



# ***The Northern Action Group Incorporated***

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## **HARD TIMES**

Dear NAG Members and Supporters,

### Introduction

Sorry this newsletter is long overdue, but my excuse is I have been working as a s.274 party to the appeal against the majority Commissioner's decision to approve a tip in the Wayby Valley. Whatever the merits of landfills or other systems for residual waste disposal this giant landfill (proposed to be 2<sup>nd</sup> biggest in the country) should never have been proposed for a Wayby Valley location.

For me it has highlighted a major fault with the current Resource management Act (RMA) processes in that too many people are abusing the consent process in the Act. It was intended for small exceptions but is being used for major projects to override the planning and policy provisions that Councils and ratepayers spend \$millions developing, consulting on and promulgating in compliance with the RMA and other relevant legislation. That makes it hard to get people with financial substance committed to the process of developing smart, integrated infrastructure and development plans for the region, when they think they can just use the process to bypass plans and approve what they want when they want it.

NAG supports freedom of choice, reducing government regulation and is against over-centralised planning and control (Yes to more localism!) but not against planning. NAG sees value in standards (which need to be enforced) and the need for District or local level integrated infrastructure and development plans that their local communities and developers support, so that essential common and shared facilities, utilities and services are provided alongside developments that need them.

Even more disappointing but probably to be expected has been Auckland Council's decision to not plan for any new landfills in the region, and to turn down an application to change its Unitary Plan to allow the landfill in the area, but then to turn around and pay a planner to support WMNZ's application at the EC hearing and to argue for a distorted reading of its own planning documents to suit that stance.

Enough on that issue other than for us to congratulate the Rodney FTT people and supporters who have put in a tremendous amount of time and effort and put up significant funding to support the appeal. NAG salutes you all!



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## Storm Damage

NAGs collective heart goes out to all those who have suffered damage or loss from the storms and rain this year. We particularly feel for the loss of a firefighter at Muriwai. We recognize how important these (and other volunteers) are to the wellbeing of our communities and the hours and work they put in to keep their communities well and safe.

Mayor Brown has highlighted that people have to take responsibility for their own decisions when they locate homes in vulnerable situations. The consent provided by Council for a building should never be assumed to provide insurance against the bad effects of “black swan” or “Act of God” events or situations.

## Inflation

Government’s fiscal largesse for an extended period – beyond Covid – funded by borrowing at cheap rates thanks to the Reserve Bank, at a time of supply lockdown and resource shortages, was always going to be inflationary.

Now we are adding to the costs of losses on the Reserve Bank’s borrowing, by Government spending (more borrowing) to soften the blow of inflation it created. And the Government and Reserve Bank want us to thank them for fixing it!

## Auckland is Broke

Auckland was broken anyway – we have repeatedly said its structure and governance is not fit for purpose – and now its financially broke as higher interest rates come home to roost (I’m sure that’s a bad use of that metaphor). Ratepayers recognized that and elected Wayne Brown. But some tough calls are needed to get us back to living within our means and he faces a lot of pushbacks.

Clearly part of the problem is central Government’s unwillingness to give Councils funding for the additional social and wellbeing activities they keep adding to Councils’ basic responsibilities.

NAG has set out the answers for Mayor Wayne in its budget response. But we suspect the status quo is too heavily entrenched for the Mayor to get everything he wants over the line, let alone NAG’s more principled solutions.

Sadly, although Rodney has already suffered at the hands of the urban centric majority, it is unlikely to see much short-term relief apart from some storm damage repair. Even though the Mayor supports more localism, this will take some time.



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Worst hit during the storms and rain are our farmers and their poorly maintained roads. We look forward to the Mayor's shake up of AT – spending money at the road-face and getting some more focus on fixing roads as a priority, over expanding the AT policy bureaucracy, speed changes, raised pedestrian crossings, and empty busses.

NAG's view is that policy driven ideological governance needs to be replaced by customer driven practical hands-on governance.

NAG says AC needs more competence. They need to move aside the Status Quo Warriors (SQWs) and get useful things done. AC should not treat Rodney as a metropolitan suburb when the population is so sparsely spread. The “if you plan for it they will come” approach might work if people can afford it, but AC's poor allocation of funds to idealistic or iconic projects is not adding wellbeing and value and the reality is coming home that you can't just give stuff away to people and fund it indefinitely from rates increases and borrowing.

