional per-capita GDP. But our two key commodities, dairy and hydrocarbons, make us vulnerable to global variations. Tourism is emerging as a sound investment, particularly with Lonely Planet ranking Taranaki the second-best region in the world to visit.



David MacLeod
Taranaki Regional Council Chair



Ross Dunlop
South Taranaki Mayor



Neil Volzke
Stratford Mayor



Neil Holdom
New Plymouth Mayor

Here are the eight priorities for Taranaki

 **Taranaki Crossing:** Our councils are already working on and investing in an iconic, mountain-to-sea visitor experience. The Government needs to commit more long-overdue expenditure within the National Park to meet visitor demand. As a Great Walk, it would be a major boost to the regional economy.

 **SH43 – Forgotten World Highway:** The sealing of the final 12km is long overdue, along with improvements to ensure the highway is safe for more traffic. This will enhance tourism instead of impeding it, and make the freight network more resilient.

 **Freedom camping:** Freedom camping, particularly along SH45 Surf Highway, has created problems for councils in ensuring visitors can get to attractions safely and that they enjoy suitable amenities. Road safety works require a Crown funding increase to reflect expanding tourist numbers. The Government should also extend its funding for toilets, showers and the like.

 **Oil and gas returns:** The oil and gas industry produces significant tax and royalty revenues for the Government but none is specifically captured in the region that produces the wealth. The next Government must look to ensure direct benefit to local communities which bear the additional infrastructure and other costs.

 **Connections to Mt Taranaki:** The North Egmont, Stratford and Dawson Falls access roads are under pressure and suffering from under-investment. The Government needs to prioritise a sustainable, long-term funding solution that also includes the Mangorei Road and Carrington Road routes to Egmont National Park and Pukeiti.

 **Western Blue Highway:** A previous investigation found a New Plymouth-Nelson roll-on, roll-off shuttle ferry service would be both feasible and viable. The concept now needs serious attention given the fragility of the national transportation network exposed by the Kaikoura earthquake.

 **Predator-free Taranaki:** This region is an excellent place for the Government to start achieving its Predator Free 2050 goal, by supporting and further funding a number of initiatives already under way involving public and private agencies – for example, Project Maunga, self-help possum control and many community-based site-specific projects. Taranaki's compact scale and united focus make it a great pilot region.

 **Cellphone coverage & broadband:** The Taranaki councils fully support the Government's broadband initiatives but there has been little progress in rural Taranaki, and there has been no progress filling the gaps in our mobile phone coverage. This is holding Taranaki back. We suggest Taranaki becomes a pilot region to show what can be done by saturating the region with high-speed, high-quality data services to support its rural businesses and communities.

Progress on our 2014 priorities

 **Major improvements to SH3 north:** The Government has committed up to \$135 million, with construction to start in late 2018/19. A great result.

Road funding: The Government established a contestable \$140 million fund to replace the previous 'R funds' regional allocations. A good result.

 **Normanby overbridge:** The Government committed \$17.6 million to complete the Normanby overbridge realignment, which opened in 2016. A great result.

 **Regional development and tourism:** A review of Taranaki's regional economic development strategy is now well under way with support from central Government. A promising development.

 **Treaty settlements:** Settlements have now been achieved for all bar one of the region's eight Iwi, with the eighth settlement under negotiation. There has also been formal reconciliation between the Crown and Parihaka. An excellent outcome.

 **Oil and gas industry and returns:** No response to date.

 **RMA implementation and reforms:** The jury is still out on major amendments made to the Resource Management Act in April 2017. Further work needed.

 **Investment in Egmont National Park:** Support for Project Mouna is good news but there is still less-than-adequate investment in visitor facilities.

Marine oil spill response capability: No response on the major issue of concern.

Background paper: www.trc.govt.nz/MtW/