

Newsletter December 2015



The Northern Action Group Incorporated

Dear NAG Member/Supporter,

Since our last newsletter in September we have again met with the Local Government Commission (LGC) approximately 4 weeks ago.

This time we had Sir Wira Gardiner (chairman) Leigh Auton (Commissioner assigned for the Northern Region) Sarah Polaschek (senior advisor) and Sandra Preston (CEO).

At that meeting the Commission asked if we would be interested in exploring a new process for assessing our proposal and although it did require a departure from the statutorily prescribed process they felt it would be beneficial to us and the community as it was intended to get the Community involved at a much earlier stage in deliberations so they could have direct influence on the outcome in determining a final proposal. (The statutory process does not really allow the community much involvement until the LGC has determined a preferred option and prepared a draft proposal on which the Community is then asked to submit their views.

This proposed 'alternative' process would involve a series of workshops hosted by the Commission involving both community groups and the general population to explore all the reasonably practical options and possibly culminating in a poll of the whole community. The advantage of this process would be that when produced the final proposal would go forward with hopefully the full support of the whole community.

Although this is a departure from the legally prescribed process (calling for alternative proposals and then the Commission itself doing the deliberating and determining the preferred option) Sir Wira said that he had discussed this new path with the Local Government Minister who gave it her 'blessing' and said she would change the law if necessary to enable it.

Sir Wira made it clear that if this new path was not achieving the desired result either of us (LGC or NAG) could at any time default back to the legal path. Our committee could see lots of advantages, especially getting the Community involved at the early stage, and nothing to lose so we readily agreed to it.

A 'Memorandum of Understanding' (MOU) was drawn up by the Commission staff and after a bit of 'fine tuning' to the wording was to be signed by Sir Wira and myself last Monday.

The guiding principles of the MOU were:

1. A desire to deliver on the best outcomes for North Rodney, and the communities that make up the area;
2. Respect for disciplined analysis and research to inform the assumptions with which the Parties might start;
3. Mutual trust and collaboration;
4. Openness and transparency of process between the Parties;
5. An understanding of the legal constraints that the Commission works within, but accepting that options that could require statutory change are not necessarily excluded; and
6. Acknowledgement of respective reporting and accountability processes.

Sadly it was not to be!

When we met with the LGC staff at Orewa on Monday 7th it had all changed. Instead of a joint LGC/NAG MOU the Commission now wants to set up a tripartite working party with 3 members each from LGC, NAG, and Auckland Council (AC). Apparently they already have the agreement of AC and there is to be a Councilor, a local board member and a member of AC staff. (These participants still to be named at time of writing this.)

Needless to say we believe this is a far cry from what we understood was originally offered to us.

We are extremely reluctant to sit 'at the table' with people and an organisation that has clearly indicated on many occasions in the past that they are absolutely opposed to what this Community has clearly indicated it wants, and that is full independence from Auckland.

At the very least we feel that the representatives of AC should be drawn from our own Local board areas of Warkworth and Wellsford and certainly staff should not be involved at all.

Rest assured we will not be bullied into a process which will be to this communities disadvantage and so have not, at this point, agreed to this sudden change in direction.

We do not wish to abandon this new initiative but at the same time we do not want to see it 'hijacked' by people who we believe do not have this Communities best interests at heart and are in pursuit of their own agendas.

In the meantime Auckland Council has at long last (3 months later) made its submission to LGC supposedly establishing that there will be a 'material affect on the operational Scale Scope or Capability' on the rest of Auckland if we are separated.

We have been given a copy by the Commission for comment. and are currently preparing a counter submission to AC's claims which we believe do not even come close to establishing the above criteria and therefore LGC will not be able to declare the rest of the region an 'affected area'

In the meantime with Christmas upon us it is unlikely that anything will happen before late January so I'd like to take this opportunity on behalf of the NAG committee to thank you for your support and wish you a happy and safe festive season.

Yours sincerely

Bill Townson
Chair - Northern Action Group Inc.

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