## **Three Waters, or is it Five?**

Now rebranded and with 10 centralised, go-governed water authorities, up from 4, the Government has shown it won't back down.

The substance of the proposal has not changed. The premises are false and the promises are still political rhetoric and impossible pipe-dreams. The criticism and solutions in our paper are still valid, but because there is a chance the proposal will be canned, we have not updated our paper.

Coordinating Watercare's activities with other AC infrastructure and service provision is a significant challenge even when it is all under the “Auckland” umbrella. Imagine what it would be like if decision making involved an even wider range of issues and priorities and made by unelected people with conflicting interests including those outside those of AC.

Encourage others to join the fight.

<https://www.stophreewaters.nz/>

## **NAG's activities this year**

With a new and invigorated Rodney Local Board (RLB) NAG wanted to start the year off well and delivered a positive presentation to the RLB's March meeting (in the new fitted out Warkworth office which AC has finally delivered from its promise of 2018.) [<http://nag.org.nz/Presentation%20by%20NAG%20to%20RLB%202023.pdf>]

The RLB was receptive and with the recognition of District wide problems from the storms, it is hoped this will bring Rodney's communities together to focus on getting

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a better deal on infrastructure, facilities, services and especially roading, drainage and watercourse management.

As new Mayor Wayne Brown has a good understanding of the North of Auckland and Northland, we wanted to get off to a good start in his term of office and get alignment of the Mayor, Councillor Greg Sayers and our RLB on addressing Rodney's problems and challenges.

So we met the Mayor (along with other local North Rodney groups who share our views) in March. This was after an earlier scheduled meeting in Wellsford had to be abandoned due to the Storm. He pretty much agreed with everything we put to him which was encouraging.

[<http://nag.org.nz/Active%20NAG%20issues%20for%20Mayor%20Jan2023.pdf> ]

Then we had to provide our response to the Mayor's budget proposal.

[<http://nag.org.nz/NAG%20response%20to%20AC%20Budget%20proposal%202023.pdf> ]

Typically, AC's analysis of consultation feedback is a numbers game. Regardless of quality, individual responses are counted against pre-set questions and bulk/group responses are discounted. It's a simple numbers game and AC pretends the biased questions it poses are all equally valid alternatives and those the officials like that get enough support can be promoted. "Principles" are generally made up where needed to support the questions and recommendations.

Fortunately, GB members (Councillors) can make up their own minds, but politics is about voting support, so yes – that's a numbers game too... Remember when voting time comes around - everyone's vote counts!

## **Billboards**

With the new Mayor, we have had to change tack a bit on our billboards to recognise and support his positive attitude to rural Auckland and its needs. Our latest is a return to basics!



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**YES! to LOCALISM  
Spend LOCAL  
Rates LOCALLY**

**NAG.** Because someone has to.

Authorised by M. Purdy, 51 Kaipara Flats Road, Warkworth.

**NAG.org.nz**

## AGM

That time is coming around again. We have Councillor Greg Sayers and some of our local board members joining us to talk on the Topic :

**“POWER to LOCALS” on  
Monday June 5<sup>th</sup> at 7.00 p.m. at the  
Totara Park Retirement Village Hall, Warkworth.**

Put it in your diary. The AGM starts at 7.00, meeting and the discussion immediately afterwards.

Regrettably our Local MP Chris Penk can't make it that day, but we will have comments from him, local board members and other political contenders. Its early in the electoral race, but NAG wants to hear what the parties will do to ensure more local based decision making and fairer resourcing for Kaipara ki Mahurangi and our Rodney Local Board area.

## Donations

We don't charge an annual membership fee but rely on donors to fund our limited expenses. If we had a bit more we could think about running some advertising to promote NAG's messaging.

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I know times are tight but if you can contribute anything, it will be spent to continue our push for localism and ideally Rodney or North Rodney independence!!

Please Donate now:

**Donations** to NAGs Bank Account ASB WW **12 3095 0233547 00**  
**Comments** to [northernactiongroup@gmail.com](mailto:northernactiongroup@gmail.com)

Want to help? Join NAG, <https://mailchi.mp/a06a70fcda9a/registration-page>

Yours sincerely

Bill Foster  
Chairman  
Northern Action Group Inc.